

**Module Title: Reading like a Victorian: Wilkie Collins's *The Woman in White* (1859-1860) in serial form.**

**Short Name: Reading like a Victorian**

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**ECTS Weighting: 5**

**Learning Outcomes:**

- Demonstrate a detailed knowledge of the primary set text
  - develop an understanding of how and why Victorian periodicals published novels in serial form
  - Develop skills in reading and analysing the content of Victorian periodicals
  - Develop an understanding of how Victorian readers consumed novels in instalments and the effects of reading in instalments
  - Identify and examine key themes and features of Victorian sensation fiction
  - Discuss the themes and concerns of the set text in relation to its social, historical, and literary contexts
  - Close read the text in instalments, paying attention to issues of form, structure, genre, plot, and language
  - Develop an awareness of contemporary and historical critical debates about Victorian sensation fiction
  - Develop skills in research, oral and written communication, and teamwork

## Course Description

This module introduces students to Wilkie Collins's *The Woman in White* (1859-60), widely considered to be the first and best Victorian sensation novel. Sensation fiction typically revolves around a number of secrets and crimes such as adultery, bigamy, or murder, hidden within middle or upper-class British homes. *The Woman in White* was first published in weekly instalments in *All the Year Round* from 26 November 1859 to 25 August 1860 (in a total of 40 parts or instalments), a magazine/periodical founded and edited by Charles Dickens. It was simultaneously serialised in the American magazine *Harper's Weekly*. *The Woman in White* rapidly became Collins's most popular novel and was subsequently issued in numerous book editions; it even inspired a franchise boom with *Woman in White* cloaks, bonnets, and perfume available for the British public.

Thanks to recent processes of digitisation, full text PDFs of the weekly issues of *All the Year Round* magazine are now available online at *Dickens Journals Online*: [www.DJO.ORG.UK/all-the-year-round/](http://www.DJO.ORG.UK/all-the-year-round/). Using this resource, the class will read Collins's novel of 40 instalments over 10 weeks, reading four instalments per week. This relatively small amount of primary text reading per week will be guided by specific questions about theme and genre and supplemented with contextual reading from *All the Year Round* magazine, other historical sources, and secondary reading on periodical theory. As a class, week- by- week, and guided by the themes of the instalments we read on that particular week, we will examine issues such as women's property and inheritance rights, the marriage market, emerging proto-feminism, alongside themes of madness, criminality, class, and national identity. This slow and detailed method of reading and studying the novel not only allows for deep examination of the novel's many plots and subplots, themes, motifs, and generic influences, but also allows students to experience the thrill of the novel's many twists and cliffhangers in the same way as contemporary Victorian readers would have done.

## **Indicative Reading List**

### **Wilkie Collins's *The Woman in White* (1859-1860)**

Week 1: introductory lecture, with course outline and instructions for reading by instalments

Week 2: instalments 1 – 4 (26 Nov 1859; 3 Dec 1859; 10 Dec 1859; 17 Dec 1859)

Week 3: instalments 5 -8 (24 December 1859; 31 December 1859; 7 January 1860; 14 January 1860)

Week 4: instalments 9– 12 (21 January 1860; 28 January 1860; 4 February 1860; 11 February 1860)

Week 5: instalments 13 – 16 (18 February 1860; 25 February 1860; 3 March 1860; 10 March 1860)

Week 6: instalments 17 – 20 (17 March 1860; 24 March 1860; 31 March 1860; 7 April 1860)

Week 7: study week

Week 8: instalments 21 – 24 (14 April 1860; 21 April 1860; 28 April 1860; 5 May 1860)

Week 9: instalments 25 – 28 (12 May 1860; 19 May 1860; 26 May 1860; 2 June 1860)

Week 10: instalments 29 – 32 (9 June 1860; 16 June 1860; 23 June 1860; 30 June 1860)

Week 11: instalments 33 – 36 (7 July 1860; 14 July 1860; 21 July 1860; 28 July 1860)

Week 12: instalments 37 – 40 (4 August 1860; 11 August 1860; 18 August 1860; 25 August 1860)

**PDFs will be provided for all readings**