

## The Popularity of Wilkie Collins's Sensation Fiction in Spain: The Case of *The Woman in White*

Alberto Lázaro<sup>1</sup>

**Abstract.** Wilkie Collins, one of the most popular Victorian novelists, has been widely acclaimed as the early master of the sensation novel and a pioneer of English detective fiction. Novels such as *The Woman in White* (1860) and *The Moonstone* (1868) became best sellers and captivated Victorian readers with their convoluted plots full of mystery, crime and sexuality, usually within the respectable middle-class home. His popularity crossed national and linguistic borders, and his novels, novellas and short stories were soon translated into different languages. In Spain, we find over a dozen of different editions of Collins's stories already in the nineteenth century, which often appeared serialised in popular journals or magazines, like their original counterparts. One of these early Spanish translations was *The Woman in White* which, in different forms and with different titles, attracted the attention of many publishers and readers during the twentieth century, despite the obstacles posed by censorship and the hardships of the post-war period. This paper aims to discuss the Spanish publication history and reception of Collins's sensation novel *The Woman in White* and analyse the scale of its popularity.

**Key words:** Wilkie Collins, sensation novel, reception, Spain

### [es] La popularidad de la narrativa sensacionalista de Wilkie Collins en España: El caso de *The Woman in White*

**Resumen.** Wilkie Collins, uno de los novelistas victorianos más populares, ha sido ampliamente aclamado como el primer maestro de la novela sensacionalista y pionero de la narrativa detectivesca inglesa. Novelas como *The Woman in White* (1860) y *The Moonstone* (1868) se convirtieron en superventas y cautivaron a los lectores victorianos con sus enrevesadas tramas llenas de misterio, crimen y sexualidad, emplazadas generalmente en un respetable hogar de clase media. Su popularidad traspasó las fronteras nacionales y lingüísticas, y tanto sus novelas como sus relatos no tardaron en ser traducidos a diferentes idiomas. En España, encontramos más de una docena de ediciones diferentes de los relatos de Collins ya en el siglo XIX, que a menudo aparecían por entregas en diarios o revistas populares, como sus homólogos originales. Una de estas primeras traducciones al español fue *The Woman in White* que, en diferentes formas y con distintos títulos, atrajo la atención de muchos editores y lectores durante el siglo XX, a pesar de los obstáculos que supuso la censura y las dificultades de la posguerra. Este artículo examina la historia de la publicación y la recepción en España de la novela sensacionalista de Collins *The Woman in White*, con el fin de analizar la magnitud de su popularidad.

**Palabras clave:** Wilkie Collins, novela sensacionalista, recepción, España

**Contents:** 1. Introduction. 2. Early reception. 3. Collins during Franco's regime. 4. Contemporary popularity 5. Conclusions.

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## 1. Introduction

One of the literary genres that achieved enormous popularity in Britain during the Victorian period was the sensation novel. This type of fiction combined the old-fashioned Gothic romance with the Realist romantic novel, placing the traditional horrors within the respectable middle-class home instead of in ancient castles or monasteries. Most sensation novelists had the gift of maintaining suspense in convincing and complex plots, which usually centred on gruesome and scandalous events including murder, theft, blackmail, madness, double identity, adultery, bigamy and sexual deviance, enacted by apparently moral individuals. In a society in which social and moral decorum was highly valued, there was also a growing popular taste for criminal fiction and melodramatic stories with sensational scandals, which made these stories very popular among Victorian

<sup>1</sup> Department of Modern Philology, University of Alcalá

ORCID: [orcid.org/0000-0003-3236-9905](https://orcid.org/0000-0003-3236-9905)

Email: [alberto.lazaro@uah.es](mailto:alberto.lazaro@uah.es)

readers.<sup>2</sup> Moreover, as Michael Diamond pointed out, it helped the fact that they were published in sequential instalments, at a time when newspapers became cheaper, better distributed nationally and more accessible to all social classes (2003: 1). However, not everyone greeted this fiction with the same enthusiasm. Part of the literary and religious establishment voiced their hostility and criticism towards what they considered vulgar literature; one example was the 1870 article “Our Novels: The Sensational School” by Alfred Austin, who claimed that these novels were “the worst form of mental food” (1870: 424). Critical voices were also heard in theatres: on 31 January, 1871, the dramatist and author of comic operas William S. Gilbert produced a satire of this type of fiction in his musical drama entitled *A Sensational Novel: A Musical Play in 3 Volumes*. Sometimes these critical voices and controversies also contributed to directing the readers’ attention towards these stories and so increasing their popular appeal.

