THE WILKIE COLLINS SOCIETY

PATRON **Faith Clarke**
Chairman **Andrew Gasson, 21 Huson Close, London NW3 3JW**
Membership **Paul Lewis, 4 Ernest Gardens, Chiswick, London W4 3QU**

NEWSLETTER SPRING 2022

MUTUALLY ASSURED DESTRUCTION

In these troubled times, we might recall that Wilkie was at the forefront if not the creator of the concept of Mutually Assured Destruction. Writing at the time of the Franco-Prussian war on 7 August 1870, he wrote in a letter to his German translator, Emil Lehmann

I am, like the rest of my countrymen, heartily on the German side in the War. But what is to be said of the progress of humanity? Here are the nations still ready to slaughter each other, at the command of one miserable wretch whose interest it is to set them fighting! Is this the nineteenth century? or the ninth? Are we before the time of Christ or after? I begin to believe in only one civilising influence – the discovery one of these days, of a destructive agent so terrible that War shall mean annihilation, and men's fears shall force them to keep the peace.

Collins returned to the notion in his fiction on two occasions. In *Jezebel's Daughter* (1880), describing the mysterious Hungarian:

He not only believes in The Philosopher's Stone; he says he is on the trace of some explosive compound so terrifically destructive in its effect, that it will make war impossible.

The theme then recurs in *Heart and Science* (1883) where referring to the evil Dr Benjulia he writes:

One report says that he is trying to find a way of turning common metals into gold. Another declares that he is inventing some explosive compound, so horribly destructive that it will put an end to war.'

So here we are, 150 years on and more than 75 years after we have had such a weapon and sadly recent events show that wars still continue!

COLLINS'S FIRST SHORT STORIES

'Volpurno' ('A Maniac Bridegroom') (1843)

'Volpurno' is Collins's first identified short story, discovered in 2008 by Daniel Hack of the University of Michigan. It was originally published in New York on 8 July 1843 in *The Albion, or British, Colonial, and Foreign Weekly* and in the same month in two other broadsheets - in Philadelphia in the *Pennsylvania Inquirer and National Gazette* on 20 July and again in New York in *The New Mirror of Literature, Amusement, and Instruction* on 29 July. Later that year it was republished using the entirely different title of 'A Maniac Bridegroom' in *The Evansville Journal* on 2 November 1843 and on 25 December 1843 in *The Rover, a Weekly Magazine of Tales, Poetry, and Engravings.*

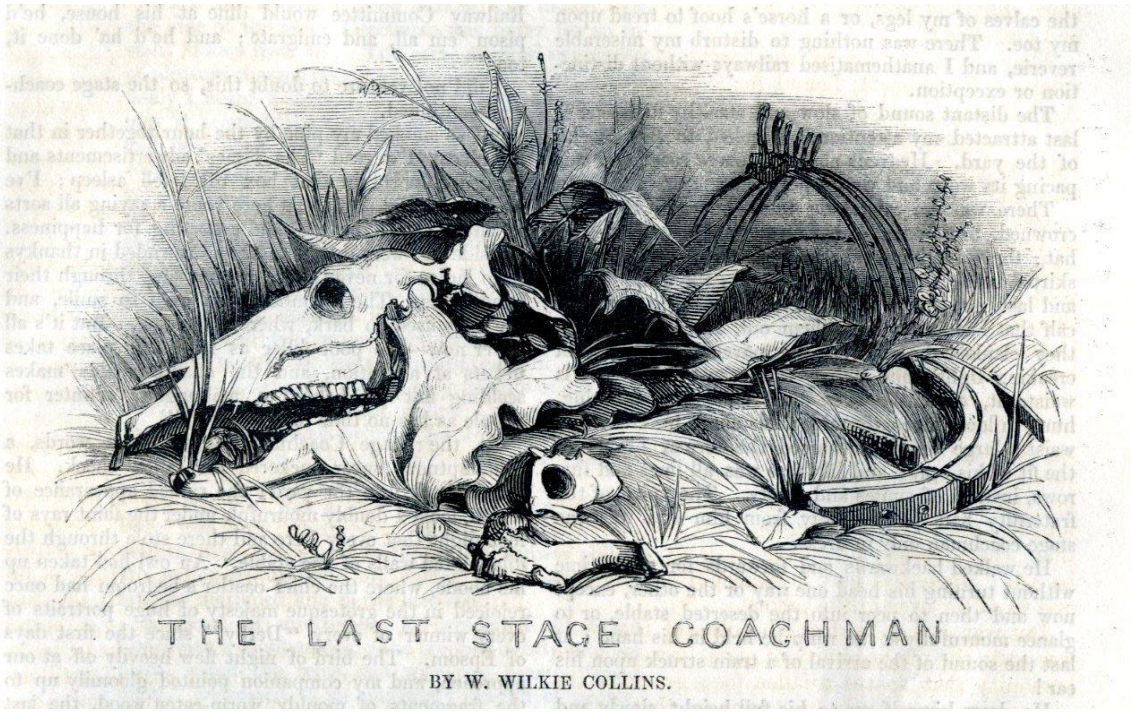
Using the wonderful modern resources of so many newspapers available online, it is now possible to add two more US newspapers to the above, both using the title 'A Maniac Bridegroom': *The Lexington Union* (from Mississippi) for 11 November 1843 and *The York Gazette* (from Pennsylvania) for 19 December.

