



**WILLIAM  
WYLER  
SEASON**

Eden Court Cinema  
Tuesday 19 January  
2016 at 7.15pm

## The Collector

Thriller | 1965 | USA, UK | Colour | running time, 119 mins.

Cast: Terence Stamp, Samantha Eggar, Mona Washbourne, Maurice Dallimore, William Beckley, Gordon Barclay

Director: William Wyler

Screenplay: Stanley Mann, John Kohn, from the novel by John Fowles

**HOW do you like your sex fiends, over or underdone—ferocious like Anthony Perkins in "Psycho" or weak, vacillating and obscure? If the latter, you should be fascinated by the creep Terence Stamp plays in William Wyler's "The Collector."**

**For the weirdo in this melodrama, a young man who kidnaps a girl and keeps her locked in the cellar of an old English country house, is a puzzler if ever there was one. He violently captures the girl by cornering her in a vacant alley and knocking her out with chloroform, the way he does the butterflies he also gathers. Then he hauls her off in a small van.**

But once he has got her in the cellar, he treats her with soothing gentleness, brings her trays of food with flowers and begs her to fall in love with him. Stern though he is about insisting that she not go beyond the door, he is equally as lenient and indulgent in trying to be agreeable to her.

No wonder, the girl, an art student, is more bewildered than frightened by him, more inclined to be cautious and analytical than to try to crack him over the head. And no wonder she is altogether baffled and terrified now, indeed—when she finally offers to give herself to him and he shuns and reviles her hideously.

It is an awfully strange fellow that Mr. Wyler and Mr. Stamp give us in this film—a fellow whose dull and dank behavior seems to cover some deep complexities. And the misfortune is that Mr. Wyler and his writers, Stanley Mann and John Kohn, working from the novel by John Fowles, fail to tell us or show us enough about him to give some dimension to his mania and some meaning to the ugly tragedy he brings on.

Mr. Stamp is entirely mystifying and fascinating at the start, as he should be, and the tension of his muted underplaying holds until well on in the film. But when it is evident that he is moving around in circles in his dark psychotic quest and that we're not going to find out more about him than the little we are told at the start, he tends to become monotonous and, finally, a melodramatic blob. This softly sinister fellow should be more than that.

On the other hand, Samantha Eggar is able to make the girl everything she should be in a situation as weird and bewildering as this. The feelings of fear, indignation, anxiety, puzzlement, shock and eventually dismal melancholy and terrifying despair possess her young and vital person with tempestuous clarity. One can feel, at least, a great compassion for her helpless and futile fate.

There are certain glints of illogic that might be criticized. How could a fellow so conspicuous (he has just won a £70,000 lottery) drop so completely out of sight? Why wouldn't the nosy neighbor, whom Maurice Dallimore plays, return to the house to do a little snooping

after his one brief and vexing visit?

Mr. Wyler has turned in a tempting and frequently startling, bewitching film, but he has failed to make it any more than a low-key chiller that melts in a conventional puddle of warm blood towards the end.

By BOSLEY CROWTHER

Published: June 18, 1965, New York Times

**"not everyone was clapping Willie on the back – the notoriously persnickety Bosley Crowther panned it, but that's nothing new"**

<http://thrillingdaysofyesteryear.blogspot.co.uk/2012/06/william-wyler-biogathon-collector-1965.html> ↓

*The idea to adapt Fowles' work for the big screen originated with a pair of former television writers, Jud Kinberg and John Kohn, who had recently turned to producing and who pitched the deal to the head of Columbia Pictures' London office, Mike Frankovich. Both Kinberg and Kohn wanted the legendary Wyler to helm the production, who was already in preparation to direct **The Sound of Music** (1965). But once Wyler started reading Fowles' novel he found he just couldn't put it down, and so he left Julie Andrews and those oh-so-alive hills in the capable hands of Robert Wise. Kinberg and Kohn arranged for screenwriter Stanley Mann to write the film's first draft, and after reading it Wyler decided it could be improved on, so Kohn did some polishing (Terry Southern reportedly turned in a revision as well, with a "what-the-front-yard?" ending that Wyler despised, choosing to stick with the way Fowles' original book called it a wrap—which I will conceal for the benefit of those who've not seen the movie).*

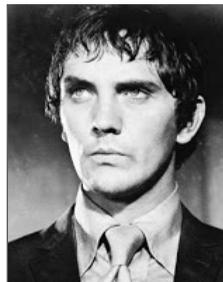
*Wyler very much wanted up-and-coming British actors in the roles of Freddie and Miranda, and Terence Stamp—who was at that time making a name for himself in features like **Term of Trial** and **Billy Budd**, for which he nabbed a Best Supporting Actor nomination—was chosen for the male lead. Stamp didn't want to take on the part of Freddie at first (he thought the character repulsive and was astonished that they didn't go with someone like Anthony Perkins or John Hurt) but he very much wanted to work with the veteran director, with whom he established an immediate connection. The two of them then began auditioning actresses for the role of Miranda...and though Stamp assumed that Britain's top female thesp, Julie Christie, was a shoo-in, Columbia's Frankovich began lobbying for newcomer Samantha Eggar. Wyler was not impressed.*



