



THE WILKIE COLLINS SOCIETY

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NEWSLETTER

WINTER 2022

WILKIE COLLINS – CENTENARY AND BICENTENARY

WCS members will, of course, be aware that 2024 is the bicentenary of Wilkie's birth on 8 January 1824.

It is unlikely that much recognition took place for his centenary in 1924, although Chatto & Windus at that time were still issuing most of his titles in their *Library Edition*, 35 years after his death. The occasion was, however, marked by two pieces in the leading magazine of the time, *John O'London's Weekly*. The first was written by Rowland Grey with the title 'The Centenary of Wilkie Collins'; it appeared on 12 January 1924 (Vol. X, No. 249, p. 550) but managed to misprint the year of his birth. The second appeared on 23 February (Vol. X, No. 255, p. 744) with the title 'A Master of Mystery' by Sir Charles Biron. These were both short articles but a much longer piece, partly biographical and partly literary criticism, by Paul-Louis Hervier was published in France on 1 June 1924 in the Paris *La Nouvelle Revue* (Vol LXXI, pp. 239-243).

Collins's popularity had somewhat declined by 1924 and not yet influenced by such literary luminaries as T. S. Eliot and Dorothy L. Sayers. Eliot wrote his essay 'Wilkie Collins and Charles Dickens' in the *Times Literary Supplement* for 4 August 1927 and this became the basis for his much-quoted introduction to the 1928 *The Moonstone* in the *World's Classics* "the first and greatest of English detective novels." Sayers had intended to write a biography of Collins for several

years but did not advertise for biographical material in the *TLS* until 21 June 1929. This was never completed but five chapters were eventually published as *Wilkie Collins: a Critical and Biographical Study*, edited by E. R. Gregory, Toledo, Ohio, 1977. Copies turn up fairly regularly on eBay.

We intend to do rather better in 2024 and have already been formulating ideas:

In conjunction with the Dickens Museum, we are holding a joint exhibition which is planned to run from approximately November 2023 till May 2024.

There will be a Symposium related to the exhibition focussing on collaborations between Collins and Dickens organised by Dr Caroline Radcliffe (University of Birmingham), Dr Pete Orford (University of Buckingham) and Dr Joanna Hofer-Robinson (University College Cork) on Saturday 17 February plus a roundtable event on the 16th February discussing the future of Collins/Dickens studies. Both will be held in London and followed by a reception for symposium delegates at the Dickens House Museum on the evening of 17 February.

Caroline is also planning an evening of mesmerism based on accounts by Collins and Dickens with magician, Careena Fenton, date to be confirmed.

The University of Birmingham will be holding an exhibition of their Collins and Dickens items from the Cadbury Research Library collections from January to July 2024 coinciding with the Dickens Society Conference which is being held at Birmingham that year.

We have also been in touch with the British Library and hope that they will devote at least some small part of their exhibition space to Collins.

We will be organising a Wilkie Walk during the summer of 2024 to highlight the main addresses where he, his family and friends lived, along the lines of our earlier 'Rambles around Marylebone' (an idea originally conceived by William Clarke, author of *The Secret Life of Wilkie Collins*).

It is also hoped to run a bicentenary conference, probably during the summer of 2024. This is being organised and co-ordinated by our ever-resourceful *Wilkie Collins Journal* editor, Joanne Parsons, and will likely take place in Falmouth.

Jak Stringer is arranging to perform one of her imaginative Wilkie entertainments probably also in Cornwall.

We are also hoping to arrange a joint meeting in Whitby (where Wilkie stayed in 1862 and began *No Name*).

We would be happy to receive any further suggestions from members. Perhaps you could arrange something locally or arrange to give a talk to a local society. Does anybody have any connection with Royal Mail or the Philatelic Bureau? A true commemoration would be an issue of Wilkie stamps – they do it for lesser individuals – but the Bureau seem impossible to get in touch with.

Please let Andrew Gasson have any thoughts or ideas on any of this.