The story was issued in 2009 as a separate publication by the Wilkie Collins Society but no record has been found for English publication around the time of the 1843 US newspapers. It can be found online at http://www.wilkie-collins.info/volpurno.htm.

'The Last Stage Coachman' (1843)

The 'Last Stage Coachman' was long considered Collins's first identified publication until the discovery of 'Volpurno'. A Brief fantasy story lamenting the passing of the stage coach, displaced by the arrival of the railway. It was first included in volume I of Douglas Jerrold's *Illuminated Magazine* for August

1843 and this had been considered its only publication. Some further investigation now shows it was issued in several other British Newspapers in 1843, either in full or as an excerpt.


THE LAST STAGE COACHMAN

BY W. WILKIE COLLINS.

The Hampshire Advertiser & Salisbury Guardian, 5 August (excerpt); *Woolmer's Exeter and Plymouth Gazette*,12 August (in full); *Manchester Times and Manchester and Salford Advertiser*, 12 August (excerpt); *Gloucestershire Chronicle*, 12 August (short excerpt); *Bristol Mercury and Daily Post*, 19 August (excerpt); *Lloyd's Weekly London Newspaper*, 20 August (in full); *Coventry Herald and Observer*, 1 September (excerpt); and the *Coventry Standard*, 1 September (short excerpt).

An excerpt also appeared in *The Royal Cornwall Gazette, Falmouth Packet, and General Advertiser* on 11 January 1850. Another 'Last Stage Coachman' – not by Collins - was published in *Tait's Magazine*, No. 144 for September 1852.

'The Last Stage Coachman' was republished by the Wilkie Collins Society in November 1990.

COLLINS'S COPYRIGHTS AND *THE EVIL GENIUS*

Collins was always seeking to protect his copyrights, mainly from American pirate book publishers but also from unauthorised English dramatists. *The Evil Genius* illustrates the methods he was obliged to follow in order to protect his copyright for both his dramas and his books.

The Evil Genius was written as a play at the same time as the novel. It was produced at the Vaudeville Theatre on the afternoon of Friday 30 October 1885, described as "a new and original drama, in Five Acts." This was the sole public performance designed to secure Collins's dramatic copyright. The cast included Marian Carr as Catherine Linley, Mrs Hendrie as Sydney Westerfield, Mr Morris as Herbert Linley and John Phipps as Captain Bennydeck. The full cast and contemporary background is given in *The Era* of 31 October 1885:

> Frequenters of theatrical London passing along the Strand on Friday afternoon might have discovered an unusual announcement affixed to the doors of the Vaudeville Theatre, making public the fact that there would be produced for the first time a new drama by Mr Wilkie Collins, entitled *The Evil Genius*. To those accustomed to production simply made for the purpose of securing dramatic copyright the announcement, though quite unexpected, would not occasion surprise, seeing that these performances are of necessity prepared in secret, and that they are launched upon the public as suddenly as is possible in order that no advantage may be taken by the unscrupulous … It may appear strange that an author should perforce have to adopt such tactics to protect his own property, and it is also hard upon him, in many ways, that this state of things should exist. Still, as things are they must be accepted until some radical and much-needed changes are made in our laws of copyright..…. we found a small proportion of the small audience assembled, and witnessed the first publication of Mr Collins's new drama.

Equivalent methods were employed to protect Collins's book copyrights. In the case of *The Evil Genius*, the first English book edition of the novel was published in three volumes in September 1886. This, however, was preceded by an undated 24-page pamphlet of what Collins called a 'bogus story', consisting of the Prologue to the main story. It was issued in an edition of just twelve copies by Tillotson, who was serialising the novel in his syndicated newspapers. The title was entered at Stationer's Hall and the sale of a copy would have protected Collins's copyright. A similar procedure was adopted for *The Guilty River* (1886) and *The Legacy of Cain* (1889).

