

POSTSCRIPT

by Richard Flanagan

These notes are for those readers who wish to discover something more of the historical truth behind some of the characters and events mentioned in *Wanting*. Perhaps because I am drawn to questions which history cannot answer, and because these characters and events thus become the motley thrown over the concerns that are the true subject of this novel, I am disinclined to research. Accordingly, I have leaned heavily on a very small post made up of only a few books. I do not know if they are definitive, only that they were useful.

On Van Diemen's Land I drew on George Augustus Robinson's own diaries, published as *Friendly Mission* (1966) and *Weep In Silence* (1987). James Boyce's *Van Diemen's Land* (2008) is revealing on contemporary attitudes to the Black War. Ken McGoogan's *Fatal Passage* (2001) and *Lady Franklin's Revenge* (2006) alerted me to the unusual story of Dr John Rae and the complex achievement of Lady Jane Franklin. For Dickens' life and character, I relied on John Forster's *Charles Dickens* (1874), Peter Ackroyd's *Dickens* (1990), and, for his elusive and paradoxical essence, G. K. Chesterton's *Charles Dickens* (1906). Claire Tomalin's *The Invisible Woman* (1990) is the most comprehensive and thoughtful life of Ellen Ternan I have found.

GEORGE AUGUSTUS ROBINSON (1791–1866)

A London builder of strong religious beliefs, Robinson emigrated to Van Diemen's Land in 1824. His business in Van Diemen's Land appears to have prospered. He took up employment with the government in 1829 to work as a conciliator with those Tasmanian Aboriginals who remained at large as the Black War neared its end. In this he seems to have been motivated both by his religious beliefs and his social ambition. In the company of his two elder sons, a number of convict porters and a party of friendly Aboriginals, Robinson travelled through the unmapped wildlands of Van Diemen's Land over the following years, bringing in those Aboriginals still at large.

'His return to Hobart with the captives,' notes the *Australian Dictionary of Biography*, 'was deemed a Roman triumph.'

In October 1835, Robinson took control of the Wybalenna settlement on Flinders Island, where the remnants of the Aboriginal population he had captured were exiled. In 1839 he was appointed to the post of Chief Protector of Aborigines at the new mainland colony of Port Phillip, a post he held until 1849. By then well-off, Robinson returned to Europe, living for some years on the Continent before settling in Bath, where he died on 18 October 1866.

His diaries recording his experience in Van Diemen's Land were edited by N. J. B. Plomley and published as *Friendly Mission* (1966) and *Weep in Silence* (1987). Plomley has become almost as controversial a figure as his subject. But his achievement was to make available perhaps the most revealing, horrifying and mysterious books we have about the Australian colonial experience, about the Aboriginal Tasmanians, the wonder of their pre-modern world and the agony of its destruction.

TOWTERER (?1800–1837)

Commonly referred to as a chieftain of the Lowgernown (Port Davey) tribe, Robinson describes Towterer as a physically robust man, tall, 'stout and well-proportioned'. The one portrait that exists of him—made by the convict artist William Buelow Gould at the Sarah Island penal settlement, as Towterer and his captured band awaited shipment to Flinders Island—depicts a slenderer figure than Robinson suggests but with vital and engaging features.

Robinson records first meeting Towterer in March 1830, near Port Davey in southwest Tasmania. The encounter was not without tension. Towterer's people kept a guard on Robinson and the knapsack in which he carried his pistols. Robinson's tame natives came from Bruny Island in Tasmania's southeast. They seemed to have harboured some tribal dislike of the southwest Aboriginals.

'A rooted enmity subsists in the mind of WOORRADY against these people,' Robinson wrote in his diary. 'Again he urges me to capture them. It is a most difficult undertaking and very hard to preserve peace among them.'

Robinson travelled and camped with Towterer's band for five days, waking on the sixth to discover they had slipped away during the night. One of Robinson's tame natives, Dray, told Robinson they had fled because 'they were frightened of my natives: had been informed that Black Tom had been out with parties in pursuit of the natives, and likewise UMARRAH; called all my blacks NUM, viz white people'.

When Robinson returned to the southwest in June 1833, a band of Robinson's 'tame' Aboriginals—led by Woorrady and also including Trugannini and Mannalargenna—took most of Towterer's band captive after (according to Woorrady's account) surprising them weaponless in a native hut during a storm. Towterer and his wife, Wongerneep, escaped, leaving behind—again according to Woorrady—their baby.