A key book in establishing the popularity of this sensation fiction was Wilkie Collins’s *The Woman in White*, first serialised in Dickens’s weekly journal *All Year Round* (26 November 1859–25 August 1860) and simultaneously in New York *Harper’s Weekly* (26 November 1859–4 August 1860). It is a complicated story about Walter Hartright, a poor drawing teacher, who falls in love with his beautiful and rich pupil, Laura Fairlie; however, she must honour her late father’s wish and marry Sir Percival Glyde, a villain who plans to steal her inheritance. With the characteristic ingredients of murder, illegitimate births, mistaken identity, insanity, romance and guilty secrets, Collins weaves an exciting narrative with a clever suspenseful plot and multiple eye-witness narrators. It also contains one of the most colourful of all Victorian villains: Count Fosco, a corpulent Italian exile, mixed up in secret political societies, eccentric and pompous but intelligent and sinister, who has the disconcerting habit of playing with his white mice as he talks. This novel, published in one volume in 1860, achieved immediate and extensive success with subsequently numerous book editions and even an adaptation for the stage first performed at the Olympic Theatre in 1871 (Laird 2015: 148–49).<sup>3</sup> In his introduction to a 1910 edition, Maurice Richardson maintained that even perfume, cloaks, bonnets and waltzes were called by this novel’s title (1910: v). Its popularity crossed national and linguistic borders, with a French and a German translation of the novel being published in 1861, in Paris and Leipzig, respectively.<sup>4</sup> Also in Paris, the first Spanish translation of *The Woman in White* appeared in 1867 in a political, commercial, and literary weekly named *El Correo de Ultramar*, which aimed at an educated readership in Latin America. It came out under the peculiar title of *Ana Catherick o la mujer vestida de blanco* (Ann Catherick or the woman dressed in white). No name of the translator is given.

This sensation novel seems to be a product of the Victorian era and firmly located in its time. Some critics tend to emphasise the link between these types of stories and their social-historical context, viewing their plots as the embodiment of Victorian fears and social changes (Pykett 1994: 10), or evoking images of a loss of class identity (Loesberg 1986: 117). And, of course, sensation novels also “capitalized on the Victorian public’s appetite for scandal” (Fantina and Harrison 2006: xii). However, one wonders if it was simply a peculiar Victorian phenomenon or something that continued to interest twentieth-century and current readers. A hint to answer this question can be found in the information provided by The Wilkie Collins Society, in the section “*The Woman in White* – A Chronological Study”: “*The Woman in White* has never been out of print since its first publication in 1860” (Gasson 2010). What is more, in 2006 the editors of the collection of essays entitled *Victorian Sensations* argued that sensation fiction was showing “signs of popular resurgence” (Harrison and Fantina 2006: ix), and gave as an example Andrew Lloyd Webber’s musical adaptation of *The Woman in White*, which premiered in London’s West End in 2004 and then, a Broadway production which opened in November 2005. The survival of the popularity of this sensation fiction could also be confirmed if we consider Collins’s reception in Spain, where we find over a dozen different editions of his stories already in the nineteenth century. In fact, one of these early Spanish translations was *The Woman in White* which, in different forms and with different titles, also attracted the attention of many Spanish publishers and readers during the twentieth century, despite the obstacles posed by censorship and the hardships of the post-war period. Following a bibliographical approach and extracting evidence from archival records, library catalogues and descriptive bibliographies, this article aims to discuss the Spanish publication history and reception of Collins’s sensation novel, *The Woman in White*, and analyse the scale of its popularity.

## 2. Early reception

Firstly, it is worth noting that Collins’s wave of popularity reached Spain early on. A few references from various publications may serve to illustrate this idea. Already in 1861, the name of Wilkie Collins appeared in the Spanish press. A little piece on the front cover of the national evening daily *La Correspondencia de España* (Spain’s Correspondence) made a passing reference to *The Woman in White*:

<sup>2</sup> For some good discussions of the sensation novel, see Pykett (1994), Wynne (2001), Hughes (2005), Radford (2009) and Cox (2019).

<sup>3</sup> For a valuable selection of the early reviews of *The Woman in White*, see the corresponding section on Norman Page’s *Wilkie Collins: The Critical Heritage* (1974: 78–126).