A REMINDER FOR MEMBERS

Members are reminded that most of the WCS publications are listed or appear in full on the website, wilkiecollinssociety.org. All of the material including the *Journal* can be searched and most downloaded. The latest issue requires a username now updated to **franklin** and password which is now **blake**.

LETTER PRICE RECORD SHATTERED

The £5,000 price record for a Wilkie Collins letter which we reported in the Spring 2022 Newsletter has been almost doubled. A letter from Wilkie to his New York publisher Harper & Bros was sold at Sotheby's in New York on 9 December 2022. The 409 word letter dated 12 November 1867 informed Harpers of the title for his new serial novel *The Moonstone*. He used what appear to be strips cut from the blue outside wrappers of *All the Year Round* and glued to the first page of his headed paper.

Harpers were serialising the novel in *Harper's Weekly* and Wilkie states he will send copy 50 clear days in advance of publication so it can be published simultaneously in London and New York.

The first weekly part of the story will be published in "All The Year Round", on Wednesday January 1st 1868. We shall therefore appear on both sides of the Atlantic on New Year's Day.

The hammer fell at \$10,000 which, with Sotheby's 26% premium, cost the anonymous buyer \$12,600, around £10,300 at current exchange rates. The previous record for the much shorter and less significant letter to his cousin Jane Ward was sold at a hammer price of \$5,500 which, with that auction house's 20% buyer's premium, cost \$6,600 (£4,800 at the time).

Unlike the Ward letter, this one to Harpers was already known from a rather poor photocopy in the Parrish Collection at the Princeton University Library. It had appeared in print before and is included in the Collected Letters.

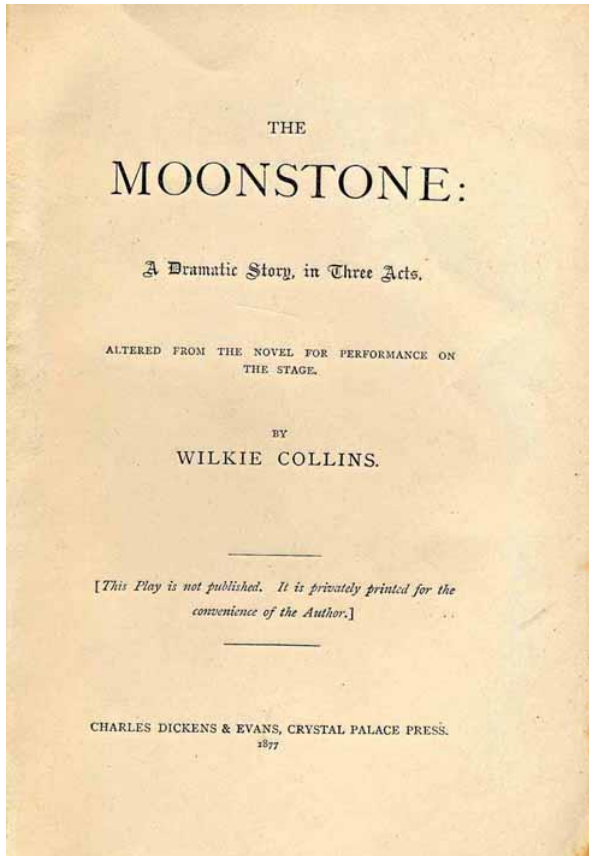
New and very welcome clear images of the letter can be seen on the Sotheby's website as Lot 1028 in the 'Age of Wonder' sale which ended on 9 December.