A facsimile edition of the 'Bogus' *The Evil Genius* is published by the British Library *Historical Print Editions*.

WHERE WAS THE COLLINS'S HOUSE IN VIA FELICE?

Long standing WCS member Angela Richardson has been researching and annotating Harriet Collins's manuscript Italian Journal now held at the Victoria & Albert Museum. Here we have her conclusions on where the Collins family stayed in Rome during the 1830s.

The Collins family lived for five months in Rome in apartments on the Via Felice from 7 January to 2 May 1837 as part of William Collins's European art tour.

Wilkie, was 13 years old when he was first in Rome in 1837. He revisited it in 1853 and wrote of his feelings to his brother:

> Here I am actually in Rome again after an interval of no less than sixteen years…. nothing has astonished me more than my own vivid remembrance of every street and building in this wonderful and mournful place…. Not the least changeless object in Rome was our old house in the Via Felice. The Virgin is still in her niche – the cabbage stalks and rubbish are strewn about underneath – the very door looks as if it had never been painted since we left it.
> ([0159] WC to Charles Collins, 13 November 1853)

The first place to look for Via Felice is in the 'Ghetto Inglese' - an area where the 19th century English artists and tourists stayed in Rome. It was believed to be a healthy place as it was less crowded and from there the Pincian Hill, with its parklands, could easily be reached. The 'ghetto' was centred around the Piazza di Spagna and the Spanish Steps where would-be artist models sought employment. William Collins wrote to Sir David Wilkie identifying Via Felice as "not five minutes walk" from the Trinita del Monte, the church at the top of those steps. The road at the back of the Trinita is Via Sistina which runs down the Quirinal Hill to the Via delle Quattro Fontane and at a cross roads, Via Felice in on the right-hand side and Via Pia on the left. The fountains of the Via Della Quattro Fontane are built into corner buildings of the crossroads.

Although, in 1853, Wilkie described Rome to his brother as 'changeless', he was, only eight years later, using his contemporary knowledge of a change in Italian politics in *The Woman in White*. The plot turns on the past lives of two

Italian characters – Professor Pesca and Count Fosco. The former, a 'sleeper' in London for a secret revolutionary society and the latter, a renegade spy. In the 1860s when Wilkie was writing this novel, the Italian *risorgimento* – the movement for reunifying the country – was in its early stages and one of its leaders, Guiseppe Mazzoni, was on his third bout of exile in London.

The final achievement of the unification of Italy in 1870 led to the changing of many street names, one of which was Via Felice. Its opposite road at the crossroads was given the exact date of unification: Via Venti Settembre. Via Felice took on the name of Via del Quirinale, because of the Pallazo della Quirinale which had been dominating Via Felice since the 16th century.

It is odd that none of the Collins family referred to this landmark, which took up a quarter of the length of the road. The number, or name, of their apartments is still not known. Perhaps they lived at the other end of the street, closer to the Spanish Steps. There is no Madonna in a niche visible on modern day Via del Quirinale and certainly no cabbage stalks but there are some gated courtyards where perhaps the Roman apartments rented by the Collins family still exist.

THE MOONSTONE AND RECOVERED MEMORIES

Mentioned in general terms in the Preface to *The Moonstone*, Collins uses a case history on p. 646 of John Elliotson's *Human Physiology* (1840) as his inspiration for the attempt to find the missing diamond by administering a second dose of opium to Franklin Blake. Elliotson – described by Ezra Jennings towards the end of the *Third Narrative* in *The Moonstone* as "one of the greatest of English physiologists" – narrates the recovery of a missing parcel.

> An Irish porter to a warehouse, who forgot, when sober, what he had done when drunk; but, being drunk, again recollected the transactions of his former state of intoxication. On one occasion, being drunk, he had lost a parcel of some value, and in his sober moments could give no account of it. Next time he was intoxicated, he recollected that he had left the parcel at a certain house, and there being no address on it, had remained there safely, and was got on his calling for it.

The Moonstone is fiction imitating real life but real life imitates fiction according to the headline in the New York *Buffalo Evening News* of 15

September 1904: “The Plot of Wilkie Collins’ “Moonstone” Duplicated in real Life.”

It is improbable “that Franklin Blake could have stolen the diamond while under the influence of laudanum and then have repeated the theft a year later while again under the influence of the same drug…. Now an actual occurrence goes to prove that the laudanum incident introduced by Collins into his famous story was not a wild flight of the novelist’s imagination.

