



## *THE WILKIE COLLINS SOCIETY*

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### **NEWSLETTER**

**SUMMER 2019**

#### **A MOONSTONE BROOCH**

The Antiques Roadshow for 7 July featured a diamond brooch which had originally been taken from Seringapatam in southern India. In *The Moonstone* the fabulous yellow diamond “fell into the possession of Tippoo, Sultan of Seringapatam, who caused it to be placed as an ornament in the handle of a dagger, and who commanded it to be kept among the choicest treasures of his armoury.” The bloodthirsty scene where the diamond was looted by Colonel John Herculastle was described in ‘The Siege of Seringapatam (1799)’, Collins’s opening chapter of the novel. The brooch must also have been a choicest treasure as it was described as highly collectable and valued by the Antique Roadshow’s resident expert at £30,000.

The programme mentioned and must have been recorded towards the end of an Exhibition on Indian Jewellery at the Victoria and Albert Museum. This was accompanied by a V & A book, *Indian Jewellery* by Nick Barnard. Quoting from the blurb,

Indian jewellery is among the most opulent and finely wrought in the world and this book draws on over 100 exquisite pieces from the V&A’s superb collection, many never published before. Nick Barnard illuminates the social context and symbolic meanings as well as the varied techniques employed by craftsmen. He describes how jewellery was worn and by

whom, how stones were sourced and cut, how traditions of making and wearing varied in different parts of the country, and how the V&A's own collection itself was brought together by travellers and scholars over the years.

No mention, however, of a significant character in *The Moonstone* “the celebrated Indian traveller, Mr. Murthwaite, who, at risk of his life, had penetrated in disguise where no European had ever set foot before.”

## **A WILLIAM FRITH EXHIBITION**

The Mercer Art Gallery, Harrogate, is staging ‘William Powell Frith: The People’s Painter’ from 15 June to 29 September 2019 to mark the bicentenary of his birth. Frith (1819-1909) was a popular Victorian narrative painter, best known for *Derby Day* and *Ramsgate Sands*. He was a long-standing friend of Wilkie and a fellow student of Charles Collins. He participated in amateur theatricals, including Collins's 1849 production of Goldsmith's *Good Natur'd Man* which inspired the painting *Mr Honeywood Introduces the Bailiffs*. Frith was also a regular visitor to Dickens and attended *The Frozen Deep* at Tavistock House in 1857. Collins travelled to Italy with Frith and his family in 1875.

Frith records in *My Autobiography and Reminiscences* (1888, Vol. II, p. 333)

When I speak of Wilkie Collins, whom I have known all his life, I shall meet with no contradiction when I say he is one of the most popular novelists of the present day. There again you have a man who is as delightful in private as he is in public. That he is an admirable *raconteur* goes with out saying; of an imperturbably good temper, as he proved on one occasion at my own table, when a rude guest – of whom I was heartily ashamed – after declaring that popularity was no proof of merit, said to Collins by way of example “Why your novels are read in every back-kitchen in England.” This Collins heard without a sign of irritation.

Further information about the exhibition can be had at [www.harrogate.gov.uk/info/20152/mercer\\_art\\_gallery/1203/william\\_powell\\_frith\\_the\\_peoples\\_painter](http://www.harrogate.gov.uk/info/20152/mercer_art_gallery/1203/william_powell_frith_the_peoples_painter).

## **ALLIANCE OF LITERARY SOCIETIES**

The annual meeting of the Alliance of Literary Societies was held over the weekend of Friday 17 to Sunday 19 May in Nuneaton. It was hosted by the George Eliot Fellowship which presented a full programme of interesting talks

on the Saturday. Next year's meeting will be organised by the Walmsley Society in Robin Hood's Bay from 12 to 14 June. The location is in north Yorkshire about five miles south of Whitby where Collins stayed with Caroline Graves in August 1861. His intention there was to research *No Name* but he was so disturbed by the noise of a local brass band that he gave up and returned early to London via Aldeburgh.