Whether the baby was abducted or abandoned is an open question. Certainly Robinson understood the powerful bond between Aboriginal parents and their children. Some days later Towterer and Wongerneep, desperate to be reunited with their child, effectively gave themselves up to Robinson. That evening Robinson observed in his diary that it was 'of vital consequence to the welfare of the Aboriginal colony that no forced separation be allowed between parents and their children, and although it may appear (to those unacquainted with the Aboriginal character) that on some occasions they seem to acquiesce in the separation of their children, yet this is not really the case. This acquiescence is the result of fear, and they afterward pine away and die.'

This time, Towterer was very friendly with Robinson, telling him that so striking had been the impression Robinson had made on them in 1830 that they had named their child after him, calling her Mr Robinson's Duke. None of this prevented Mr Robinson's Duke from being sent to the Orphan School in Hobart. There, two years later, she died, much to the distress of her parents, who were by then exiled on Flinders Island. In the same year, 1835, Wongerneep—whom Robinson had renamed Queen Eveline—gave birth to another child, Mathinna.

Towterer—renamed by Robinson as King Romeo—died on 30 September 1837, 'a victim', Robinson recorded the settlement's doctor as saying, 'to his own obstinacy'. The following day Robinson attended the post mortem, noting that the body was decapitated. 'Romeo or TOWTERER was an old acquaintance of mine,' he

wrote in his diary that evening. 'He attached himself to me when I first went to Port Davey. He has left a wife and infant child.'

There is no record of the date or cause of Wongerneep's death.

MATHINNA (1835–?1852)

There is little accurate information about Mathinna—as though, on being taken from her people on Flinders Island, she was already passing into myth. The earliest account of Mathinna's life in book form was given in James Bonwick's *The Last of the Tasmanians, or, The Black War of Van Diemen's Land* (1870).

Bonwick was largely reprising a report in the *Hobart Mercury* published on 7 June 1869 as 'Something of the Past' and ascribed to 'Old Boomer'. By turns fanciful, factually wrong and written in a spirit of high tragedy, it is, intriguingly, highly critical of the ruthless war waged against the Tasmanian Aboriginals. Yet the broad outline seems accurate, and the details are tantalising.

Old Boomer describes Mathinna arriving at Government House in Hobart with a 'kangaroo skin, a rush basket, a shell necklace or two, and a pet opossum'. He writes of how she would travel in the Governor's carriage 'standing up as straight as a sassafras plant, dressed in a short bright scarlet frock, while her head, arms and legs were quite unclad, and presented a black and shining, yet strange and pleasing contrast with her new attire . . . She grew to be a tall, graceful girl . . . perhaps one of the grandest specimens of our kind that ever nature smiled upon.'

Old Boomer claims it was Lady Jane's physician, Dr Bedford, who advised that a removal to a climate far colder than Van Diemen's land 'would, most probably be followed by fatal consequences'. Sent to the orphanage, Mathinna was alone. 'Poor girl. She had no friends then . . . All those fawners around Government House who used say kind things, and pretend to be proud to take her hand in the ball-room because it pleased Lady Franklin, had all disappeared.'

After Bonwick, Mathinna's story vanishes from major historical accounts.

Frances J. Woodward's biography of Jane Franklin, *Life of Jane* (1951), omitted Mathinna entirely, nor is she mentioned in either Lloyd Robson's standard history of Tasmania (1983) or (apart from a reference in an appendix) Lyndall Ryan's *The Aboriginal Tasmanians* (second edition, 1996).

Only further research will reveal the truth or otherwise of Old Boomer's account and resolve the various contradictions in other accounts. Some facts can be established.

Mathinna was the daughter of Towterer and Wongerneep, born on Flinders Island in 1835. By 1841 Mathinna was living at Government House in Hobart with Sir John and Lady Jane Franklin. There she was raised alongside Eleanor, Sir John's daughter from his first marriage. Mathinna was said to have the 'manners of a well-born child'.

