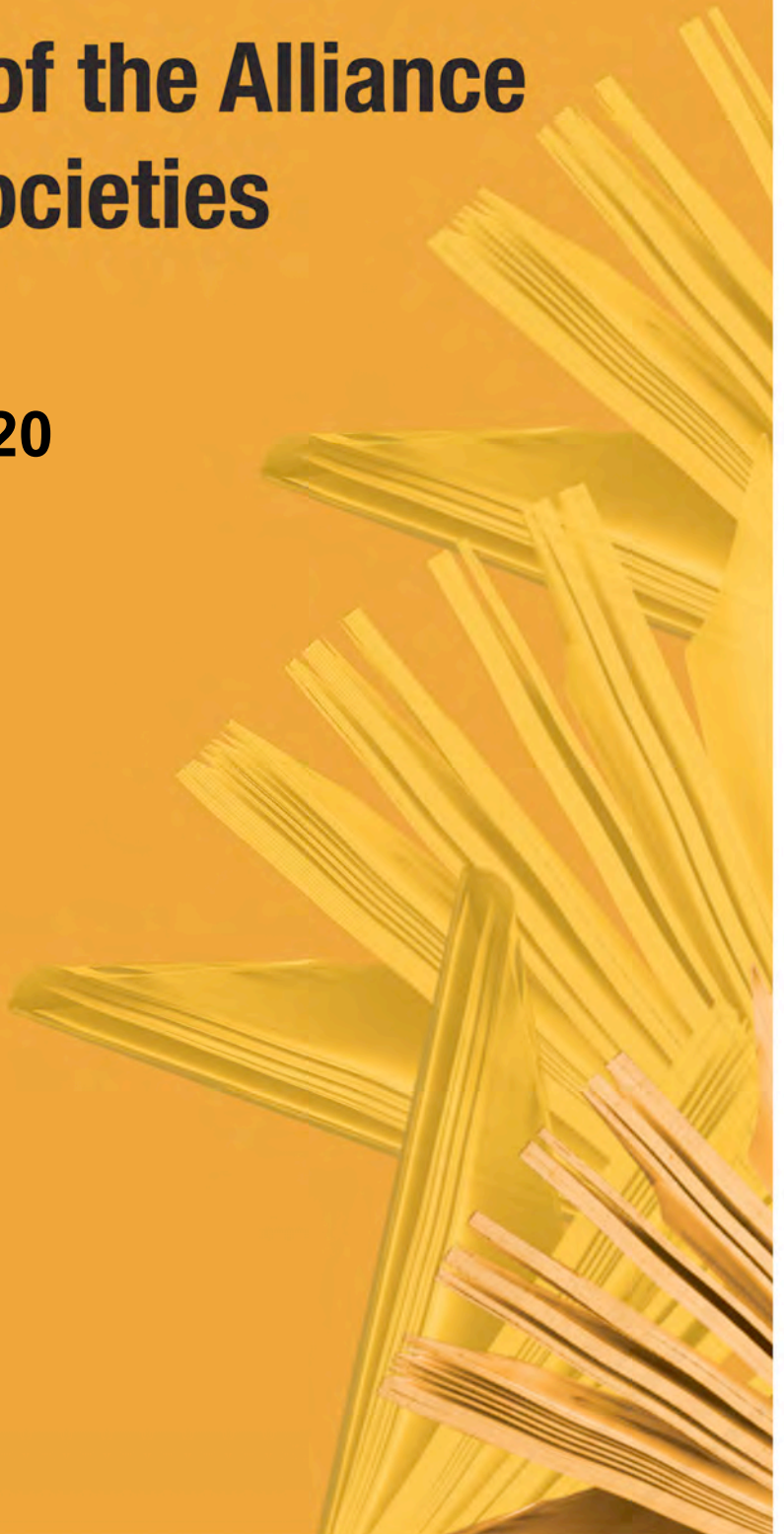


ALSo...

The Journal of the Alliance of Literary Societies

Volume 14 – 2020

20:20 VISION





President: Claire Harman

Chair & Journal Editor: Linda J Curry

Hon. Treasurer & Membership Secretary: Julie Shorland

Hon. Secretary: Marty Ross

For more information on the Alliance of Literary Societies, contact Linda Curry (tel. 0121 475 1805, or email ljc1049@gmail.com) – or visit the ALS website at <http://www.allianceofliterarysocieties.org.uk>.

This journal is supplied in electronic format only. If you require a paper copy of the journal, and you belong to an affiliated society, just send a cheque for £5 (to cover printing, and p&p - made payable to the ALS) to The ALS, 59 Bryony Road, Birmingham B29 4BY. If you do not belong to an affiliated society and you require a paper copy, you can purchase one for £9 incl p&p.

If you wish to place an advertisement in future editions of this journal, please contact the Editor for rates.

© 2020 published by the Alliance of Literary Societies

ISSN 2059-4607

ALSo...

The Journal of the Alliance of Literary Societies

Volume 14, 2020

20:20 VISION

Editor: Linda J Curry

From July 2020, I am taking over from Linda Curry as the new editor of *ALSo*. I come to this post with some experience of the work involved, as Linda and I co-edited *ALSo* for a couple of years when it first started. I must thank Linda for all she has done as sole editor over the past decade or so and can assure all those involved with the ALS that my commitment to our annual journal will be as strong as hers has been.