### ***THE WOMAN IN WHITE* – SILENT FILM VERSIONS**

There were several silent film versions of *The Woman in White*. The version from July 1917 in the Thanouser Collection, also called *The Unfortunate Marriage*, was described in detail in the WCS Newsletter for Summer 2014 (you can still search for this on the WCS website). More recently a slightly later film version called *The Twin Pawns* has become available as Volume 132 in the 'Silent Gems Collection'. It dates from 1919 and although the storyline is attributed to Collins, the plot is several steps removed from his original.

Separated since birth, twins Violet and Daisy White are unaware of each other's existence. Violet, the idol of her indulgent father Harry has everything her heart could desire while Daisy, reared by her indigent mother, is poorly clad and underfed. This fragile child of the slums is not aware that John Bent possesses certain papers which confirm her true relation to Harry White. By hiding from Daisy's father, the truth of her existence, Bent is able to manipulate the twins to his own best advantage; they become his pawns. After hiding Daisy away in school, he substitutes her for Violet, whom he has forced into marriage, when the latter dies. Then he disposes of Daisy by declaring her insane and placing her in an asylum. It appears that Bent will win the game until Bob Anderson, who is in love with Daisy, comes to her rescue and checkmates the black knight.

The film features Mae Murray in the double role together with Warner Oland and Henry G. Sell in a production by Leonce Perret Pictures, produced by the Acme Pictures Corporation. The film currently appears to be distributed through Amazon but you can find it on YouTube – with Dutch titles, however – at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=D3tsJ-wPTpg>.

### **MORE ON SCREEN ADAPTATIONS**

Victorian scholar Ellen Moody has written a long piece in her blog about the difficulties of adapting Wilkie's works, *The Woman in White* and *The Moonstone*,

for the screen. She watched five adaptations altogether of varying lengths and age and concludes

Collins's two best-known novels are just not adaptable because their fascination and depths comes from the highly complicated ironically juxtaposed subjective and nuanced narratives... [That] he is astonishingly contemporary in a lot of his perceptions... And lastly that at their core is a radical attack on sexuality as usually perceived and controlled, and violations of privacy, security, and any calm."

It is rather a long read but certainly well worth the time. [ellenandjim.wordpress.com/2019/07/07/wilkie-collinss-woman-in-white-the-moonstone-resist-adaptation/](http://ellenandjim.wordpress.com/2019/07/07/wilkie-collinss-woman-in-white-the-moonstone-resist-adaptation/)

### ***DRACULA***

Ellen Moody also notes in that blog:

I'm convinced that Collins's *Woman in White* was a strong influence on Stoker's sensational vampire horror tale: Collins's use of subjective structures, and many of his themes and motifs are taken over.

Another recent essay elaborates on that theme. 'The *Woman in White*'s influence on *Dracula*', written by Tyler Tichelaar can now be found at <https://thegothicwanderer.wordpress.com/2019/06/24/the-woman-in-whites-influence-on-dracula/>.

### **FRANK ARCHER'S DIARY**

The actor Frank Archer (1844-1917), whose real name was Frank Bishop Arnold, played the vicar Julian Gray in the dramatic version of *The New Magdalen* in 1873 and in a revival in 1885. Archer was Wilkie's favourite actor for the part. In 1874 Wilkie even considered withholding permission for an earlier revival because Archer was not available.

I have hesitated – solely on your account, feeling the serious loss to the piece of not including you in the cast. ([1493] to Archer 16 November 1874).

They remained friendly and Wilkie gave Archer a lot of help after he quit acting in 1888 and tried to develop a writing career. Unfortunately for Archer, that was

not a great success but by then he did not need to earn a living as in 1879 he had married the wealthy daughter of the Bedford brewer Thomas Jessop. Archer's diaries and notebooks record several meetings with Wilkie. However, the earliest reference to him was in a diary of 1862 when Archer was aged 17 and working as a warehouseman in a fabric wholesaler near St. Paul's cathedral. He records on 13 August 1862: "Begin "Woman in White" Wilkie Collins". The edition was presumably the one volume edition which had been published in 1861. Sadly, he gives no views or comments on the book.