In March 1843 Lady Jane Franklin wrote that the convict artist Bock was painting some portraits of Aborigines:

'Mathinna's will show the influence of some degree of civilisation upon a child of as pure a race as they, and who in spite of every endeavour, and though entirely apart from her own people, retains much of the unconquerable spirit of the Savage; extreme uncertainty of will and temper, great want of perseverance and attention, little if any self-control, and great acuteness of the senses and facility of imitation.'

Shortly before the Franklins left the colony in 1843, Mathinna was sent to the Queen's Orphan School in Hobart. She was aged eight. She was sent back to Flinders Island the following year, where for a time she lived in the home of the Catechist, Robert Clark, with some other Aboriginal children. One of these, Fanny Cochrane, from whom many present-day Tasmanian Aboriginals are descended, attempted to burn down the Catechist's home. Following up on allegations of cruelty by Clark to children in his care, a subsequent investigation by the Launceston port officer, Matthew Friend found Clark had 'on several occasions chained and flogged Fanny Cochrane'.

In 1847, when the Aboriginal settlement was removed from Wybalenna to Oyster Cove, south of Hobart, Mathinna was sent back to the Queen's Orphan School. She returned to her people at Oyster Cove in 1851. There is no record of any Oyster Cove Aboriginal committing murder in the period Oyster Cove was an Aboriginal settlement.

Different authorities give Mathinna's death variously as 1855 (Cassandra Pybus, *Community of Thieves*, 1991) and 1856 (Lyndall Ryan, *The Aboriginal Tasmanians*, 1996). The most complete account is given by N. J. B. Plomley in *Weep In Silence* (pages 173, 181 and 779); he dates Mathinna's death as 1 September 1852. Plomley cites a letter from the magistrate James Woodhouse Kirwan to the Colonial Secretary in May 1855, in which Kirwan mentions 'the case of a native woman named ARWENIA—this was MATHINNA—who, having become drunk at an inn at North West Bay had fallen on her face [in a puddle on the road] on her way home and was found dead next morning'.

Kirwan had previously reported adversely on the Oyster Bay settlement, describing it as 'filthy' and noting that 'the first place to which they [the natives] resort is the public house', near which took place 'scenes of disgusting immorality on the part of the native women and white in the open day'.

While a recent revival of interest in Mathinna's story has seen a production inspired by her life produced by the Bangarra Dance Theatre in 2008, it is clear that after Bonwick, Mathinna's story was largely forgotten. For over a century, it survived only in the enigmatic painting made of her as a child in a red dress by the convict artist Thomas Bock.

SIR JOHN FRANKLIN (1786–1847)

John Franklin entered the English Royal Navy at the age of fourteen, seeing active service a year later at the Battle of Copenhagen. He claimed his passion for exploration was kindled while serving as midshipman with Matthew Flinders on his voyages of exploration of New Holland between 1801 and 1804. He later fought at the Battle of Trafalgar.

His Arctic expeditions of 1819–22 and 1824–28 established his standing as an explorer, a reputation consolidated by the publication of his *Narrative of a Journey to the Shores of the Polar Sea, in the Years 1819–22* (1823). Franklin's first wife, Eleanor Anne Porden, by whom he had a daughter, Eleanor, died while he was away on his second expedition. In recognition of his achievements as an explorer, he was awarded the gold medal of the Geographical Society of Paris, an honorary D. C. L. of Oxford, and a knighthood. In 1828 he married Jane Griffin. The union was to be childless.

Franklin returned to naval service, accumulated more awards and in 1836 was appointed Lieutenant-Governor of the penal colony of Van Diemen's Land. Described as a Whig king with a Tory cabinet, he held the position until 1843, when he was recalled following the intrigues of his colonial enemies, their work abetted by a global depression that struck the formerly prosperous colony particularly hard. I have seen no record of Sir John Franklin's attitude towards Mathinna.

In 1845 Franklin was awarded the leadership of the most expensive expedition in the history of the Royal Navy—its mission to find the Northwest Passage. He was by then fifty-nine, old and fat. But his desire to clear his name was strong; his friend Sir Edward Parry said Franklin would die of disappointment if he were not allowed to go.

The expedition set sail on 19 May 1845 and was last seen by the crew of two whaling ships in Baffin Bay at the end of July that year. Franklin's ships were never seen again. Not a soul survived to tell what befell them, and to this day no conclusive evidence has been found that might solve the mystery of their fate.