To celebrate my debut year as editor I have decided to make the theme for 2020/2021 the art of parody: a topic that has come to be associated with my name for the past few years. All those in the ALS who feel that their creative talents lie in a literary exercise which combines literary criticism, satire and a talent for pastiche are invited to submit a parody of any living or dead writer of the English-speaking world. The literary formats can be fragments from a novel, short story, piece of journalism or play, but these fragments must not be more than a thousand words in length. Poems can be complete short poems or fragments from a longer work, but must not be more than fifty lines in length.

Given the current obsession with Covid-19 and its implications for all of us, the subject of this parody is: 'The Writer in Lockdown'. Imagine, for instance, how George Eliot, Jane Austen or Charles Dickens might portray a character, or characters, in an *unpublished* novel faced with all the problems posed by the restrictions of a nineteenth century lockdown. Or try to guess how Dr Johnson, John Clare or Charles Lamb might respond if they were projected forward to April and May 2020 and told to 'Stay home, protect the NHS and save lives'. Let your imagination roam. Time and place are no barriers. Your writer can describe a lockdown in his or her own time (perhaps at a time of plague) or ours. And remember, you have hundreds of writers to choose from.

The deadline for contributions to this special Parody number of *ALSo* is appropriately 1 April 2021. There is a style sheet in the Journal section of the ALS website, and my email address is r.healey709@btinternet.com.

R. M. Healey

Charles Lamb Society

Contents

	Page
Editorial	1
The Art of Seeing: 'The Horses' by Ted Hughes	2
Marty Ross	
Looking Through Your Spectacles	5
Rita Rundle	
<i>Poor Miss Finch</i> and the Eyes of Wilkie Collins	9
Andrew Gasson	
<i>The Singular Adventure of the Man With the Golden Pince-Nez:</i> Eye-Glasses as Evidence in Dorothy Sayers' <i>Whose Body?</i>	12
John Lingard	
Verne and Wells: Travels to the Moon	15
Linda J. Curry	
Notes on Contributors	17

Editorial

Sadly, this is a shorter volume than is usually produced. I think that maybe the topic was not quite as appealing as in the past. Nevertheless, I hope you will find it an interesting gathering, with pieces on Ted Hughes, Angela Thirkell, Wilkie Collins and Dorothy L. Sayers. I have also added a short piece on Jules Verne and H. G. Wells.

As you will see from the previous page, this is my last edition of *ALSo* as Robin Healey takes over from me as editor from this year. This is my fourteenth edition, and it time for some fresh blood! I have, however, really enjoyed doing it.

Please do have a go at Robin's parody theme for next year. It sounds like some good fun could be had there – and, as I always say, it's a good way to promote your writer(s).

Linda J Curry

THE ART OF SEEING: 'THE HORSES' BY TED HUGHES

Marty Ross

Samuel Johnson wrote, and it is possibly the shortest sentence he ever managed, 'The true Art of Memory is the Art of Attention' (*The Idler* 74). All artists must cultivate the arts of attention, seeing and memory. In this brief essay, I would like to look at the attempt of one very young poet, Ted Hughes, to construct such a detailed picture of a loved – or at least very well-known – landscape that he is able to carry it like a talisman into his future. And this may recall the efforts of another young poet, about 70 years earlier, to do the same.

The narrative of 'The Horses' (from Hughes's first collection, *The Hawk in the Rain*, 1957) is straightforward: the poet climbs a hill before dawn, sees the sunrise, returns to the valley. After a stumble into Hopkins ('the hour-before-dawn dark'), an influence on the young Hughes, he regains his feet and climbs more surely. The weather is all: it is 'A world cast in frost', where his breath makes 'tortuous statues in the iron light' and, apart from his effort of climbing, all is stillness. As dawn begins, and, with it, movement ('the valleys were draining the darkness'), he can see the line of the moor above him, and then, with wonderful precision, he sees the horses:

'Huge in the dense grey – ten together –
Megalith-still. They breathed, making no move,
With draped manes and tilted hind-hooves,
Making no sound.'

This is rural Yorkshire, perhaps during or just after the War, so these are big, tired, working horses. Megaliths, indeed, particularly, in the frosty, dim light. The 'draped manes and tilted hind-hooves' are perfectly descriptive of sleeping horses. They could be a threat to the walker, but they are so still, they have become part of the landscape: 'Grey silent fragments/Of a grey silent world.' The last phrase is the only single line in this poem of loosely arranged couplets.

Hughes wrote another poem about horses – 'A Dream of Horses' (from *Lupercal*, 1960) – which is rather a poor one and, in contrast to the frost and stillness of 'The Horses' is all fire and violent movement. 'The Rain Horse', a story first published slightly later than 'The Horses' (*The London Magazine*, 1960; later collected in *Wodwo*, 1967), has many similar elements: a man climbs a hill and goes down again, but in this instance, he gets very wet in the process and is pursued by a malevolent horse. Hughes specifically notes that a horse in the rain normally 'goes into a sort of stupor, tilts a hind hoof and hangs its head', but this is no tired old plough horse: it is a 'thin, black horse' and it watches him 'intently'. Unlike the narrator of 'The Horses' the writer has returned to his old home after 12 years and feels like an exile: 'The land no longer recognized him.' However, he does know how to see. As he crouches under a stunted oak for shelter from the weather and the horse, 'He studied the twig, bringing dwarfs and continents and animals out of its scurfy bark.' The subsequent flight and pursuit is overwrought in true (or should I say, worst?) Hughesian style, and again, makes a compelling contrast to the stillness of 'The Horses'.