Another diarist – a young woman who lived in Brereton near Rugeley in Staffordshire – records on 24 October 1860: "Annie read Woman in White aloud to me." Annie is almost certainly her sister. The reading must have been from one of the earlier three-volume editions before the final three-volume New Edition was published in November 1860. The diary has no further references to reading it or having it read to her.

How many more unrecognised mentions of Wilkie's bestseller must there be in diaries of the 1860s?

## **GAME OF SPOILERS**

Wilkie makes a surprise appearance in an essay about spoilers – revealing plot details of television serials before they have been broadcast. It was a big issue for the recent Home Box Office hit *Game of Thrones* and the writer notes it was something Wilkie warned against in the preface to the first edition of *The Woman in White* in 1860.

In the event of this book being reviewed, I venture to ask whether it is possible to praise the writer, or to blame him, without opening the proceedings by telling his story at second-hand...if he tells it at all, in any way whatever, is he doing a service to the reader, by destroying, beforehand, two main elements in the attraction of all stories – the interest of curiosity, and the excitement of surprise? (Preface to *The Woman in White* 1860, p. viii).

The essay then quotes a critic in *The Saturday Review* suggesting a compromise, pleading

[we hope] there is no objection to an occasional hint, a dark allusion ... to this mystery of mysteries, the [plot of] the Woman in White.

The anonymous writer of the essay says what followed was not quite what we'd recognise today as a "spoiler-free" review, but this was new territory for the Victorian reviews and their readers. See <http://theconversation.com/spoilers-making-people-angry-since-victorian-times-116317>.

### **ANOTHER WILKIE COLLINS**

In 1885 our Wilkie Collins heard from a young man called Wilkie Collins Barr whom we think lived in Pennsylvania. Barr had written to Wilkie to say he enjoyed *Armada* and asked for his autograph. Wilkie obliged with his reply:

Two of your names give you a claim to my autograph, which I ought to be the last person living to dispute. But there is another reason for my writing to you. I am especially pleased to hear that you like "Armada" – for, if I may venture to pronounce an opinion, I think "Armada" the best book that I have written.

This letter [3112], dated 27 May 1885, was printed on page 3 of the *New York Times* for 29 June 1885.

### **AND YET ANOTHER COLLINS**

A recent piece in the *Orlando Sentinel* recorded the death of a man called Wilkie Collins Nash II (also known as Buddy) who died on 5 May aged 80. He was born on 15 December 1938 in Indianapolis, Indiana. His father was Russell Collins Nash (1902-1963) and his mother Vivian Nash (née Flannagan). Buddy leaves behind two daughters, Carolyn Harrison and Regina Schodrowski; a sister, Colleen Shook; six grandchildren; and seven great-grandchildren.

Buddy's grandfather was also Wilkie Collins Nash (hence the II in his name). He was born in Indiana on 17 September 1878, served in World War I and died on 25 July 1934. He was listed in the 1920 Federal Census as a coal worker with a wife Daisy. Their son Russell Collins Nash (born 16 August 1902) was Buddy's father. Buddy's memorial service was on Saturday 18 May at 11 am.

### **A COMPLIMENT TO WILKIE IN *THE TIMES***

Back in June, there was a piece in *The Times* about Victorian male novelists. This prompted a reply from *Times* reader Dave Lees, "Camilla Long (Comment, last

week) invites us to name “a significant Victorian novelist who isn’t a raging misogynist”. The obvious answer is Wilkie Collins, who wrote many stories exposing the injustices perpetrated on Victorian womanhood.”