THE FRANKLIN EXPEDITION

The first accurate reports of the expedition's fate were made by Dr John Rae, a noted Arctic explorer in the employ of the Hudson's Bay Company. From extensive interviews with Inuit eyewitnesses and relics he obtained from them, Dr Rae concluded that the expeditioners had abandoned their ships and perished on a forced march southwards in the region of King William Island, some having resorted in the end to cannibalism. Dr Rae's report, made public in 1854, was most unwelcome to Lady Jane Franklin; it was publicly undone by Dickens' powerful attack on it, which was published in December 1854 in *Household Words* as 'The Lost Arctic Voyagers'.

In 1859, while on a search expedition put together by Lady Jane Franklin, Francis Leopold McClintock found a document in a stone cairn on King William Island that recorded Sir John Franklin as dying on board an ice-bound Erebus on 11 June 1847. The cause of his death is not recorded. The document also established that in 1848, with twenty-four men now dead, the survivors had started a forced march south.

Expeditions continue to this day seeking to find the truth. The discovery of further relics, skeletons and Inuit testimony, as well as more recent exhumation and forensic investigation of frozen bodies known to be those of expeditioners, have yielded some details. All the evidence has confirmed what Dr John Rae dared to say, what Lady Jane denied, and what Dickens so powerfully refuted.

In the 1980s a series of exhumations of expeditioners' corpses by a forensic pathologist, Owen Beattie, found that the men examined had suffered lead poisoning. At the time, this was attributed to the defective soldering of the expedition's tinned food, but more recently it has been suggested that it resulted from a shipboard system for distilling water. The weakness, paranoia and irritability associated with lead poisoning tallied with Inuit accounts of disoriented survivors. Further forensic examinations of the remains of eight men found at Erebus Bay in the mid 1990s found cut marks on ninety-two bones, which was consistent with cannibalism.

The sum of a century and a half of search expeditions' gleanings suggests that a combination of cold, starvation and disease—including scurvy, pneumonia and tuberculosis, and exacerbated by lead poisoning and a cultural arrogance that saw expeditioners refuse to adapt to indigenous ways to survive—was responsible for the

deaths of all the expedition members. The role cannibalism played in this tragic scenario is no longer denied, but its precise part remains impossible to ascertain.

Franklin's fate arose from both imperial history and literature, and it was perhaps inevitable it would continue to live on in both. To take the palm in discovering the Northwest Passage loomed as large in the heyday of the English Empire as winning the space race would for later imperiums, the reasons a similar amalgam of strategic concern, commercial possibility and national chauvinism. The Arctic also occupied an important mythological place in nineteenth-century English imaginings, from Coleridge's *The Rime of the Ancient Mariner* (1798) to Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* (1818), which begins with Victor Frankenstein being discovered on an ice floe in the polar regions.

Perhaps, then, it is no surprise that Franklin's myth remains potent so long after his disappearance. Songs ('Lady Franklin's Lament', a ballad from the 1850s, became a twentieth century folk music standard, with Bob Dylan using its tune for his song 'Bob Dylan's Dream'), paintings (such as Sir Edwin Landseer's popular 'Man Proposes, God Disposes', which in 1864 gave pictorial support to Dickens' arguments, showing two ferocious polar bears on top of a ship's wreckage, one tearing at a red ensign, the other at a human rib cage), panoramas, dioramas and magic lantern slides were succeeded by films and more literature, from Jules Verne, whose *Adventures of Captain Hatteras* (1864) has the novel's hero retrace Franklin's footsteps), to the German novelist Sten Nadolny, whose fictionalised life of Franklin, *The Discovery of Slowness* (1983), was a bestseller in Germany, where it is credited with inspiring the slow movement, as well as an opera, television programs and even a corporate training fad.

Dreams, commerce and national vanities continue to intersect in the most recent attempt to discover the fate of Franklin, a Canadian government-sponsored expedition in the northern summer of 2008 that was viewed as an expression of Canada's desire to assert sovereignty over Arctic waterways, which, as the ice caps melt, finally seems likely to fulfil the commercial hopes invested in them for so many centuries. The six-week expedition located 'remnants of copper sheeting' believed to be from the doomed ships of Sir John Franklin.