In that poem, dawn begins to unfold in a series of images, sometimes apt and sometimes not. 'The curlew's tear turned its edge on the silence' is a wonderful line, but for me, means less and less the more one thinks about it. But, it does powerfully evoke the sensation of standing in moorland and hearing a curlew cry, and perhaps that is enough to ask of any image. By contrast, 'detail leafed from the darkness' is perfect.

His climax should be the arrival of dawn, but he has a slight relapse into Hopkins, and the whole passage seems overwrought and overworked:

‘Then the sun
Orange, red, red erupted
Silently, and splitting to its core tore and flung cloud,
Shook the gulf open, showed blue,
And the big planets hanging –.’

But I do like those ‘big planets hanging’. The following line is a poor one, forgivable from a young poet, ‘I turned/Stumbling in the fever of a dream’. And so he returns to the horses. In spite of the stirrings of dawn all around, and their coats steaming in the early light, they remain as still as stone: ‘Their hung heads patient as the horizons...’

The conclusion of ‘The Horses’ returns to these patient horizons, but first takes a small journey into the future:

‘In din of the crowded streets, going among the years, the faces,
May I still meet my memory in so lonely a place
Between the streams and the red clouds, hearing curlews,
Hearing the horizons endure.’

And this is where we hear the echo of another young poet, who lonely and homesick in London in the 1890s, constructed from memory his heart’s own place, ‘The Lake Isle of Innisfree’:

‘I will arise and go now, for always by night and day
I hear lake water lapping with low sounds by the shore;
While I stand on the roadway, or on the pavements grey,
I hear it in the deep heart’s core.’

Yeats wrote in his *Autobiography* (1924) his recollection of how this poem came into being, the old poet remembering his younger self in this moving passage:

‘I had still the ambition, formed in Sligo in my teens, of living in imitation of Thoreau on Innisfree, a little island in Lough Gill, and when walking through Fleet Street very homesick I heard a little tinkle of water and saw a fountain in a shop-window which balanced a little ball upon its jet, and began to remember lake water. From the sudden remembrance came my poem *Innisfree*, my first lyric with anything in its rhythm of my own music.’

The sound of water, the association with a distant and longed-for place, the evocation of that place through memory, are the sparks that light the fire of that great poem. Yeats was a great early influence on Hughes, and proved a steadier guide than Hopkins. I have no doubt that Hughes was consciously evoking ‘The Lake Isle of Innisfree’ at the conclusion of ‘The Horses’, as he walks ‘In the din of crowded streets’ and prays, ‘May I still meet my memory in so lonely a place/Between the streams and the red clouds, hearing curlews,/Hearing the horizons endure.’ Memory, which relies on attention and true seeing, can construct a world,

as all our great poems demonstrate. Or, as Ruskin wrote, 'To see clearly is poetry, prophecy and religion – all in one.'

References

Hughes, T. (1957), *The Hawk in the Rain*.

_____ (1960) *Lupercal*.

_____ (1967) *Wodwo*.

Johnson, S., in *The Idler*, No. 74, 15 September 1759.

Yeats, W. B. (1924), *Autobiography*.

ooOoo

LOOKING THROUGH YOUR SPECTACLES

Rita Rundle

Angela Thirkell's novels show many of her characters involved with spectacles - and not necessarily wearing them to see with. Did her interest in spectacles come from her admiration for her cousin, Rudyard Kipling, 25 years her senior, already an established writer when she was growing up, and never seen without his spectacles?

Angela Thirkell wrote a novel a year from 1933 to 1960, nearly all set in Anthony Trollope's Barsetshire. In just about every one of them, Mrs Morland, a writer of popular novels, makes an appearance, and often has trouble with her glasses. It is generally thought that she is based on Angela Thirkell herself.

Asked whether she had seen an acquaintance, "I'm getting so blind," said Mrs Morland, proudly, "that I shall soon recognise nobody at all". So, in 1945, a visit was arranged to:

'dear Mr Pilbeam, lately released from the R.A.M.C. to look after the neglected civilian population. Mrs Morland read as far as TUSLPZ quite easily, boggled over XEFQRM and failed hopelessly at FRGSBA. She had then been quite unable to make up her mind whether the left or right arm of a St. Andrew's cross looked lighter or darker, furthermore insisting that even an X couldn't have a left or right because each arm went right through, if Mr Pilbeam could understand, and what he really meant was the north-west to south-east arm, or the north-east to south-west and he oughtn't to say: "The right arm is darker than the left, isn't it?" because that is a leading question. A busy oculist might have been excused for losing his temper at this point, but Mr Pilbeam not only had great patience but was a devoted admirer of Mrs Morland's books. So disentangling what she said from what she meant, he had finished the examination and written her a prescription for spectacles'.