<sup>4</sup> A French translation by Émile Forgues entitled *La femme en blanc* was first serialised in the newspaper *Le temps* from 25 April 1861 to 21 August 1861, and then published in one volume by the Paris publisher Hetzel in the same year. Also in 1861, the German version *Die Frau in Weiss* by Marie Scott appeared in Leipzig.

A London bookseller has offered Wilkie Collins, author of the novel that made the most noise last year, the sum of 5,000 pounds sterling, or 25,000 *pesos fuertes*, to write for him, at his convenience, another novel on the subject of his choice. (1861: 1–2)<sup>5</sup>

A few years later, in 1875, in a weekly Madrid publication entitled *Revista Europea* (European Review), the renowned Spanish journalist and politician Francisco de Asís Pacheco, discussed the situation of the contemporary British novel and referred to Wilkie Collins as the “author of an admirable book, *The White Dress*, and one of today’s most prestigious writers, [who] follows Dickens and can be said to have been trained alongside him” (1875: 437).<sup>6</sup> Even some obituaries appeared in various provincial publications such as *El Comercio de Córdoba* (The Trade of Cordoba), *El Liberal: Diario Democrático de Menorca* (The Liberal: Democratic Daily of Menorca), *El Guadalete: Periódico Político y Literario* (The Guadalete: Political and Literary Newspaper) from Jerez de la Frontera, Cadiz and *La Ilustración Artística* (Artistic Illustration), from Barcelona. The obituary of the latter publication highlights the characteristic plots of this author, full of mysteries, crimes and frauds, which are of interest to readers because of Collins’s realistic technique, depicting conspirators, spies and traitors who are “treated with real touches, never melodramatic” (1889: 354).<sup>8</sup>

Like their original English counterparts, Collins’s first stories translated in Spain also appeared serialised in newspapers and periodical publications. Some of them were published in the newspaper *La Correspondencia de España* in the 1870s. However, the first one was an unsigned version of *No Thoroughfare*, published under the title *El abismo* (The Abyss) for the literary serial of the newspaper *La Política* (The Politics). Taking into account that this story of suspense, love and action had been written in collaboration with Charles Dickens, perhaps Collins’s arrival in Spain might be due to the popularity Dickens already had in this country. Nevertheless, several other tales by Collins came immediately afterwards, as can be seen in the following table:

Table 1: Early Spanish versions of Collins’s stories. Only first editions are listed.

English title & date	Spanish version & date	Translator	Publishing details
<i>No Thoroughfare</i> (1867)	<i>El Abismo</i> (1872)	Anonymous	Madrid: Impr. Manuel G. Hernández
<i>Man and Wife</i> (1870)	<i>Marido y mujer</i> (1874)	Joaquina García Balmaseda	Madrid: La Correspondencia de España
<i>The New Magdalen</i> (1873)	<i>La muerta viva</i> (1876)	Joaquina García Balmaseda	Madrid: La Correspondencia de España
<i>Poor Miss Finch</i> (1872)	<i>¡Pobre Lucila!</i> (1877)	María Pilar Sinués	Cádiz: La Moda Elegante
““Blow up with the Brig!”: A Sailor’s Story” (1859)	“La mecha: narración marítima” (1879)	Anonymous	Zaragoza: Revista de Aragón
<i>Jezebel’s Daughter</i> (1880)	<i>La hija de Jezabel</i> (1887)	Francisco Cárles Egea	Madrid: El Liberal
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• “Miss or Mrs.?” (1871)</li> <li>• “Brother Griffith’s Story of a Plot in Private Life” (1858)</li> <li>• “The Dream Woman” (1874)</li> </ul>	<i>¿Señorita o Señora?; Un drama de la vida privada; La mujer de los sueños</i> (1887)	Ángel de Luque	Madrid: El Cosmos Editorial
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• “The Frozen Deep” (1874),</li> <li>• “John Jago’s Ghost; or, the Dead Alive” (1873-1874)</li> </ul>	“El mar de Hielo” “El espectro de Yago” (1887)	Anonymous	Madrid: El Globo
“Mr. Percy and the Prophet” (1877)	<i>Percy y el profeta</i> (1889)	Enrique Godínez y Esteban	Madrid: El Cosmos Editorial
<i>The Law and the Lady</i> (1875)	<i>La pista del crimen</i> (1890)	Anonymous.	Madrid: El Cosmos Editorial
<i>The Dead Secret</i> (1857)	<i>El secreto</i> (1890)	J. A.	Palma de Mallorca: La Opinión

Also, before the end of the nineteenth century, the translation of *The Woman in White* was published in Spain, in two volumes (the first appeared in 1894 and the second the following year). Curiously enough, the

<sup>5</sup> “Un librero de Londres ha ofrecido a Wilkie Collins, autor de la novela que hizo más ruido el año pasado, la cantidad de 5,000 libras esterlinas, o sea 25.000 pesos fuertes, para que le escriba, cuando lo tenga por conveniente, otra novela sobre el asunto que más le agrade.” All translations from the Spanish are my own.