Three major examples which immediately come to mind are *The Woman in White* where Anne Catherick and Laura Fairlie run foul of Sir Percival Glyde; *No Name* where Magdalen and Norah Vanstone are disinherited by their wicked uncle Michael; and *Man and Wife* where Anne Silvester suffers at the hands of the villainous Geoffrey Delamayn and where Hester Detheridge reveals the helplessness of working-class married women. William Frith also described a wife, ill-treated at the hands of her drunken husband, who could well have been the model for Hester Detheridge. *Man and Wife* attacks both Irish and Scottish marriage laws as well as arguing the case for a Married Woman’s Property Act, finally passed in 1882, twelve years after the book was published.

### **HARPER’S EDITIONS**

Starting with *Antonina* in 1850, Harper Brothers became Collins’s official publishers in the USA and issued his works in various editions the most complete of which consisted of seventeen titles in their *Illustrated Library Edition*. This was published from 1873 to coincide with his reading tour to North America. The edition contains a facsimile inscription in Collins’s handwriting, “I gratefully dedicate this collected edition of my works, to the American People.” The signature sometimes confuses (probably amateur) booksellers into believing they have a signed copy and advertise it with an astronomical price. Harpers continued to issue titles in the same style complete with illustrations up to 1902 by which time they had become the *Moonstone Edition*. It appears, however, that *The Moonstone*, described on the dust jacket as “The most famous mystery story of all time”, survived beyond this date since a copy has been seen described with the same illustrated format in the *Sun Dial Library*. This series was issued by Garden City Publishing from 1929 with *The Moonstone* dated 1937. (<https://seriesofseries.owu.edu/sun-dial-library/>).

### **‘THE DUEL IN HERNE WOOD’ AND *THE SPIRIT OF THE TIMES***

‘The Duel in Herne Wood’ is one of several stories specially written between 1876 and 1887 for the Christmas issues of the New York newspaper *The Spirit of*

*the Times*. Most were republished in a variety of English and US magazines and were eventually included in *Little Novels* (1887) but with different titles. In the case of ‘The Duel in Herne Wood’, it was renamed ‘Miss Bertha and the Yankee’. The story in its original incarnation in *The Spirit of the Times* for December 1877 can now be seen online at <https://digital.library.villanova.edu/Item/vudl:570595>. Currently for sale online at ABE Books at a not so modest \$1,500 is Collins’s later story, ‘The Girl at the Gate’ first published in December 1884 and republished as ‘Mr. Lepel and the Housekeeper’ in *Little Novels*.

At the same time, Collins specifically recorded that three stories from *The Spirit of the Times*, ‘Fie. Fie! Or the Fair Physician’, ‘Love’s Random Shot’ and ‘The Devil’s Spectacles’ “have served their purpose in periodicals, but are not worthy of republication in book form. They were written in a hurry, and the sooner they are drowned in the waters of oblivion the better. I desire that they should not be republished after my death.” They can, however, be found in Julian Thompson’s 1995 *Wilkie Collins. The Complete Shorter Fiction*.

## **THE LADY DETECTIVES**

Various Collins stories have been dramatized and broadcast on Radio 4 extra, mainly his major works, *The Woman in White*, *The Moonstone* and *No Name*, as well as the occasional short story such as ‘A Terribly Strange Bed’ and ‘Who Killed Zebedee?’ We can now add to the list *The Law and the Lady* in which Valeria Woodville attempts to prove the innocence of her husband, Eustace, tainted with the Scottish Not Proven verdict for killing his first wife. The novel was dramatised by Roger Danes, featuring Abigail Docherty and Richard Conlon. It was originally broadcast in 2005 and more recently in 2018 on Radio 4 extra.