The visits to Mr Pilbeam resulted in four pairs of glasses, a pair of bifocals with which 'she nearly went mad while accustoming herself to them',

'a rather dashing little semi-circular lens for reading only, an owl like plain pair for cards (which she never played) to a much stronger pair now really necessary for close work. To these she added what she quite correctly called her face-à-main. And what with mislaying all four pairs in every possible permutation and combination, and catching the ribbon of her face-à-main in her clothes and furniture or bending it double by stooping suddenly, she hardly ever had the pair she needed'. (*Miss Bunting*)

Mr Pilbeam is first mentioned in a novel in 1942, where he is actually referred to as Mr Pilman. Angela Thirkell is known for getting her characters muddled. She did have rather a lot of them spread over those 27 years.

'Oliver's oculist had disappeared into the army at the beginning of the war and he had chanced upon an unlovable gentleman whose attitude towards his patients was that if his glasses did not suit them, something must be wrong with their eyes and it was entirely their own fault. Oliver, smarting under a large consultation fee and a very expensive pair of spectacles, which made him feel rather sick and a good deal blinder than he was, had put the spectacles away and resigned himself to using his

old ones and supporting his headaches till his own dear Mr Pilman came back from wherever he was’.

At various times, Oliver’s eyes worry him: ‘He took off his spectacles and held his hand over his eyes for a moment, a gesture which made his mother and sister each say to herself, “Oliver’s eyes are bad again”’. A visitor notices ‘that he wore large horn spectacles and his eyes looked tired’.

In 1947, Oliver is able to say, ‘You know I hardly ever have headaches since my dear Mr Pilman came back from the war and gave me proper spectacles’.

Another rather vague but absolutely charming woman who appears in several of the novels is Mrs Brandon. The opening of *The Brandons*, one of my favourite Angela Thirkell novels, is as follows:-

“‘I wonder who this is from,” said Mrs Brandon, picking a letter out of the heap that lay by her plate and holding it at arm’s length upside down. “It is quite extraordinary how I can’t see without my spectacles. It makes me laugh sometimes because it is so ridiculous.”

In proof of this assertion she laughed very pleasantly. Her son and daughter, who were eating their breakfast, exchanged pitying glances but said nothing.

“It doesn’t look like a handwriting I know,” said Mrs Brandon, putting her large horn-rimmed spectacles on and turning the letter the right way up. “More like a handwriting that I *don’t* know. The post mark is all smudgy so I can’t see where it comes from.”

“You might steam it open and see who it’s from,” said her son Francis, “and then shut it up again and guess.”

The above passage was written in 1938. Ten years later, in 1948, we find Mrs Brandon still wearing her horn-rimmed spectacles, this time sitting up in bed to chat to her son’s wife. “‘A nice time?” said Mrs Brandon, taking off her large owl spectacles’. After a conversation with her daughter-in-law, ‘Mrs Brandon put on her owl spectacles again, rescued ‘Aconite by Night’ from the ruelle and was quite unable to remember where she had got to, which is perhaps part of the great curative value of thrillers. Presently she shut the book and took off her spectacles.’

The conversation with her daughter-in-law is about the problems of their all sharing the same house. Mrs Brandon promises to seek a solution. The solution turns out to be the marriage of Mrs Brandon to Canon Joram in 1949 and she joins him in his home in the cathedral close and Mrs Joram is still, ‘putting on her large horn-rimmed spectacles, the better to see what Lord Pomfret was saying (a state of mind only those whose eye sight never knows from day to day whether it will be able to distinguish one friend from another will appreciate)’.

Another interesting use of spectacles, in addition to hearing with them, is to annoy people. At Southbridge School in 1937, Philip Winter, a sensitive young junior master who has great difficulty hiding his feelings and easily loses his temper, is fair game for sly baiting by the boys.

“‘Look here”, he complains to the housemaster, “I can’t stand it. It’s Swan”.

“What has he done this time?” asks that gentleman.

“He looks at me through his spectacles. I can’t stand it”.

“But, my dear fellow, if he has spectacles he must look through them”.

“It isn’t that. It’s the way he looks. I believe he has gone into spectacles on purpose.”

On another occasion, we see Swan in action.

‘Swan deliberately took his spectacle case out of his pocket, his spectacles out of their case, polished the lenses and put the spectacles on. He then for a fleeting moment looked at Philip’.

Swan manages to create mayhem on another occasion at the end of which, ‘He then picked up his glasses, put them on again, and studied with attention Philip’s face from which the red was slowly ebbing’. (*Summer Half*)

By 1951, Philip Winter has been through the Second World War, emerged as a colonel, became the owner and headmaster of a very successful prep school, and married the ideal wife. One of his assistant masters is Eric Swan, who says, “I would like to apologise now, sir, for having looked at you through my spectacles at Southbridge”. This reminder of past times now causes merriment rather than difficulty. (*The Duke’s Daughter*)

Jessie is the hideous head housemaid at Southbridge School and she is in trouble because she darns socks with the wrong colour wool. Matron tells a visitor,

“‘She’s a good girl, but she’s vain, and won’t wear her spectacles. I’ve told her again and again you can’t tell navy blue from black without your glasses, Jessie, especially I said by artificial light, but it’s no good speaking. I shall tell Jessie it has been noticed by outsiders.’” (*Summer Half*)

This conversation happens in 1937 and poor Jessie is still being grumbled about in 1950 for not wearing her glasses while darning!