A painter fell from a scaffold and was seriously injured. He was placed under an anaesthetic and operated upon. In his unconsciousness he babbled about continually of a fortune of $100,000 which awaited him in England. When the man regained consciousness and the surgeons joked him of the supposed wild dreams which the anaesthetic had caused, the man’s brain completely cleared from the shadow which had long hung over it and proved that the fortune did actually await him. Subsequent developments show the man’s story to be substantially true.

Similar instances of fiction imitating real life and real life imitating fiction are explored in ‘*Poor Miss Finch* and Some Literary Coincidences’ accompanying this Newsletter.

A RECORD LETTER

A newly found and charming letter from Wilkie Collins came on the market at a recent auction in Chicago. Showing some signs of having been stuck in an album the auctioneer at Potter & Potter could give no further clues about its provenance.

Dated 12 January 1881 the three-page letter, written on the green-blue paper Wilkie used at the time, was to Jane Ward. Often said to be Wilkie’s favourite niece, Jane was the daughter of his mother’s sister, Margaret Carpenter, the highly successful Victorian artist. Jane was married to Charles Ward, Wilkie’s lifelong friend who worked at Coutts and acted as his banker.

In barely one hundred words he responds affectionately to her gift of flowers for his 57th birthday four days earlier.

12th January 1881

My dear Jane,

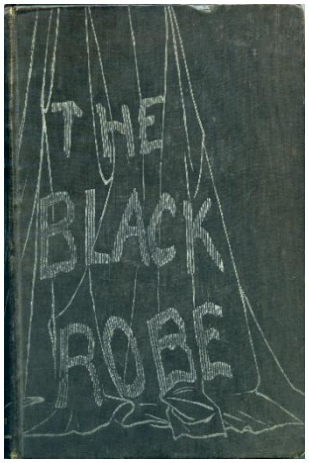
Four days since I ought to have thanked you for that charming token of remembrance and kindness. My only excuse is that I am smothered in the folds of "The Black Robe". In plain English, I am so hard at work on the concluding chapters of a new story, that I am not even fit to write a letter when the day's task is done. This is only an apology for a letter – but I delight in the lovely flowers – and I most sincerely thank you.

My love to all at home.

Yours affecly | Wilkie Collins

Mrs Charles Ward

Even in casual correspondence Wilkie created memorable phrases – 'I am smothered in the folds of "The Black Robe"'. The story was being published in parts in several syndicated newspapers and in April 1881 Chatto & Windus published it as a three-volume novel. The binding, incidentally, shows the folds of a Black Robe and is possibly the first use on cloth of a reliable 'silver' pigment in the form of aluminium.



Collins's reference to 'all at home' includes the four grown up children of Jane and Charles who were still living with them. They had eleven children altogether. Charles died two years later.

The letter fetched what is thought to be a record price of $6,600, around £5,000 - a rate of £50 per word! It will be one of several newly identified letters in the 14th Addenda to his letters which the Society plans to publish towards the end of the year.

WHISTLER EXHIBITION

The Royal Academy in London has put together a unique collection of James Whistler's paintings and drawings of women dressed in white. The centrepiece is his *Symphony in White, No. 1: The White Girl* (1862), a painting of Whistler's Irish lover, the red-haired Joanna Hiffernan, dressed entirely in white. Inevitably it was widely referred to as 'The Woman in White' when it was exhibited in the Berners Street Gallery in 1862 after being rejected by the Royal Academy. Wilkie's novel had been published a couple of years earlier and was still selling thousands of copies in its one volume edition.

Whistler denied the connection with Wilkie's *The Woman in White*. In a letter to the editor of *The Athenaeum*, William Dixon, he wrote

May I beg to correct an erroneous impression likely to be confirmed by a paragraph in your last number? The Proprietors of the Berners Street Gallery have, without my sanction, called my picture "The Woman in White." I had no intention whatsoever of illustrating Mr. Wilkie Collins's novel; it so happens, indeed, that I have never read it. My painting simply represents a girl dressed in white standing in front of a white curtain. (*The Athenæum* 5 July 1862 p.23).

But Frederick Buckstone, the secretary of the Berners Street Gallery where it was displayed, claimed in *The Athenaeum* two weeks later:

Mr. Whistler was well aware of his picture being advertised as 'The Woman in White,' and was pleased with the name. (*The Athenæum* 19 July 1862 p.86).

There is no mention of Whistler or the painting in Wilkie's known letters. Whatever the truth of the controversy, this exhibition is a must-see for all Wilkie Collins enthusiasts. It contains many other paintings by Whistler and is an exploration of Whistler and white. Curated by Ann Dumas and Margaret MacDonald, it closes on 22 May. Tickets £17 (RA members free but must book). Another account of the exhibition is at https://thecritic.co.uk/sensation-painting.

