

WYBERT REEVE

Wybert Reeve appeared in and wrote numerous plays and also published a novel, *Sundered Lives* (1871) before coming to Australia in 1879. He remained until 1900, living mainly in Adelaide, and during that time wrote and produced his own plays, many of which were adaptations of plays and novels, including *Passion* (1884), adapted from Rosa Praed's *Policy and Passion*. One of his earliest Australian works was the pantomime, *Cinderella* (1879) which both wrote and directed.

Born in London in 1831, Wybert Reeve was involved in the theatre at Bradford, England in the late 1840s but initially attempted a career in the British army, serving during the early 1850s as an Officer in the 5th Dragoon Guards. It is thought that he may have been in Australia in 1852, the year a farce called *An Australian Hoax* was staged in Sydney. Reeve is recorded as having produced his first play that same year in Plymouth, England. It too was called *An Australian Hoax*.

After leaving the army Reeve spent much of his later life in the USA and Australia. In his preface to *From Life* (1891), for example, he refers to himself as "an actor, writer, manager, and traveller over the greater part of the civilized world." He played comic parts with several provincial companies in England and managed Sheffield's Theatre Royal for three years beginning 1862 and was lessee in 1867. Prior to coming to Australia he was also proprietor of the Theatre Royal Scarborough. Among the plays he wrote, most of which were farces, were *Never Reckon your Chickens*, *Parted*, *The Better Angel*, *I Love You*, *A Match for Mother-in-law* and the pantomime, *Bluebeard*, *the Great Bashaw*, or, *Harlequin Stormcloud*, and *the Fairy Starlight Queen*. Some of his English plays were published by Samuel French, including *Won at Last!* (1869), *A Supper Gratis; Or, An Impudent Intruder* (1869), *Pyke O'Callaghan; or, The Irish Patriot* (1870), and *Parted: An English Love Story* (1874). He also published a novel while in England, *Sundered Lives* (1871).



Andrew Gasson. Wilkie Collins
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Reeve was also a theatrical collaborator and long standing friend of Wilkie Collins (1824-1889). He had appeared in Collins' dramatic adaptation of *The Woman in White* (Olympic Theatre, London) in 1873 joined Collins on a reading tour of North America. He later played the role of Fosco (in *A Woman in White*) for a two-week run at the Broadway Theatre, New York. During an eight year period, Reeve is said to have played the role over 1,500 times in England, Canada and the USA.

Between 1879 and 1900 Reeve lived in Australia, settling for much of that time in Adelaide, where he became a prominent figure in South Australian society. He was the vice-president of the South Australian University Shakespearean Society, and managed and leased several theatres. He also wrote and produced his own plays, including an adaptation of the novel *Policy and Passion* by Rosa Praed, and contributed short stories for the *Australasian*. One of his earliest works was the pantomime, *Cinderella; Or, Harlequin Prince Beauteous, the Butterfly Fairy, the Golden Spider, and the Little Glass Slipper* which both wrote and directed for a season in Melbourne shortly after arriving in the country. Another of his early productions in Australia was Wilkie Collins' *No Name*, which he staged at the author's request. Produced in Melbourne in 1879 it was retitled *Great Temptation*.

Reeve's association with Melbourne in the late-1880s saw him collaborate with the Majeroni Company. His comedy, *Only Dust*, with additions by Signor Majeroni, was staged at the Bijou Theatre in 1887, followed by a production of his own adaptation of *The Woman in White* the following week (Reeve directed). The *Argus* theatre critic wrote of *Only Dust*, "Quiet comedy has always suited Mr. Wybert Reeve, and he succeeds admirably in the delineation of Dr. Bolusi." Another of his productions at the Bijou was *The Crushed Tragedian*, an adaptation of the H.J. Byron comedy *The Prompter's Box*.

Reeve's other Australian plays include *For Life, or, The Foster Brothers* (1880), *The Passing Regiment* (1883), *A Dead Heat* (1884), and *Duty Bound* (1886).

Details in this biography have been sourced from Pascoe, Charles Eyre, *The Dramatic List: A Record of the Principal Performances of Living Actors and Actresses on the British Stage* (1879); Andrew Gasson's "Wybert Reeve." *Wilkie Collins Information Pages*; and "Wybert Reeve." *AustLit The Australian Literature Resource*.

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