THE MOONSTONE PLAY – AN ANNOTATED COPY

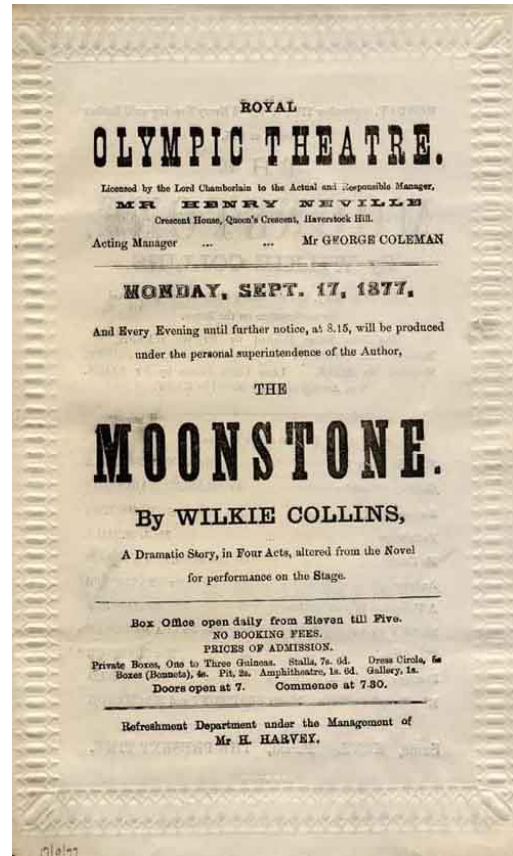
The record-breaking letter, however, was not the star of the auction for Collins scholars. A few lots later (1034) the hammer fell on a unique copy of the privately printed 1877 dramatisation of *The Moonstone* which had been carefully annotated by Collins. Sotheby's confirmed that 60 of the 88 leaves contained his notes and amendments. The text of the book was printed on one side of the paper only and some sections were completely rewritten in Wilkie's hand on the blank versos of the leaves. In one case the changes were so extensive that he inserted a new leaf in the book with both sides covered in his handwriting.

Although the annotations are not dated the changes must have been made for the first production of the play at the Olympic Theatre which ran for 55 performances from 17 September to 17 November 1877. Collins's altered copy converts the three-act printed play into a four-act drama, confirmed by the first amendment on the title page where 'three' is clearly deleted and 'four' inserted.

The play was performed at the Olympic in four acts as clearly stated in the programme and also confirmed by the final paragraph of a contemporary review in *The Times* (21 September 1877, p. 4e): "The scene – all the four acts were laid in one scene, a hall in Miss Verinder's house – was very complete."



Printed version of *The Moonstone* in three acts



Programme for the four-act *Moonstone*

So this item represents the only known extant text of the play as it was actually performed. The hammer went down at \$40,000, the mid-point of the estimate, and cost the anonymous bidder \$50,400 including the 26% buyer's premium - around £42,000. Its whereabouts are now unknown. Previous copies without annotation were offered for sale at \$7500 in July 2015 by bookseller, James Cummins of New York and a rebound copy for £1000 by a London bookseller in 2019.

The play did well at the Olympic, netting Collins £242-7s in seven payments from the theatre manager Henry Neville. In today's terms that is not much more than half as much as the annotated copy fetched in the New York auction.

***THE WOMAN IN WHITE* A NEW DRAMATISATION**

"Are you to break your heart to set his mind at ease? No man under heaven deserves these sacrifices from us women. Men! They are the enemies of our innocence and our peace." (Marion Halcombe). Thus opens the website for the 'Heady Conduct Theatre' production of *The Woman in White* adding

This gripping adaptation of intrigue, love and betrayal is as vibrant and exciting as when it was first written.

This latest adaptation of *The Woman in White* toured amphitheatres in the Cotswolds and St Albans and opened a new venue in the heart of St Ives, Cornwall, before moving indoors at Norwich Playhouse and Stamford Arts Centre, and ending its tour at Brighton Open Air Theatre on September 15. Any member who saw it please contact paul@paullewis.co.uk.

THE WOMAN IN WHITE CAR

Not exactly an adaptation, but the South Korean film *The Woman in White Car* (2022) freely draws on elements in Collins's novel – a pair of sisters, kidnapping, mistaken identities, a woman committed, opportunists out for an inheritance – all approached from a variety of different perspectives. This South Korean take on the story was shown at the 2022 London Film Festival. A Google search will find more, including a You Tube trailer, fortunately with subtitles.