It is now available on CD (mainly distributed through Amazon at about £15) together with three other dramatisations as *The Lady Detectives*. The other stories are *The Redhill Sisterhood* by Catherine Pirkis in which Victorian sleuth Loveday Brooke investigates some nuns who seem to be forsaking their vows for burglary; *Mr Bovey’s Unexpected Will* by L. Meade where Victorian detective Florence Cusack investigates a man whose fate depends on his weight in gold; and *The Golden Slipper* by Anna Katherine Green in which New York socialite-cum-detective Violet Strange probes four rich women suspected of multiple thefts.



Anna Katherine Green (1846-1935) is best known for *The Leavenworth Case* (1878). Collins wrote to her publisher, George Putnam, in 1883:

Have I read “The Leavenworth Case”? I have read it through at one sitting. Need I say after that what I think of it? Yes – because I have a word to add about Miss Green’s future work. Her powers of invention are so remarkable – she has so much imagination and so much belief (a most important qualification for our art) in what she writes, that I have nothing to report of myself, so far, but most sincere admiration.

Nevertheless – for a personal but completely biased opinion - she’s not a patch on Wilkie!

## **A MISCELLANY OF BOOKS**

### **SHERLOCK HOLMES AND *THE MOONSTONE***

Another recently discovered candidate for Wilkie’s PPI (Parodies, Plagiarism and Imitation - see the WCS Newsletter for Winter 2018) is *The Further Adventures of Sherlock Holmes – The Moonstone’s Curse* by Sam Siciliano, one of a series of books using the great detective as a character. We do, however, meet Mr Murthwaite and an Indian, as well as Dr Watson and Inspector Lestrade. Quoting the blurb,

The aristocratic Charles Bromley arrives at 221B Baker Street to beg Sherlock Holmes for his help. Bromley believes that his wife is in danger, as she has refused an offer to sell the Moonstone, a fabulous diamond that has been in her family for generations but which is said to be cursed. When a jeweller is found murdered, it seems as if the Moonstone deserves its reputation. Then the diamond is stolen, and Holmes must try to unravel a mystery centuries in the making.

The novel is published by Titan Books at £7.99, paperback, (ISBN 9781785652523).

### **A MARY BRADDON COMPANION**

WCS members fond of sensation novels may like *Mary Elizabeth Braddon: A Companion to the Mystery Fiction* by former WCS Journal editor Ann-Marie Beller. Quoting from the cover introduction:

Mary Elizabeth Braddon (1835-1915) was an important figure in the development of crime fiction. She wrote more than 80 novels, numerous plays, poems, essays and short stories, and edited two magazines during her 55-year literary career. Her bestselling *Lady Audley's Secret* secured her reputation as a leading "sensation novelist." Though critics called her work immoral, Braddon's novels influenced the detective fiction of the late Victorian period. With entries on all her published writing, characters, relationships and influences, and themes and contexts, as well as numerous illustrations, a career chronology, and a chronological and alphabetical listing of all of her works, this companion to Braddon's mystery fiction is the definitive reference on this provocative but overlooked writer.

Braddon emulated Collins, not only in using substituted identity, but also setting criminal activities in everyday surroundings. In 1887 she acknowledged that she owed *Lady Audley's Secret* to *The Woman in White* and that "Wilkie Collins is assuredly my literary father." Collins also became a personal friend. In *Rough Justice* (1898) she introduced Detective Faunce whose novel-reading includes both Wilkie Collins and Charles Dickens.

The *Companion* is arranged alphabetically with several references to Collins together with his own separate entry plus one for *The Woman in White*. It is published by McFarland and is available through Amazon at £36.95, paperback, (ISBN 978-0786436675).

### ***SECRET RAMSGATE***

*Secret Ramsgate* by Andy Bull with 100 illustrations has just been published by Amberley Publishing at £13.49 (ISBN 9781445692555). There is also a Kindle edition at £12. The author reveals the hidden history of Ramsgate, from the landing of Roman invasion forces and St Augustine's mission, Thomas Becket's links with nearby Sandwich, the famous writers who lived in or who visited the town - including of course Wilkie Collins - and tales of remarkable characters, unusual events and buildings lost or hidden.