'We're armed with a new confidence for the 2009 campaign,' the expedition's leader, Robert Grenier, was quoted as saying, echoing the optimism of so many before him to finally solve the enigma that is Franklin.

LADY JANE FRANKLIN (1791–1875)

Born the daughter of John Griffin, a silk weaver of London, and Mary Griffin (née Guillemard), Jane Griffin married Sir John Franklin in 1828.

A woman possessed of energy, ideals and enthusiasms, she left her mark in Van Diemen's Land in everything from the schools and societies she founded, to the temple housing sculpture she commissioned, which after her departure ended up being used to store apples. Much has been made of her achievements as an intrepid traveller—she was the first European woman, for example, to climb Mount Wellington, to travel overland from Melbourne (then Port Phillip) to Sydney, and from Hobart to Macquarie Harbour on Van Diemen's land west coast—but little of the travails suffered in consequence by the four convict porters who had to carry her

in a blackwood palanquin through the rainforests of southwest Tasmania as she and her husband explored that region.

‘Though one of the best and kindest of her sex,’ wrote the surveyor James Calder, who cut the track through the southwest over which the palanquin along with Lady Jane’s numerous hat boxes were borne, ‘[she] had a very troublesome habit of taking her own way in everything, and I found that I might as well try to persuade her that darkness was light, as that it was possible to improve on any arrangements of her making.’

Her devotion to her husband in the wake of his vanished expedition made her one of the most admired and well-known figures of her age, at a time when the word celebrity had just entered the lexicon. It was said that ‘what the nation would not do, a woman did’.

Lady Jane Franklin’s greatest achievement was to transform the story of her husband’s disastrous final expedition into a story of triumph, best summed up by the caption beneath his statue in London, which reads ‘Discoverer of the North West Passage’. There was no evidence for the claim, but for the next century and a half it would be accepted as the truth.

CHARLES DICKENS (1812–1870)

‘I have never known a moment’s peace or content since the last night of *The Frozen Deep*,’ Dickens wrote to Wilkie Collins in late 1857. Within nine months of the final performance of the play in Manchester, Dickens left Catherine, his wife of twenty years, after an incident that saw her accidentally receive a bracelet intended for Ellen Ternan.

‘More tragic and far-reaching in its effect was the association of Charles Dickens and Ellen Ternan and their resultant son than that of Nelson and Lady Hamilton and their daughter,’ wrote Dickens’ daughter Katey. ‘My father was like a madman. He did not seem to care a damn what happened to any of us.’

Dickens dyed his hair and kept his Arctic explorer’s beard, telling his children to regard him not as their father but as an ‘elder brother’. He spent a day burning all the letters he had kept, exclaiming, ‘Would to God every letter I had ever written was on that pile!’

Dickens’ biographer Peter Ackroyd has said that ‘the effect of meeting Ellen marks the biggest watershed in Dickens’s life. He was one man before and another man after.’

Dickens supported Ternan from 1860 onwards. He installed her in various residences around London and on the Continent, where she spent extended periods of time. According to Katey, Dickens’ and Ternan’s son died in infancy. Unlike Collins, Dickens was secretive about this, as he was about the relationship, so much so that many details, including the illegitimate child, remain debated questions.

In these final years Dickens wrote three more novels—*A Tale of Two Cities* (in which he reprised the plot of *The Frozen Deep* in different form), *Great Expectations* and *Our Mutual Friend*, and he began a fourth, *The Mystery of Edwin Drood*. Many critics have noted that these novels are increasingly concerned with the keeping of secrets. They are also darker, his genial humour largely absent, and the women characters seem to shed the meekness of earlier novels for more wilful and impetuous natures.

Dickens once said he ‘believed he had more talent for the drama than for literature, as he certainly had more delight in acting than in any other work whatever’. As if to build on this talent and perhaps to maintain a connection with his reading public, from whom in other respects he was becoming increasingly distant, he embarked on his famous reading tours. The double life took its toll, the keeping of the secrets perhaps far more destructive than the secret itself. He died, worn out, at the age of fifty-eight.