WILKIE COLLINS – THE COMPLETE FICTION

This book by WCS member Professor Stephen Knight of Melbourne University is “the first comprehensive overview of the complete works of Wilkie Collins.” It is part of Routledge's ‘Studies in Nineteenth Century Literature.’ Continuing the publisher's blurb, it examines Collins's

... vast array of novels and short stories, this volume includes analysis of the social, historical, and political commentary Collins offered within his works, illuminating Collins as more than a successful crime and sensation author, or the fortunate recipient of Dicken's grand patronage, but as a hard-thinking and lively-writing part of the rich mid-Victorian literary scene. Overall, Collins is seen as a master of narratives which deal with social and personal issues that were much debated in his fifty-year authorial period. Close attention is paid to the events, themes, and characterization in his fiction, revealing his analytic vigor and the literary power of that period and context. Delivering fresh insight into the variety and richness of Collins' themes and arguments, this volume provides a key source of information and analysis on all Collins' fiction.

Comprehensive the book certainly is. Knight has read everything by Wilkie and, his bibliography shows, every major work about him. Taking an essentially chronological approach Knight looks at the development of Wilkie as a storyteller – moving from short stories to novels and then interspersing novellas and short stories among his longer works. He pulls out six categories to cover all his

fiction from ‘Failed Romance’ to ‘Supernatural Forces’ via ‘Crime and Social Tensions’. Nothing quite like it has ever been done on Wilkie’s fiction and it is a detailed and interesting read.

It might usefully be taken in conjunction with Julian Thompson’s 1995 *Wilkie Collins: The Complete Shorter Fiction* and all the stories are listed in tabular form on a page of Andrew Gasson’s Wilkie Collins website at https://www.wilkie-collins.info/short_stories.htm.

Like so many academic books Knight’s *Complete Fiction* is not cheap at £120 although it can be had for a quarter of this on Kindle. *Wilkie Collins – the Complete Fiction*, Routledge, 2023.

BLACK HERITAGE IN *THE MOONSTONE*

The Moonstone also gets a mention in a history of medical practitioners of black heritage by archivist and diversity ally for the Archives and Records Association, Phillip Milnes-Smith as part of black history month. He writes

Wilkie Collins’ 1868 novel *The Moonstone* offers, in Ezra Jennings, the portrait of a medical man of mixed heritage in Victorian Yorkshire. An unsympathetic servant notes of him, ‘The work all falls on [Jennings]. Not much of it now, except among the poor. THEY can’t help themselves, you know. THEY must put up with the man with the piebald hair, and the gipsy complexion—or they would get no doctoring at all.’

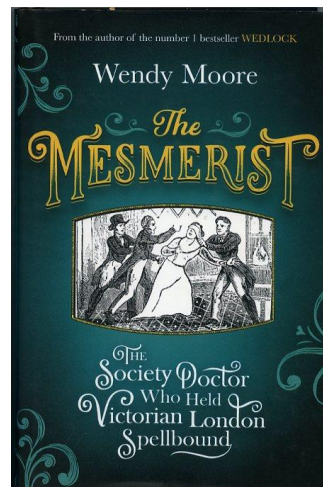
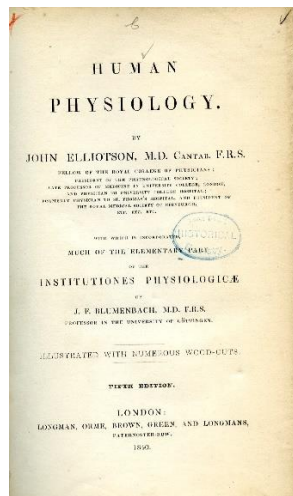
More in <https://practicebusiness.co.uk> search ‘Wilkie Collins’.

JOHN ELLIOTSON

Ezra Jennings from *The Moonstone* was in fact based on the unconventional John Elliotson (1791-1868) who was one of the subjects of ‘Spellbound: James Braid and John Elliotson, Victorian Pioneers of Hypnotism’, a webinar at the Royal Society of Medicine on 10 October. The lectures were given by Dr Michael Gow, a dental practitioner and a modern exponent of hypnotism, and Wendy Moore, the author of *The Mesmerist: The Society Doctor Who Held Victorian London Spellbound*.