Jessie is not the only one not looking properly at domestic tasks:

‘Freeman had words with cook about the silly way she acted, not putting her glasses on while she was doing the wash-up when it stood to reason you couldn’t get the mustard off the plates if you didn’t see it’. (*County Chronicle*)

On various occasions, spectacles are used to express a mood or feeling as in, ‘Ruth put the tea tray down...and after looking at her employer through her hideous steel-rimmed spectacles went out, hooking the door with her foot as she did so.’

Or, on a more pleasant occasion, when a young couple want to tell an older relation that they have just become engaged: ‘Martin took off his spectacles and put them in their case, the better to see what had happened.

“‘I couldn’t help it,” said Emmy’.

Lastly, spectacles not only assist the vision, but exactly convey the authoritative character of a retired governess. Dealing with a recalcitrant ex-pupil, ‘Miss Bunting put on the pince-nez

which had quelled many members of the present House of Lords and looked at her. Lucy subsided.' (*Marling Hall*)

References

Thirkell, A., (1937) *Summer Half*

_____ (1939) *The Brandons*

_____ (1942) *Marling Hall*

_____ (1945) *Miss Bunting*

_____ (1950) *County Chronicle*

_____ (1951) *The Duke's Daughter*

ooOoo

POOR MISS FINCH AND THE EYES OF WILKIE COLLINS

Andrew Gasson

In *Poor Miss Finch* (1872), the heroine, Lucilla Finch, is blind with cataracts. Much of the plot is taken up with the efforts of the eccentric but likeable German doctor, Herr Grosse, to restore her sight, and his disagreement with the opinion of the overly conservative English oculist, Mr Sebright. The operation, unfortunately, is only briefly successful. Collins's account of her early attempts at seeing seem to represent the most careful research as well as an awareness of visual psychology and perception. His descriptions of her disorientation, lack of spatial judgement, dislike of dark colours, and her continuing inability to recognise shape and form except by touch all bear a striking resemblance to a 20th century case history of a Mr S.B. recorded by Gregory of 'Recovery from Blindness', written in 1963, nearly 100 years later.

Both fictional and real-life cases end badly. S.B. retains his sight but suffers a psychological crisis. 'His story is in some ways tragic. He suffered one of the greatest handicaps, and yet he lived with energy and enthusiasm. When his handicap was apparently swept away, as by a miracle, he lost his peace and his self-respect.' Lucilla, at one point, declares "My eyes are of no use to me!" and, after weeks of frustration and mental anguish, lapses into blindness once again. The narrator records 'The sightless eyes turned on me. "Oh, God, after a few brief weeks of sight, blind again!" to which Lucilla replies "Don't cry about my blindness...The days when I had my sight have been the unhappiest days of my life."'

It is very likely that Collins based Lucilla's recovery from sight on a real-life case reported in the *Lancet* for 25 November 1854 (p. 438) of a Communication of the Royal Medical & Chirurgical Society, entitled 'A Case of successful operation for congenital capsular cataract on a female aged twenty-two, who had been blind from birth.'¹

The case was presented by George Critchett, Surgeon to the Royal Ophthalmic Hospital. 'Jane S., aged twenty-two, was brought to the Royal Ophthalmic Hospital in the spring of 1849, suffering from cataract in both eyes, with slight internal strabismus, and considerable involuntary rolling and oscillation of the globes from side to side...' Much of the subsequent discourse centred on the use, or otherwise, of chloroform following a question by Mr Fergusson.

Collins, in fact, knew both Critchett, who practised at 21 Harley Street and treated him during the 1870s, and Fergusson. On one occasion, when all three were present at a dinner party given by the Bancrofts, Fergusson confirmed that 'the dose of opium to which Wilkie Collins from long usage had accustomed himself was enough to kill every man seated at the table.'

There is, perhaps, a touch of irony in that Lucilla is probably based on a real-life case whereas, so convincing was the character of Herr Grosse (described in the book as having 'a pair of staring, fierce, black goggle eyes with huge circular spectacles'), that Collins was inundated with letters from readers demanding the name of the real-life doctor on whom he was modelled. It is just possible that Collins had learned from Critchett about the famous

¹ Read to the Royal Medical & Chirurgical Society on 14 November 1854.

Austrian oculist, Georg Joseph Beer (1763-1821), who, like Grosse, was at odds with establishment ophthalmology represented by Mr Sebright in the novel. Beer was known for 'Beer's cataract flap operation' using a specially designed 'Beer's knife' as well as a ground-breaking textbook.

Beer is also quoted by a 20th century source to state 'Might not the reason for this sudden and striking change of temper, indeed I might say of the whole character, be partly due, perhaps, to the fact that the patients have supposed all objects, which they could only get to know by feeling when blind, to be quite different from what they subsequently see them to be.'²

Contemporary illustrations of Collins invariably show him wearing the typical small, oval-eye frames of the time - very similar to some of those currently in fashion. We cannot be sure at what age he became short-sighted, but certainly from 1850 onwards, when he was 26, all portraits and photographs feature him wearing spectacles.