**Willie then learned that Stamp and Eggar had a past history:** the two of them were students at the same dramatic school (the Webber Douglas Academy of Dramatic Art) and Stamp had expressed romantic designs on his future co-star, which she torpedoed with all deliberate speed. Wyler thought that their previous rocky relationship would be ideal for the sexual tension and discomfiture experienced by the protagonists in **The Collector**, and so he okayed Frankovich's choice. Three weeks into the film's rehearsals, Willie was dissatisfied with Eggar's work and he fired her on the spot. Told by Frankovich to lay low in Palm Springs for a while, Eggar ended up being rehired after would-be replacement Natalie Wood turned Wyler down due to a previous film commitment.

**With Eggar's rehiring, there were a few conditions.** One was that she would have to work with an acting coach for the duration—something that usually went against Willie's modus operandi, but he broke that rule because he ended up hiring the coach: character great and TDOY fave Kathleen Freeman. Another condition was that Stamp would stay in character throughout the shooting of **Collector** (just call him Meryl Streep), so his constantly being a miserable bastard was something that upset Eggar considerably. She wasn't aware that Wyler had instructed Terrence to do so...but it helped immeasurably with the awkward "relationship" that develops between the couple.

**And of course, it wouldn't be a Wyler film without the infinite number of camera takes for which the director had become notorious.** Eggar later recalled for Jan Herman's **A Talent for Trouble: The Life of Hollywood's Most Acclaimed Director, William Wyler** that the most uncomfortable sequence in her experience working with "Once More" Willie was the shooting and re-shooting and re-shooting of a love scene between her and co-star Stamp: "...we shot that love scene for what seemed like weeks. I kept wondering why I had to stand there with no clothes on when they were only shooting me from the shoulders up. Willy always used to sit, and it was a strange level where his eyes were." (Um...yeah.)



Terence Stamp



Samantha Eggar

**But Eggar did get a few concessions.** **The Collector** had originally planned to be shot in black-and-white, but Wyler decided that color would best accentuate the actress' red tresses and creamy complexion. Samantha was also vindicated from the director's initial reluctance to use her when she was awarded the Best Actress prize at the Cannes Film Festival (her co-star wound up winning Best Actor) and a Golden Globe for Best Actress in a Drama as well. She also snagged one of the film's three Oscar nominations, the others going to Wyler (for his direction) and Mann and co-producer Kohn for their adapted screenplay.

**The Collector was the first thriller ever directed by William Wyler** . . . make that his only thriller. With this film, Wyler demonstrated the same versatility for which Howard Hawks received critical plaudits (directing in any number of film genres) and the critical response to **Collector** was quite favorable, getting thumbs up from the likes of Andrew Sarris and Judith Crist (not everyone was clapping Willie on the back—the notoriously persnickety Bosley Crowther panned it, but that's nothing new). The only accolade that mattered to Wyler, however, was the one he received from author Fowles—since authors are notorious for cringing when their work is adapted for the big screen. Fowles was most enthusiastic: "I enjoyed it just as much the second time as the first. . ." (Fowles did suggest to Wyler that some modifications be made to Maurice Jarre's score for the picture, changes Willie was only too happy to implement before the movie's release.)

**Does the film hold up today?** I suppose it depends on how accepting you are with the overall premise, which admittedly is a little cold-blooded (and I personally experience unease when they try to make Freddie a sympathetic sort...because no matter how you slice it—the guy's a creep) but as a character study it makes for captivating viewing. Towards the end of his career, Wyler had started to drift toward quieter pieces like **The Children's Hour** (1961) and his last picture, the underrated **The Liberation of L.B. Jones** (1970) . . . abandoning bigger budgeted features like **The Big Country** (1958) and **Ben-Hur** (1959). (His experience "directing" Barbra Streisand in 1968's **Funny Girl** probably soured him on any such further endeavors.) Despite the subject matter, **The Collector** features Willie in top form, coaxing two remarkable performances from stars Stamp and Eggar. It's no mystery that many fans of the veteran director consider the film one of the best in the twilight of his astonishing career.



DIRECTOR – WILLIAM WYLER

1902 - 1981



**Eden Court Cinema**  
**Tuesday 2 February**  
**2016 at 7.15pm**

The great Bette Davis stars as Leslie Crosbie, the wife of a Singapore plantation manager who shoots a man in what she claims is self-defence. Her husband hires a lawyer to defend her, but as the case unfolds doubt is cast upon her story. Based on a short story and play by W. Somerset Maugham and nominated for 7 Oscars, including Bette Davis's fourth nomination for Best Actress, **The Letter** is a tale of passion, murder and blackmail.

Our next screening...  
**The Letter**

The last film in our  
**William Wyler Season**



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