‘No one knows whether he found peace and intimacy with Ternan as Charles Darnay does with Lucie Manette in *A Tale of Two Cities*,’ another biographer, Jane Smiley, has written, ‘or whether he found frustration and cruelty, as Pip finds with Estella in *Great Expectations*. He succeeded in taking to the grave the answer to the central question of his life, which he lamented to John Forster in 1855, before the advent of Ternan. “Why is it, that as with poor David,” he wrote, referring to one of his most famous characters, “a sense comes always crushing on me now, when I fall into low spirits, as of one happiness I have missed in life, one friend and companion I have never made?”’

As Dickens said to Forster on another occasion, ‘Only think what the desperate intensity of my nature is.’

Against his stated wishes, Dickens was buried at Westminster Abbey. Neither Catherine Dickens nor Ellen Ternan was invited to his funeral. To the surprise of many, then and since, Ellen Ternan was named the first legatee of Dickens’ will and was bequeathed £1000, as though in death Dickens wished to do what he had failed to do in life and publicly honour the relationship.

On her deathbed, Catherine Dickens left instructions that Dickens’ early letters to her be donated to the British Museum, so that ‘the world may know he loved me once’.

ELLEN LAWLESS TERNAN (1839–1914)

Ellen Ternan was involved with Dickens from 1857, when she played a supporting role (not that of the romantic lead, which was taken by her sister) in *The Frozen Deep*, until the novelist’s death in 1870. Her biographer, Claire Tomalin, concluded that the relationship was complex, ‘her experience of life . . . considerable but mostly rather grim . . . The love of the great man, which must have seemed to promise so much when she was twenty, had become both destructive and a barrier cutting her off from any future of her own.’ Not for Nelly the public position, prestige and privileges of mistresses of other places and other times.

Ellen Ternan was present at Gad’s Hill when Dickens died there on 9 June 1870. A story gathered by Tomalin after her biography was published, and which she credits as possible, has Dickens suffering his initial stroke not at Gad’s Hill, but at Ellen Ternan’s home. Tomalin concludes that the story ‘tallied with many of the undisputed facts of Dickens’s last days and explained several inconsistencies.’

Six years after Dickens’ death, Ellen Ternan married a schoolmaster, George Wharton Robinson, twelve years her junior, to whom she had a son, Geoffrey, and a daughter, Gladys. Neither child had any knowledge of their mother’s past, and Nelly kept her secret from them until her death in 1914.

In 1920 Geoffrey Robinson resigned from the army and set up as a second-hand book dealer in Slough. Going through the papers left him by his mother and aunts, he

discovered that they had been professional actresses, that Nelly was not sixty-five when she died but seventy-five, and that, prior to her marriage, his mother had a long and deep association with Charles Dickens. Geoffrey Robinson met with Sir Henry Dickens, the novelist's only surviving son, who, when asked, admitted that Ellen Ternan had been his father's mistress.

Thereafter, Geoffrey Robinson kept his study locked, refused to have any Dickens novel in his home and would switch off the radio if mention was made of his name. He grew reclusive and died in 1959. His papers were sold. Nothing in them revealed any connection between his mother and Charles Dickens.

DOUGLAS JERROLD (1803–1857)

Douglas Jerrold was a playwright, novelist and journalist, whose literary standing was for a time almost equal to that of Charles Dickens. Time has relegated him to a footnote. Regarded in his lifetime as a great wit, Jerrold was best known for his association with *Punch*—originally a radical satirical journal—from its second edition. He edited and contributed to a number of other magazines. His politics were radical; the 1911 *Encyclopedia Britannica* records that 'he never tired of declaiming against the horrors of war, the luxury of bishops, and the iniquity of capital punishment'.

Jerrold's friendship with Dicken temporarily suffered in the late 1840s, for while Dickens was against public executions, Jerrold was an abolitionist. According to Dickens' own account, it was Jerrold who made up. Meeting by chance at the Garrick, Jerrold said, 'For God's sake, let us be friends again! Life's not long enough for this!'

For all his success, financial security evaded Jerrold, as it did so many writers, and when he died suddenly his family were left in the difficult circumstances that motivated Dickens to reprise *The Frozen Deep*.