<sup>6</sup> “Wilkie Collins, autor de un admirable libro, *El vestido blanco*, y escritor de los que hoy gozan mayor prestigio, sigue a Dickens y puede decirse que forma [*sic se forma*] a su lado.”

<sup>7</sup> “Guadalete” is the name of a river in Cadiz.

<sup>8</sup> “[...] aparecen con especial habilidad diseñados los tipos conspiradores, espías y traidores, tratados con toques reales, nunca melodramáticos”.

title chosen for this version was *El vestido blanco*, focusing on the white dress rather than on the woman who wears it, Anne Catherick, a fugitive from a lunatic asylum with a striking resemblance to the innocent heiress, Laura Fairlie. It is also interesting to note that on the title page a quote from Dante is included – *Donna bello bianco vestito* – which might refer to the angel “bianco vestito” mentioned in the Purgatory section of his *Divina Commedia* (xii: 88–89) or to the well-known vision of Beatrice, dressed in white, in Florence as described in *La vita nuova* and painted by Henry Holiday in *Dante and Beatrice* (1883). Whatever the case, it obviously refers to the woman in the original English title.<sup>9</sup> On this occasion, the story was not serialised in a newspaper or magazine, although the printer, Francisco G. Pérez, had worked for newspapers like *La Patria* (The homeland), *La Unión Católica* (The Catholic Union), *El Resumen* (The Summary) and *La Libertad* (The Freedom). Little more is known of this edition, whose translator is unnamed,<sup>10</sup> although a look at the first lines of the text reveals that it was most likely made from the French version by Émile Forgues:

This is the story of what a Woman’s patience can endure, and what a Man’s resolution can achieve. (1987: 1)

Ce que peut supporter la patience d’une femme, ce que peuvent accomplir le courage et la constance d’un homme, cette histoire le dira. (1861 Forgues’s French version)

Lo que puede soportar la paciencia de una mujer, lo que pueden cumplir el valor y la constancia de un hombre, esta historia lo dirá. (1894 anonymous Spanish version)

Using a French text as the main source for a Spanish translation was not an uncommon practice at that time in Spain, considering that Paris was the capital of culture for most of the Spanish literary intelligentsia and French was the main foreign language at Spanish schools and universities.

Some more publishing details are available about the next Spanish versions of Walter Hartright’s adventures. In 1907, a new translation came out in the Madrid publication *La Novela Ilustrada* (The Illustrated Novel), a weekly magazine which had been founded two years earlier<sup>11</sup> under the direction of the journalist and best-selling Spanish novelist Vicente Blasco Ibáñez. By then, he had already published his most recognised novels, such as *La barraca* (1898, The Hut) or *Cañas y barro* (1902, Reed and Mud), naturalistic stories on rural life in the farmlands of Valencia, very different from those by Collins. His magazine, however, included complete novels of all genres written by popular nineteenth-century authors and, it is argued, was essential in the development of the high-quality novel in Spain. In fact, the appearance of a long list of popular periodical collections which published complete novels became an editorial phenomenon characteristic of the first decades of the twentieth century in Spain: “[...] essential in the resurgence of the quality serialised novel [...]” (Lluch-Prats 2012: 94).<sup>12</sup> Again, in this case, the name of the translator is not given, although on the back cover of the volume one can read that all novels in this magazine are translated or “scrupulously corrected” by Blasco Ibáñez himself. This time the title used focuses on the character of Anne Catherick, although she is referred to as a “lady” and not simply as a woman – *La dama vestida de blanco* – a title used in different later editions.