Dr James Braid evolved early theories on hypnotism while Elliotson charted the therapeutic effects of hypnosis when it was first introduced in Britain. His discoveries were first acclaimed and then traduced by the medical establishment. He was one of the first surgeons to operate using hypnosis as a form of

anaesthesia but concern among his colleagues about his unconventional practices led to his forced resignation in 1838 from his Chair at the University of London.



Through his connection with Dickens, Collins was well acquainted with Elliotson who in 1863 tried, unsuccessfully, to use hypnotism as a substitute for laudanum to control the pain of his rheumatic gout. He wrote to his doctor Francis Carr Beard on 30 January 1863

Elliotson came here today. I told him this – I said “I am so weak, I have no writing power left in me – give [me] a tonic – I must have strength.” [He] has prescribed simple “Wormwood,” the other medicine to be taken with it, if it agrees with me – to be left off, if it does not. Caroline to Mesmerise my feet, and to Mesmerise me into sleeping so as to do without the opium!

Ezra Jennings in *The Moonstone* calls Elliotson 'one of the greatest of English physiologists' and uses a case history in Elliotson's *Human Physiology* as his inspiration for the attempt to find the missing diamond by administering a second dose of opium to Franklin Blake. With a curious symmetry, Elliotson's death in 1868 coincides with the first publication of *The Moonstone*.

WILKIE IN MARYLEBONE

Recently come across is *Marylebone Lives: Rogues, Romantics and Rebels, Character Studies of Locals since the Eighteenth Century*, published by Spiramus Press at £14.99, originally issued in 2015 and apparently still available. This is a compilation by Mark Riddaway and Carl Upsall of biographical pieces which originally appeared over a 10 year period in *The Marylebone Journal*, a bi-monthly magazine owned by the Howard de Walden Estate. Wilkie, of course, lived in Marylebone for most of his life and in Wimpole Street on the de Walden

Estate during his final years. He may well have encountered many of the entries as his neighbours.

The short piece on Collins originally appeared in the December/January issue for 2013/2014 and was written by Andrew Lycett, author of the excellent 2013 *Wilkie Collins: a Life of Sensation*. Amongst numerous others, Wilkie is in the excellent company of politicians such as William Pitt, scientists such as Charles Babbage, architects such as John Nash and a variety of infamous miscreants. Amongst the illustrations, Wilkie's photograph appears directly above prolific crime writer, Edgar Wallace.

SOME OTHER COLLINS HIGH PRICES

Auctions are not the only source of high prices for Collins's works. There are apparently several other kites being flown at present. A first US edition of *The Woman in White* (1860), admittedly the first of the four states, can be had for a modest \$12,500 from the Manhattan Rare Book Company. An 1862 one volume English edition of the same title – not the first one volume in 1861 - has been offered for a while at the equally ambitious price of about £4,000 by The-Mad-Librarian but now seemingly reduced to £3,250. The same source has *The Black Robe* at £6,500, an 1881 first edition in three volumes but with spines which appear not to match and contemporary library labels attached. Or you could have *The Moonstone* as the first US edition in paper wrappers at a modest \$4,000. All of these and other 'bargains' can be found on ABE books or on eBay.

NO NAME - A LOST CLASSIC

Mark Gatiss, director and writer of the TV Series *Sherlock* starring Benedict Cumberbatch, asked for his favourite book by *The Times*, wrote

No Name is a lost classic. It's not one of Collins's famous "sensation" novels like *The Woman in White* or *The Moonstone*, in fact quite the reverse. He sets out not to have any twists. But it is the most amazing piece of work — you could stand a spoon up in the plot, it is so dense. It is a brilliant mid-Victorian classic that no one has ever adapted and I love it. (My Culture Fix, *The Times*, 23 November 2022).