JERROLD, DOSTOEVSKY AND THE CRYSTAL PALACE

Douglas Jerrold's mocking description of Joseph Paxton's design of the Great Exhibition Hall as a 'palace of very crystal, the sky looking in through every bit of the roof' was a joke that quickly transmuted into a celebrated title. Fyodor Dostoevsky visited the Crystal Palace—by then relocated from Hyde Park to Sydenham Hill and holding another great exhibition—in 1862. It terrified him:

People come with a single thought, quietly, relentlessly, mutely thronging into this colossal palace; and you feel that something final has taken place here, that something has come to an end. It is like a Biblical picture, something out of Babylon, a prophecy from the apocalypse coming to pass before your eyes. You sense that it would require great and everlasting spiritual denial and fortitude in order not to submit, not to capitulate before the impression, not to bow to what is, and not to deify Baal, that is, not to accept the material world as your ideal.

Others saw the building far more hopefully. In his novel *What Is To Be Done?* (1863), the Russian socialist N. G. Chernyshevsky approvingly presented the 'crystal palace' as a vision of a future socialistic society. Chernyshevsky's use of the Crystal

Palace as a symbol for a new world order seems to have appalled Dostoevsky even more than the building itself, and he satirised Chernyshevsky's ideas in *Notes From Underground* (1864):

And it is then—this is still you speaking—that new economic relations will come, quite ready made, and also calculated with mathematical precision, so that all possible questions will vanish in an instant, essentially because they will have been given all possible answers. Then the crystal palace will get built . . .

And so Jerrold's joke, which had turned into a title, transformed again—this time into an oppressive symbol for a coming dystopia.

JOHN FORSTER (1812–1876)

Journalist, editor, biographer and man of letters, John Forster is remembered today for his friendship with Dickens, after whose death he wrote the first biography of the novelist. Although Dickens was amused by—and occasionally made fun of—his friend's pomposity, modelling Podsnap in *Our Mutual Friend* (the last novel he completed before his death) on Forster, he relied upon him as an unofficial agent and editor. Forster was also the repository of many of Dickens' secrets, from his shame at having worked in a bootblackening factory as a child, which Forster revealed in his biography, to the relationship with Ellen Ternan, which he did not.

From *Our Mutual Friend* (1864–65):

Mr Podsnap was well to do, and stood very high in Mr Podsnap's opinion. Beginning with a good inheritance, he had married a good inheritance, and had thriven exceedingly in the Marine Insurance way, and was quite satisfied. He never could make out why everybody was not quite satisfied, and he felt conscious that he set a brilliant social example in being particularly well satisfied with most things, and, above all other things, with himself.

WILKIE COLLINS (1824–1889)

A novelist and playwright, Wilkie Collins' standing in Victorian Britain was high, his books sensations, his literary achievements lauded. He is credited with inventing the detective novel (as, admittedly, are several others, including Edgar Allan Poe).

After failing as a tea merchant and at the law, Collins settled down to a life of which, as Julian Symons has noted, 'his father would strongly have disapproved'. Collins abhorred the idea of marriage, an institution he regarded as 'miserably narrow'; he maintained long-term relationships with two women, and took such large amounts of opium that, he confessed, he could not recall composing some of his novels.

In this, Collins was not without precedent: in his old age he recalled overhearing his mother saying to the visiting poet Coleridge,

'Mr Coleridge, do not cry; if the opium really does you any good, and you must have it, why do not you go and get it?'

Collins was as unconventional as Forster was conventional; perhaps it is less than surprising that Dickens' friendship with the young writer grew stronger as his love affair with Ellen Ternan drove him away from Victorian bourgeois society. A visiting American journalist described the two novelists walking together through London as a sort of literary Sancho Panza and Don Quixote:

'Collins, short and rather thick-set, with bold forehead, long black beard, large bright-blue eyes, and gold spectacles, forming a decided contrast with the airiness and "sailor-like aspect" of his great friend.'

The Woman in White and *The Moonstone* were Collins' most successful novels; his addiction to opium and the loss of Dickens are credited as the decisive factors in his waning popularity in later times. The novels of his final years were seen as little more than vehicles to rail against various injustices—from vivisection to the inhumane treatment of lunatics, from marriage laws to the cult of athleticism.

'What brought good Wilkie's genius nigh perdition?' asked Swinburne. 'Some demon whispered – "Wilkie! have a mission."'

In truth, Collins was merely continuing in the tradition of engaged entertainment that had in an earlier era worked so successfully for his mentor, Dickens, and for others such as Douglas Jerrold, but which had by the later 1800s fallen out of favour.