Our next version, made by Mercedes Rodríguez-Rubí de Zimmer and printed by the Barcelona publisher Editorial Ibérica, appeared around 1914;<sup>13</sup> its new title was *La mujer del traje blanco* (The Woman in a White Dress), more similar to the English one. In 1933, another edition appeared in “Lecturas para Todos” (Readings for Everyone), which was a weekly literary supplement of the Madrid magazine *Jeromín*.<sup>14</sup> This time the title and text, although unsigned, is like the 1907 Blasco Ibáñez version, although with a few omissions, such as the opening section of the first chapter in which, together with a brief introduction to the story, Collins includes a critical comment on the legal system, accusing justice of being in the service of the moneyed classes: “the Law is still, in certain inevitable cases, the pre-engaged servant of the long purse” (1987: 1). The narrator thus justifies the fact that some crimes of the story have not ended in the court of justice. A trained lawyer, Collins’s literary texts often criticise the Victorian legal system and shows the flaws of English domestic laws. Regardless of the quality or the completeness of the texts, all this shows how several translations of this sensational novel became widely available among Spanish readers during the last years of the nineteenth century and the beginning of the twentieth.

<sup>9</sup> For references to Dante in *The Woman in White*, see Caracciolo (1971).

<sup>10</sup> The identification of some details of these early Spanish editions is difficult since the date of publication or the name of the translator is sometimes not given.

<sup>11</sup> Although the date of publication is not included in the volume, we can guess the year from the number of the series (Año III, núm. 326) given on the back cover.

<sup>12</sup> “[...] imprescindible en el resurgimiento de la novela por entregas de calidad [...]”.

<sup>13</sup> This edition is not dated; yet, from various bibliographical catalogues and advertisements in the press, one can guess it could be from 1914.

<sup>14</sup> “Jeromín” was the nickname of the Spanish military leader in the service of his half-brother, King Philip II of Spain, best known for his role as admiral at the Battle of Lepanto.



### 3. Collins during Franco's regime

As the twentieth century progressed, the political, cultural and economic situation in Spain did not augur well for the reception of foreign authors in this country. After a terrible civil war (1936–1939), the devastating effects of the conflict and the policy of cultural protectionism that came with General Franco's regime (1939–1975) were certainly felt in the literary scene of those years. Moreover, the state intervention in publishing policies achieved a greater intensity with the establishment of a very strict censorship system that exercised tight control in order to determine what was morally or politically correct for the common good of the nation. No book could be printed or sold without permission from the censorship office. Censors examined all applications and wrote reports in which they justified their decision on whether the text was allowed to be printed, was banned or could be published with some "alterations". Another obstacle that could hinder the publication of a book at that time was its literary or documentary quality. Given the scarcity of paper in Spain in the post-war period, if the censors considered that the book had no literary, artistic or documentary value, they might not recommend its publication in their report.<sup>15</sup>

However, despite the economic problems and the strict system of previous censorship established during Franco's regime, several versions of Collins's novel did manage to make their way to Spanish readers. The previous 1933 anonymous translation appeared in a 1941 issue of a popular publication entitled *Novela Quincenal* (Fortnightly Novel). As stated on the back cover, the aim of this magazine was to make available to the general reading public, at the lowest price, the best Spanish and foreign novels of all genres and "always with the maximum decorum and literary value". It seems that Franco's censor agreed with this description of "maximum decorum": his or her keen eye did not find anything that could be morally or politically incorrect in Collins's novel and the text was eventually published.<sup>16</sup> There is, however, one detail that should not be overlooked: the censor did not think highly of this novel, describing it as a "vulgar romance novel"; but nothing objectionable was found and the green light was given. Another translation by Modesto Rincón entitled *La dama blanca* (The White Lady), published in 1944, was also authorised, in a large printing of 5,000 copies. In the report, the censor gave a different view about the value of the novel and stated that it was "an interesting detective adventure novel", in which, it is true, a secret society is mentioned on a couple of pages; but he adds: "This is key to the novel, and I do not think it is important at all".<sup>17</sup>