Wilkie regularly stayed in Ramsgate with Caroline Graves from the 1870s. When his morganatic family was old enough, he became Mr Dawson and was joined by Martha Rudd and his three children. The resort became the setting for scenes in *The Law and the Lady*, *Poor Miss Finch* and *The Fallen Leaves*.

### ***COLLABORATIVE DICKENS***

Also published in 2019 is *Collaborative Dickens. Authorship and Victorian Christmas Periodicals* by Melisa Klimaszewski. It is issued by Ohio University Press (Athens) in its 'Victorian Studies' series, hardback at £66 (ISBN13 9780821423653). The publisher introduces the text with:

From 1850 to 1867, Charles Dickens produced special issues (numbers) of his journals *Household Words* and *All the Year Round*, which were released shortly before Christmas each year. In *Collaborative Dickens*, Melisa Klimaszewski undertakes the first comprehensive study of these Christmas numbers. She argues for a revised understanding of Dickens as an editor who, rather than ceaselessly bullying his contributors, sometimes accommodated contrary views and depended upon multivocal narratives for his own success. Klimaszewski uncovers connections among and between the stories in each Christmas collection. She thus reveals ongoing conversations between the works of Dickens and his collaborators on topics important to the Victorians, including race, empire, supernatural hauntings, marriage, disability, and criminality. Stories from Wilkie Collins, Elizabeth Gaskell, and women writers such as Amelia B. Edwards and Adelaide Anne Procter interact provocatively with Dickens's writing.

Melisa Klimaszewski is also the author of the useful little *Wilkie Collins* in the 'Brief Lives' series from Hesperus Press, published in 2011.

### ***CHEMICAL CRIMES***

Published by Ohio State University Press (Columbus) is *Chemical Crimes: Science and Poison in Victorian Crime Fiction* by Cheryl Blake Price, hardback at £63.95. (ISBN 9780814213919).

[The book] delves into the dark world of Victorian criminality to examine how poison allowed authors to disrupt gender boundaries, genre, and the professionalization of science. ... From the Newgate and Silver Fork novels of the 1830s to the emergent genres of science and detective fiction of the 1890s, Price advocates for the classification of a new type of poisoner, one who combined crime with methodical scientific know-how: the chemical criminal.

Collins, of course, is mentioned and we have no further to look than *Jezebel's Daughter* where the villainous Madame Fontaine does her best to poison Mrs Wagner with the aid of her late husband's box of lethal chemicals.

## LARGE PRINT EDITIONS

There are now several Collins titles advertised as large print editions. The Large Print Bookshop lists six titles in Tiers 16pt: *The Evil Genius*, *The Two Destinies*, *The Law and the Lady*, *The Moonstone*, *The Dead Alive*, and *The Haunted Hotel*. Details are online at [www.largeprintbookshop.co.uk/index.php](http://www.largeprintbookshop.co.uk/index.php).

Amazon also lists similar editions, sixteen in all, but do not state the size or font. The other approach is to use a Kindle (other reading devices are available) where all Collins titles are available to download free of charge from Amazon's Classics and where the font size can be easily adjusted while reading.

## WILKIE'S MEMOIRS OF WILLIAM COLLINS

Adrian Harrington Rare Books currently has in its half price summer sale a first edition copy of Wilkie's first published book, a biography of his father, *Memoirs of the Life of William Collins Esq., R.A. With Selections from his Journals and Correspondence* at what appears to be the quite sensible price of £125 – decent copies usually appear at prices between £500 and £1,000. Search under 'authors' at <https://www.harringtonbooks.co.uk/> for a photograph and description.

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As a final thought after such a miscellany of books, if you want to know what Wilkie himself read, consult Professor Baker's 2002 *Wilkie Collins's Library. A Reconstruction* where you will find everything from Aldeburgh - an 1861 guide – to William Winter - the theatre critic. (Greenwood Press, Connecticut).

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