Myopia, however, was not Collins's only eye problem. For a great many years, he suffered from what he called rheumatic gout (a complaint which also afflicted Herr Grosse) and this frequently affected his eyes with particular severity, causing him the most agonizing pain. Today, this would probably be diagnosed as iritis or scleritis, both conditions which could be treated by modern ophthalmology. On some occasions, he was compelled to keep his eyes bandaged for days or even weeks at a time so that publishers' deadlines were met only by dictating to an amanuensis from his sick-bed in a darkened room.

This was the case during the magazine serialisation of *The Moonstone* in 1868 when he suffered one of his severest attacks. A report at the time described him as having eyes like 'enormous bags of blood'.³ Once, in conversation, he was heard to say 'I see that you can't keep your eyes off my eyes, and I ought to say that I've got gout in them and it's doing its best to blind me.'

Apart from his own real-life eye problems, blind or visually handicapped characters appear in *Poor Miss Finch* and at least two other Collins books. *After Dark* (1856), indeed, begins dramatically enough with 'The doctor has just called for the third time to examine my husband's eyes. Thank God, there is no fear at present of my poor William losing his sight, provided he can be prevailed on to attend rigidly to the medical instructions for preserving it.' One of the main characters in *The Dead Secret* (1857) is blind, having rapidly lost his sight in his youth despite 'the doctor from London having blistered him behind the ears, and between the shoulders, and drenched the lad with mercury and moped him up in a dark room.'

Some aspects of Collins's own ill health may have been hereditary in origin. He certainly considered that his rheumatic disease was inherited from both his grandfather and from his father. Harriet Collins's Diary for 14 August 1837 reads like a model for *The Dead Secret*, recording for William Collins 'Inflammation in his eyes very bad indeed - tried different

² Von Senden, referring to his 1932 monograph.

³ Described to Fitzgerald by Charles Kent.

bathings for them - put on leeches in evening to temple.' And, on 16 August, 'eyes very bad put blisters behind ears.'

Perhaps Wilkie's forced pre-occupation with his own eye problems explains, in part, the significant appearance of blind characters in his stories.

© Andrew Gasson, FCOptom and the Wilkie Collins Society

References

Bancroft, M. and S. (1909), *The Bancrofts: Recollections of Sixty Years*. London: John Murray, p.174.

Collins, W. (1872), *Poor Miss Finch*, Chapters 39 and 49.

Fitzgerald, P. (1913), *Memories of Charles Dickens*. Bristol: J. W. Arrowsmith, p.262.

Gregory, R. L., and Wallace, J. G. (1963), 'Recovery from Early Blindness: A Case Study', in *Experimental Psychology Society Monograph No. 2* (available online).

The Lancet, 25 November 1854, p.438.

Von Senden (1960), *Space and Sight*, pp. 326-35.

ooOoo

**THE SINGULAR ADVENTURE OF THE MAN WITH THE GOLDEN PINCE-NEZ:
EYE-GLASSES AS EVIDENCE IN DOROTHY SAYERS' *WHOSE BODY?***

John Lingard

Whose Body? (subtitled *The Singular Adventure of the Man with the Golden Pince-Nez*) was published in 1923. It is the first novel by Dorothy Sayers to feature her amateur detective, Lord Peter Wimsey.

The story begins with a double mystery. The naked corpse of an unidentified man has been found in the bathtub of a London home. He appears to have been killed by 'a blow on the back of the neck'. The owners of the house, Mr and Mrs Thipp, deny any connection with the man or his demise. Inspector Sugg, a Lestrade-like figure, arrests Thipp and his maid Gladys, but fails to convince a coroner's jury of their guilt. At the same time, Lady Christine Levy, the wife of a wealthy businessman, Sir Reuben Levy, reports to the police that her husband is missing. Wimsey, aided by his friend Inspector Charles Parker, solve these mysteries through a mixture of Wimsey's effrontery and intuition, his valet's expertise as a photographer, Parker's professionalism, and chance. Dr Julian Freke, a pathologist at St Luke's Teaching Hospital, has nurtured a twenty-year jealous grievance against Sir Reuben, who married the woman with whom Dr Freke had been in love. Using, or one should say 'abusing', his position at the hospital, Freke murders and buries Levy, and attempts, unsuccessfully to disguise the body of a homeless man - intended as a teaching aid - by shaving his beard to make him look like Reuben. Clues, interviews, a newspaper book review, and Freke's attempt to murder Wimsey with an injection of strychnine, lead Wimsey and Parker to make it clear they know Freke is the murderer. Freke returns home, writes a confession, and is about to kill himself with a lethal injection when Sugg redeems his former blunders by arriving just in time to make an arrest.

'A dead man, dear, with nothing on but a pair of pince-nez'. Wimsey first hears about the body in the bath from his mother who has been informed through a gossip-chain. The pince-nez, with a 'fine gold chain' attached, is the first piece of evidence for Wimsey and Parker. They are both struck by the murderer's 'macabre humour' in leaving or placing the pince-nez on the body.