More information and a video tour at royalacademy.org.uk. The RA magazine (Spring 2022) contains two essays about the painting.

WHAT WE OWE TO WILKIE

Part of Whistler's painting is used to illustrate a 2018 article by Radha Vastal published at crimereads.com. 'What we owe to Wilkie Collins's *The Woman in White'* is an essay on the 19th century origins of the modern psychological thriller. It is a comprehensive and well written account of how the book has influenced writers at the time and up to the present day. Read more at crimereads.com: search 'Wilkie Collins', which also finds three other essays about his work.

JUPITER AND HIS SATELLITES

A high-resolution image of a little-known engraving of Wilkie, Dickens and other contributors to *All The Year Round* can be found on the website of the Yale Centre of British Art – search 'Wilkie Collins'.

WCS member Professor Graham Law identified it as originally published in the *Queen*, Vol. 1, 16 (21 December 1861), pp. 313-315.

'Tom Tiddler's Ground--The Committee of Concoction: Extraordinary Proceedings in Wellington Street (from our own Reporter). A Humorously attended and highly influential meeting of literary gentlemen was recently held at the office of All the Year Round, to arrange a plan for the Christmas number of that deservedly popular periodical'.

The clock on the left is captioned 'Jupiter and his Satellites'. Wilkie holds up his manuscript entitled 'Something Horrid' and the misspelled label on the picture on the wall top right reads 'Collincs Wilkie or Ye Modern Frankenstein'. The boy, identified only as F.C., is bringing in two bottles – not of wine but of ink. The five men in the image left to right are identified as George Augustus Sala, Wilkie Collins, Charles Dickens, William Moy Thomas, and John Hollingshead. Of these only Thomas was not a contributor to ATYR (Oppenlander (1984) and Parrott (forthcoming)) though he had contributed many articles to *Household Words* (Lohrli (1973)). The print supposes they are 'concocting' the Christmas number of *All The Year Round* which that year was *Tom Tiddler's Ground*. The authors of that work were later revealed to be – apart from Dickens and Collins – Wilkie's brother Charles, Amelia Edwards, and John Harwood. It was Wilkie's last Christmas number until he wrote *No Thoroughfare* with Charles Dickens, six years later in 1867.

The image is referred to by Lillian Nayder in *Unequal Partners – Charles Dickens, Wilkie Collins, & Victorian Authorship*, Cornell UP, 2002, p.130 and frontispiece.

A search on the website of the Yale Centre for British Art reveals that it also holds several works by Wilkie's father, William Collins, which include *May Day* (1812) and *Frost Scene* (1827).

ALLIANCE OF LITERARY SOCIETIES

The ALS will be holding its AGM this year at the Hull History Centre from Friday 20 to 22 May 2022. The weekend will be hosted by the Philip Larkin Society, celebrating the 100th anniversary of his birth. It will include a range of talks about his life and works, including his time at the University of Hull. As always there will be plenty of opportunities to meet and socialise with friends from other societies. Full details can be obtained from the Alliance website https://allianceofliterarysocieties.files.wordpress.com/2022/02/als-agm-2022.pdf.

ALPHA FEMALE

One of the strangest uses of an extract from *The Woman in White* was published recently by an investment firm called Seeking Alpha in an analysis of a Boston

firm called Toast, which provides cloud-based technology for the restaurant industry. Its shares had not lived up to expectations after a stock market launch. After a summary of the firm, the article on its website includes this quote:

My hour for tea is half-past five, and my buttered toast waits for nobody."— Wilkie Collins, The Woman in White.

They are the concluding words of Mrs. Catherick's narrative

On this account no names are mentioned here, nor is any signature attached to these lines: the handwriting is disguised throughout, and I mean to deliver the letter myself, under circumstances which will prevent all fear of its being traced to my house. You can have no possible cause to complain of these precautions, seeing that they do not affect the information I here communicate, in consideration of the special indulgence which you have deserved at my hands. My hour for tea is half-past five, and my buttered toast waits for nobody.

It is a strange choice to illustrate an article about a firm called Toast. Perhaps Wilkie has a fan at the investment firm?

BAD BOOK COVERS

And still with the lasting attraction of Wilkie's most famous book, long time member Susan Hanes sent this link to some examples of the most inappropriate literary fiction book covers – scroll down to the fourth item https://lithub.com/50-very-bad-book-covers-for-literary-classics/.

Paul Lewis	paul@paullewis.co.uk	www.wilkiecollins.com
Andrew Gasson	apogee@apgee.co.uk	www.wilkie-collins.info