It should be noted that the initial critical comment on the corruption of the legal system had been left out in these two first post-war versions. In those lines, as mentioned above, Collins was being very critical of the attitude of the judiciary, which, in his opinion, tends to act in favour of the powerful classes; something that might raise the eyebrows of the Spanish censors. And, indeed, a censor must have found fault with this initial criticism on the shortcomings of justice when the publisher Dédalo submitted a request to publish the full text of Blasco Ibáñez's translation in 1943 because the publication was "suspended". Although the report is missing, the word "suspendida" was written on the application, which was the term used by the censorship office for banning books.<sup>18</sup> Dédalo had already published several novels by Collins in his *Revista Literaria: "Novelas y Cuentos"* (Literary Magazine: Novels and Tales) and wanted to further contribute to Collins's reception in Spain by publishing *The Woman in White* in this very popular magazine that included novelties, mainstream literature and a full diversity of genres. Persevering in his purpose, the following year Dédalo tried again, this time explaining in their application that the initial critical comment had been removed. In view of the editor's explanations, the censorship office lifted the ban.<sup>19</sup> However, I could not find Collins's novel in the magazine's catalogue. There is no copy of it in the Spanish National Library, nor does it appear in Antonio González Lejárraga's volume on the magazine (2017), which includes all titles published in it. What happened to this edition of *La dama vestida de blanco* is one of the archive's remaining mysteries. Nevertheless, other translations which included this opening section were also authorised by Franco's censors without any difficulty. This is the case of a new version by Fernando Gutiérrez and Diego Navarro entitled *La dama de blanco* (The Lady in White), published in 1945 by the Barcelona publisher Hispanio-Americana de Ediciones, on which the censor's report states that "It is a good novel of remarkable literary value and there is nothing objectionable about it".<sup>20</sup> Similarly, in 1948 the Spanish censorship office found no fault with the 4,000 copies of a complete new text by María Fernanda de Pereda which was eventually printed by the Madrid publisher Aguilar in 1953.<sup>21</sup>

<sup>15</sup> On censorship in post-war Spain, see Abellán (1980), Beneyto (1977) and Cisquella, Erviti and Sorolla (1977).

<sup>16</sup> "Valor literario o artístico: Vulgar. Novela más o menos rosa sin nada censurable. Puede autorizarse". See File Y-235, Reference (03)050SIG21/06689. Censorship files of this period can be found in the Archivo General de la Administración (Alcalá de Henares, Madrid).

<sup>17</sup> "En las páginas 309 y 310 se habla de una sociedad secreta. Ello es clave para la novela y no creo tenga importancia alguna. Observaciones: Es una interesante novela de aventuras policíacas. Nada de particular." See File 8120-43, Reference (03)050SIG21/07306.

<sup>18</sup> See File 6131-43, Reference (03)050SIG21/07253.

<sup>19</sup> See File 6139-44, Reference (03)050SIG21/07519.

<sup>20</sup> "Es una buena novela de notable valor literario y que no tiene nada censurable." See File 5170-44, Reference (03)050SIG21/07477.

<sup>21</sup> See File 1185-48, Reference (03)050SIG21/08206.

Another curious paperback edition of *The Woman in White* authorised during Franco's regime deserves our attention. It is a large printing of 10,000 copies of an anonymous text (*La dama vestida de blanco*) published in 1965, in Madrid, by Ediciones Cid, a well-established publisher that specialised in comics and popular novels, although Albert Camus's *L'Étranger* (1942) was also included among its titles. The interesting detail of this Spanish edition of Collins's novel is that it appeared in a series named "Biblioteca de Chicas" (Girls' Library), as if this were one of those romance tales with stereotyped Barbara Cartland's heroines. At that time, there was a footnote in the application forms the publishers had to fill in for the censorship office which added a genre touch: "If it is a work for children or a female readership, please state explicitly."<sup>22</sup> It seems that young readers and female audiences were especially "protected" by the system. Therefore, Ediciones Cid made clear this story was intended for women and the censor did not raise any objection.<sup>23</sup> Furthermore, this edition also confirms Collins's huge popularity in Spain in the 1960s, since the title page presents the author as a "precursor of mystery literature, which today retains all its intensity, all that quality that we have come to call 'suspense'".<sup>24</sup> What all this also shows is that the publisher clearly appreciated the balance that the novel's plot strikes between suspense and melodrama, between the handling of intrigue and characters that strongly appeal to emotions.

Here, we disregard the Spanish versions that appeared in Latin America and might have been imported and read in Spain. In 1947, for instance, the Spanish censorship office authorised the importation of 400 copies of the Argentinian edition of *La dama de blanco*, translated by Horacio Laurora and published in 1946 by Emecé Editores.<sup>25</sup>

#### 4. Contemporary popularity

With the arrival of democracy and the country's economic take-off in the last decades of the twentieth century, *The Woman in White* continued to attract many Spanish publishers and readers. As can be seen in Table 2, five different publishing houses chose this novel and put out some new translations, all of them under the title *La dama de blanco*:

Table 2: Spanish translations of *The Woman in White* published in the last decades of the twentieth century.