These old-fashioned eyeglasses become something like the kind of object in his films that Alfred Hitchcock called a MacGuffin. A good example is the apartment key hidden by the would-be murderer in *Dial M for Murder*. The object can be small—a pince-nez, a key, the model of a falcon. It can, however, act both as a trigger for the plot in a film or novel and a leitmotif. Wimsey understands at once that the expensive pince-nez with its 'very beautiful and remarkable chain of flat links chased with a pattern' cannot belong to the dead man who, judging from the condition of his discoloured and decayed teeth alone, is clearly a pauper. The pince-nez is, then, almost certainly a distraction designed to deflect investigation from the murderer. At this point, Wimsey does not know that the blow was caused by accident, 'the fall of a piece of scaffolding'.

Wimsey's first action is to advertise in the *Times* requesting anyone who has recently lost a gold pince-nez with a distinctive chain to contact him at his address in Piccadilly. He receives a prompt response from a solicitor in Salisbury, named Thomas Crimplseham. Crimplseham lost a gold pince-nez on a recent train journey in London. The pince-nez is almost certainly his as the chain matches one that 'was a present from my daughter, and is one of my dearest possessions'. Not without strong suspicions of the solicitor's motive for writing - he could well be 'a cold and cunning villain' - Wimsey obtains an optician's specification of the eyeglasses from Scotland Yard. He then travels down to Salisbury to meet Crimplseham.

The solicitor is delighted that his eyeglasses have been found, partly because he is 'quite lost without them', but mainly because of the sentimental value of the chain. When, however, Wimsey seems to accuse him of being complicit in the supposed murder, Crimplseham assumes that he is being subject to blackmail and asks Lord Peter to leave his office. The two men meet again at Wimsey's hotel, and part amicably, as the solicitor proves to have a reliable alibi.

The solid proof that the pince-nez belong to Crimplseham is provided by the optician's prescription which is 'an unusual one, owing to the peculiar strength of the lenses and the marked difference between the sight of the two eyes'. In other words, he is astigmatic. It is a mark of Sayers' attention to detail that both features, the astigmatism and the strength of the lenses, are paralleled by certain other lenses important to Wimsey's investigation. Wimsey himself has 20/20 vision, but occasionally sports a monocle to make people, especially suspects, say: 'Dear me! How weak the sight of that eye must be!'. They will, of course, deduce that Lord Peter is astigmatic. The monocle is in reality a magnifying glass with 'a powerful lens'. Wimsey uses it throughout his investigation to search for finger-prints and other sources of evidence. He owns another object with a lens: an 'electric torch' that looks like 'a flat, silver matchbox', and is powerful enough to examine a dead man's teeth.

Other lenses are connected to Bunter, Wimsey's valet, and his skill as a photographer, which is vital to his master's investigations. Early in the novel, Wimsey offers to buy Bunter some new equipment for his photographic work, and Bunter immediately requests 'A Double Anastigmat with a set of supplementary lenses' including a wide-angled one. As baffled as most readers will be by the 'Double Anastigmat', Wimsey tells Bunter: 'You can buy your cross-eyed lens'. Bunter will take his camera and some powerful arc-lamps to Sir Reuben's home where, with the help of Sir Reuben's domestic staff, he is able to photograph 'Lots of prints' that will prove invaluable in bringing the murderer to justice.

Wimsey reaches certainty on the identity of the murderer, by chance, intuition, and finally a dangerous confrontation with the murderer himself. Some suspicion has already been cast on Julian Freke concerning the disappearance of Sir Reuben. Freke has told Inspector Parker that he was once in love with the woman who is now Reuben's wife. Wimsey reads a review of Freke's new book, *Physiological Bases of the Conscience*, and sends Bunter to purchase a copy where he reads the following assertion: 'The knowledge of good and evil is an observed phenomenon, a certain condition of the brain-cells, which is removable'. Wimsey sees this as 'an ideal doctrine for the criminal'. The thought leads him to an acceptance of Freke's guilt:

‘And then it happened—the thing he had been half-unconsciously expecting...He remembered—not one thing nor another thing, nor a logical succession of things, but everything—the whole thing perfect, complete, in all its dimensions as it were and instantaneously, as if he stood outside the world and saw it suspended in infinitely dimensional space. He no longer needed to reason about it, or even to think about it. He knew it.’

This epiphany is so strong that it has a backlash. The same night, Wimsey is visited by a severe recurrence of shellshock resulting from his experience in the Great War. He sleepwalks back into the trenches, to be returned to bed by Bunter, his former sergeant.

Now the only loose ends are two questions: how did Freke acquire the pince-nez, and why did he leave it on the body in the bath? Was it accident or ‘pure devilry’? The answers are provided in Freke’s confession. In the afternoon before he murdered Reuben, Freke had spent time with a friend and had seen him off at Victoria Station. Leaving the station, he has to fight his way through a crowd ‘coming up from the underground’. During a taxi-ride home, he discovers ‘somebody’s gold-rimmed pince-nez involved in the astrakhan collar of my overcoat’. Later, when he has left the body in the bath, he decides on impulse to leave the eyeglasses on the man’s face: ‘I saw what distinction they would lend his appearance, besides making it more misleading’.

At one level, *Whose Body?* is a well-constructed detective novel where many of the clues relate to such things as eye-glasses, camera lenses, a flashlight, and human eyesight. The work is not, however, without an element of vision in a philosophic or even prophetic sense. This last is, for example, evident in the dramatic scene where Wimsey confronts a man he knows to be a cold-blooded murderer. An even finer sense of vision comes in Chapter VIII where Lord Peter experiences his epiphany concerning the murder, and which ends with the return of shell shock. In these three passages, Sayers’ writing is remarkable, transcending what one expects from the mystery novel as a genre.