Date	Translator	Publisher
1984	Maruja Gómez Segalés	Barcelona: Montesinos
1985	Maruja Gómez Segalés	Madrid: Fascículos Planeta
1991	Maruja Gómez Segalés	Barcelona: Círculo de Lectores
1995	Unknown	Barcelona: Literatura y Ciencia
1997	Miguel Martínez-Lage	Barcelona: Ediciones B

It is important to note that some of these editions went into several reprints within the next few years. For instance, the Montesinos edition was reprinted twice in 1984, 1985 and 1986, putting the 18<sup>th</sup> reprint on the market in 2006. Also noteworthy is the relevance of some of the publishing houses that released these editions. Fascículos Planeta was a department specialised in popular publications of the prestigious Planeta publisher, a company founded in 1949, which currently owns over 70 publishing houses worldwide. Similarly, Círculo de Lectores, which began as a reading club in 1962, became the largest reading social network in Spain with over a million members whose collection of works "Obras completas" is still a reference in Spanish literature.

The popularity of the novel has shown no sign of abating with the coming of the new century. Table 3 shows twenty-first-century editions by 12 different publishers that used some previous translations, like those by María Fernanda de Pereda, Maruja Gómez Segalés and Miguel Martínez-Lage, or introduced new versions, like those published by Sonolibro (an audiobook) and Alianza Editorial.

<sup>22</sup> "Si es obra para niños o para público femenino, dígame expresamente."

<sup>23</sup> See File 1088-65, Reference (03)050SIG21/15912.

<sup>24</sup> "precursor de la literatura de misterio, que hoy en día conserva toda su intensidad, toda esa calidad que modernamente hemos dado en calificar de 'suspense'".

<sup>25</sup> See File 3839-47, Reference (03)050SIG21/08060.

Table 3: Spanish translations of *The Woman in White* published in the twenty-first century.

Date	Translator(s)	Publisher
2002	Miguel Martínez-Lage	Barcelona: Punto de Lectura
2002	Maruja Gómez Segalés	Barcelona: DeBolsillo
2003	Maruja Gómez Segalés	Barcelona: Mediasat
2004	Maruja Gómez Segalés	Madrid: El País
2005	María Fernanda de Pereda	Madrid: Suma de Letras
2006	Miguel Martínez-Lage	Madrid: Homo Legens
2008	Miguel Martínez-Lage	Barcelona: Verticales de Bolsillo
2013	Raquel Yepes Sola	Málaga: Sonolibro
2014	Miguel Ángel Pérez Pérez	Madrid: Alianza Editorial
2016	Maruja Gómez Segalés and Laura Martín de Dios	Barcelona: Penguin Clásicos
2018	Miguel Martínez-Lage	Barcelona: Navona Editorial
2021	Miguel Martínez-Lage	Barcelona: Editorial Alma

To the above list one should add three different editions in Catalan under the title *La dama de blanc*, translated by Lluís Comes i Ardreueri, and published by Columna, labutxaca and Proa in 1990, 2008 and 2018 respectively. The three publishers belong to the prestigious Group Planeta and though labutxaca is a more recent creation, the other two are very well-established publishers. Founded in 1985, Columna Edicions has become a leader in Catalan publishing. It offers a large catalogue of fiction and non-fiction by both Catalan authors and translations of works by notable foreign writers. Proa's history is much longer. It was founded in 1928 and, since then, it has published Catalan versions of great novels of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, including Thomas Hardy's *Tess of the D'Urbervilles* in 1929, Oscar Wilde's *The Picture of Dorian Gray* in 1930, Charles Dickens's *Great Expectations* in 1934, Iris Murdoch's *Under the Net* in 1965 and E. M. Forster's *A Passage to India* in 1985. It is somewhat surprising that there has not been a Catalan translation of a Collins's novel a little earlier, the first the first text by Collins being a version of *The Haunted Hotel* by Roser Berdagué in 1986. No translation of *The Woman in White* has been found in the other languages of Spain such as Basque and Galician.<sup>26</sup>

The success and popularity of Collins's novel in Spain is attested not only by the large number publishers interested in this story or the availability of copies, but also by the variety of translations, some more complete than others, that readers might have enjoyed through the years. In this contemporary period, from 1984 onwards, we have recorded four new Spanish translators of *The Woman in White* (Maruja Gómez Segalés, Miguel Martínez-Lage, Raquel Yepes Sola and Miguel Ángel Pérez Pérez) plus an unknown version published by Literatura y Ciencia and a revised edition of Maruja Gómez Segalés's text in which another translator (Laura Martín de Dios) is included. In fact, if we look back over the entire history of the publication of this novel in Spanish, we find that there are 11 different names of translators altogether, plus three anonymous or unidentified texts, which show six different titles, as illustrated in the following table.

Table 4: Spanish titles and translators of *The Woman in White*.

Title	Translator(s)	Date of 1 <sup>st</sup> edition
<i>El vestido blanco</i>	Anonymous	1894–1895
<i>La dama vestida de blanco</i>	Vicente Blasco Ibáñez	1907
	María Fernanda de Pereda	1953
	Anonymous	1965
<i>La mujer del traje blanco</i>	M. Rodríguez-Rubí de Zimmer	1914?
<i>La dama blanca</i>	Modesto Rincón	1944

<sup>26</sup> There is however a Basque version of *The Moonstone*, entitled *Ilargi-harria*, translated by Antton Olano and published by Alberdania and Elkar in 2008.

<i>La dama de blanco</i>	Fernando Gutiérrez and Diego Navarro	1945
	Maruja Gómez Segalés	1984
	Unknown	1995
	Miguel Martínez-Lage	1997
	Raquel Yepes Sola	2013
	Maruja Gómez Segalés and Laura Martín de Dios	2016
<i>La mujer de blanco</i>	Miguel Martínez-Lage	2006
	Miguel Ángel Pérez Pérez	2014

As a curiosity, it may be added that among the titles used in the Spanish versions, *La dama de blanco* was the most used, followed by *La dama vestida de blanco*. In both cases the term “lady” (*dama*) was preferred to “woman” (*mujer*). The later versions, however, those by Miguel Martínez-Lage and Miguel Ángel Pérez Pérez, opted for a more literal translation of the title – *La mujer de blanco*.

## 5. Conclusions

There does not seem to be an official translation that dominated the Spanish-speaking world, but many different versions that helped spread Collins’s story among Spanish readers over three different centuries. Like in the UK, at the beginning, the text often appeared in a serialised form in very popular publications; then, the book format became the most common option and it lately appeared as an audiobook and an eBook as well. Irrespective of the quality, the completeness or the format of the different translations, all this goes to show the immense and uninterrupted popularity achieved by Collins’s *The Woman in White* in Spain, even during the difficult post-war times when a strict censorship was enforced. It is true that the text had a minor incident with the censors, who suspended Dédalo’s version in 1943, presumably because of a critical comment on the judiciary at the very beginning of the story. But this did not prevent the novel from continuing to be disseminated and read during Franco’s regime.

These findings lend weight to the initial hypothesis of this study about the popularity of the sensational novel. It is true that this type of novel was an intrinsic part of nineteenth-century English society, but it was not just a particular Victorian phenomenon; on the contrary, these somewhat gruesome stories that cleverly exploit the qualities of suspense and sensationalism, like *The Woman in White*, have also captivated Spanish readers of all times and even continue to interest contemporary audiences. Perhaps, as Michael Diamond suggests, what explains our ongoing fascination with these sensational characters and events is the fact that this sensation literature simply uses “human nature” (2003: 6). Another possible reason behind this success may lie in the writer’s ability to create a masterpiece, as Maurice Richardson suggested in his 1910 introduction: “Collins achieved an almost perfect integration between his great talent as a novelist and his capacity for sensationalism” (1910: v). Indeed, his ability to tell an interesting story, with a good dose of suspense, often created by his narrative method, with the limited accounts of multiple witnesses, might explain the success of this novel. Also, the inclusion of memorable characters like Count Fosco, who, despite his exaggerated features, carries a strong sense of reality. The verisimilitude created by this characterisation and the inclusion of many circumstantial details helps to portray a real world, which, it is true, belonged to a Victorian age, different to our twenty-first-century society, but a world that still has its charm for the contemporary reader.

This brief account of the reception of Collins’s sensation novel, *The Woman in White*, in Spain is necessarily limited in scope. No research has been done on the book’s readership in this country, the physical characteristics of its translations or the socioeconomic aspects of its publishing history. Similarly, comparative studies between the reception in Spain of Collins’s text and other similar Victorian narratives, such as Charles Dickens’s *Great Expectations* (1861), Ellen Wood’s *East Lynne* (1861) or Mary Elizabeth Braddon’s *Lady Audley’s Secret* (1862), might also provide valuable data and insights on the popularity of the genre. However, these and other issues concerning the reception of Collins in Spain remain open to further research.

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