References

Sayers, D. L. (2009), *Whose Body? The Singular Adventure of the Man with the Golden Pince-Nez* (Lexington, KY).

ooOoo

VERNE AND WELLS: TRAVELS TO THE MOON

Linda J Curry

In the mid-19th century, Jules Verne was writing about space travel in his novel *From the Earth to the Moon*, where the Baltimore Gun Club decided to build a cannon which would fire a bullet-shaped pod with the intention of landing a motley crew of three on the moon: their club President, one of his rivals, and a poet. They were duly launched but the book finished before they got to the moon.

Readers would have to wait a few years to find out what happened after the launch, when *Around the Moon* was released. By this time, the crew had suddenly grown to include a dog. Despite various things going wrong with the pod, they were enjoying fine wine and cooking! No conception of zero gravity there then! Instead of landing on the moon, they entered its orbit and started to map out the surface using opera glasses. Sadly, they didn't land but returned to Earth, entering the atmosphere at the same speed by which they left it. Miraculously, they were picked up from the sea alive and well.

Verne had a passion for science and geography – combining them in his travel stories, his *voyages extraordinaires*. Obviously, we can look back on those writings and laugh at how ludicrous the 'science' was, but, of their time, they were fantastic, fuelling the imagination as all Verne's exploration works did.

It was even in the minds of the Apollo 11 astronauts on their way back to Earth, as Neil Armstrong said:

'A hundred years ago, Jules Verne wrote a book about a voyage to the Moon. His spaceship, Columbia, took off from Florida and landed in the Pacific Ocean after completing a trip to the Moon. It seems appropriate to us to share with you some of the reflections of the crew as the modern-day Columbia completes its rendezvous with the planet Earth and the same Pacific Ocean tomorrow.'⁴

Many writers were influenced by Verne, including H. G. Wells, who wrote *The First Men in the Moon*, published in 1901. In his story, he only had two 'astronauts' (one of them a physicist who had discovered 'cavorite', which combatted zero-gravity). At one point in the story, one of the protagonists mentioned *From the Earth to the Moon*, so Wells obviously had that in mind. Reputedly, Verne quipped that at least he had used 'real science' (in the form of gun cotton) to launch his pod, and not 'invented science' like the cavorite.

Wells' took his story a little further as they managed to land on the moon, where they discovered a world of alien creatures. Only one protagonist escaped back to Earth, leaving behind Cavor (the inventor of cavorite), who at some point later on managed to send a radio message back to Earth describing what he had discovered about lunar society. By 1901, scientific knowledge had improved somewhat.

⁴ <https://www.space.com/26617-apollo-11-flight-log-july-23-1969.html>

Six years earlier, in 1895, Wells' *The Time Machine* was published. Again, the reader was taken on a journey, following the Traveller as he tried out his machine, and ending up in a sort of post-apocalyptic world where science and industry no longer existed, with Earth gradually imploding. Did this foretell our current concerns (or lack of them) about global warming?

Technological and scientific development continues apace and Verne's imaginings of men in space became reality with the first moon landing of 1969 (just over a hundred years after the publication of *From Earth to the Moon*) – although they were eating their beef and vegetables out of a package in an unrecognisable format, whilst they floated around in zero gravity. Apparently, despite the space missions being 'booze free', Buzz Aldrin reputedly took on board some bread and wine to celebrate Communion – so, it looks as if they got their red wine after all. I bet they didn't have opera glasses though!

References

Verne, J. (1867), *From the Earth to the Moon*, Pierre-Jules Hetzel (English translation)

____ (1873), *Around the Moon*, Pierre-Jules Hetzel (English translation)

Wells, H. G. (1895) *The Time Machine*, William Heinemann

____ (1901), *The First Men in the Moon*, George Newnes

NOTES ON CONTRIBUTORS

Linda Curry is Chair of the ALS and outgoing editor of this journal. She is a member of the John Clare and Sherlock Holmes of London Societies, and a retired university manager.

Andrew Gasson is the Chairman of the Wilkie Collins Society and this article appeared in their journal in April 2019 but is reproduced here with kind permission.

John Lingard specialises in Scandinavian literature and drama. He has published articles on the Norwegian Romantic poet J. S. Welhaven, Henrik Ibsen, the Danish playwright Kjeld Abell, and crime fiction novels by Henning Mankell and Åsa Larsson.

Marty Ross is a member of the Elmet Trust, which owns and rents out Ted Hughes' childhood home in Mytholmroyd. She is also a member of the Johnson Society (Lichfield) and the Sylvia Townsend Warner Society and is Secretary of the ALS. Incidentally, she loves the poetry of Hopkins, but believes that he can prove metaphorical quicksand for young poets.

Rita Rundle graduated from Nottingham University with a Biology degree in 1960 and spent the next 35 years teaching and bringing up a family in England and Australia. After retirement, she and her husband lived on a canal boat for 5 years and travelled, mainly to Australia to visit friends and family. Throughout this time, she has always enjoyed writing. She is a member of the Angela Thirkell Society.