In fact as long ago as 1989 BBC Radio produced a very good adaptation of *No Name* which is occasionally repeated on Radio 4 Extra. It was adapted by Elizabeth Bradbury with such long departed radio stalwarts as Jack May as Captain Wragge and John Moffatt as one of Collins's best lawyers, Mr Pendril.

WILKIE COLLINS AND HIS HEROINES

Long-standing WCS member and Collins researcher, Angela Richardson, has written the following notes and observations about ‘Wilkie Collins and His Heroines’.

Much has rightly been written about the strong women characters in Wilkie Collins’ novels. Less attention has been given to the colour of their hair. Take the two most honest speaking: Marian Halcombe from *The Woman in White* (1860) and Rachel Verinder from *The Moonstone* (1868). They are alike in their dark colouring. Wilkie Collins tells us that Rachel is a brunette and Marian has such dark hair that a down of it can also be seen on her upper lip. They both dress in strong colours. Marian’s clothes are a rich contrast to her half-sister Laura’s white muslin and in *The Moonstone* Betteridge observes Rachel’s bright yellow travelling dress.

There is a similarity of description between the blond heroines in *The Woman in White* and *Heart and Science* (1883). They both share pale skin and hair. Laura Fairlie in *The Woman in White* has very pale hair “of so faint and pale a brown—not flaxen, and yet almost as light; not golden, and yet almost as glossy.” So too has Carmina Greywell in *Heart and Science*: “Her hair was of so light a brown that it just escaped being flaxen.” Both Carmina and Laura share a nervous disposition.

Lydia Gwilt in *Armadale* (1866) is one of Wilkie Collins’s pale women characters, who also has beautiful skin. So pure is her complexion that she was used as an advertisement when a child, for a beauty product. However, her hair is very different from all other Wilkie Collins heroines. “This woman’s hair, superbly luxuriant in its growth, was of the one unpardonably remarkable shades of colour which the prejudice of the Northern nations never entirely forgives – it was red!”

The “prejudice of the Northern nations” stems from the Christian belief that Judas Iscariot had red hair, which became associated with betrayal and criminality. There is no mistaking, that in *Armadale* Lydia Gwilt is a criminal. She begins with forgery and goes on to murder, theft, attempted murder and attempted bigamy. But Wilkie Collins does not portray her solely as a villainess. She sacrifices her life for the love of her husband and is also shown as much a victim as a perpetrator, manipulated by the men around her into committing crimes for their benefit.

If the ‘wicked’ Miss Gwilt has the weight of Renaissance art pointing out that her red hair means she has a capacity for wrong doing, then the Pre-Raphaelite-Brotherhood has the counter presentation of her vulnerability. Holman Hunt was a Collins family friend, and we can safely assume that Wilkie Collins knew his art well – and had met his models, particularly Fanny Cornforth, whom Holman Hunt wanted to marry. She is the model with wonderful red hair, in ‘The Awakening Conscience’ and ‘The Hireling Shepherd’. Rossetti also painted her in the luscious portrait ‘Bocca Baciata’ which translates as ‘the kissed mouth’.

Contemporary readers of *Armadale* would be very familiar with these visual references to red hair and find the character of Miss Gwilt both thrilling and beguiling. No wonder Wilkie Collins’ play of this name was by far his most successful drama.

WILKIE IN THE MAGNETIC NORTH

Wilkie crops up in all sorts of unlikely places. In *The Magnetic North* by noted polar traveller and author, Sara Wheeler, he receives on page 197 a rather unkind mention about *The Frozen Deep* before she discusses the Dickens connection in greater detail:

The business of transformation and romanticism brought out the worst in everyone. Wilkie Collins supplied *The Frozen Deep*, a terrible melodrama loosely based on the Franklin story, the action centring on a group of women waiting for news of their menfolk, these latter having vanished on an Arctic expedition.

THE QUEEN OF HEARTS AND HUNTLEY & PALMERS

Early in the twentieth century, biscuit manufacturers Huntley & Palmers produced decorative tins for their products in the form of book-ends or book stacks. A recent example on eBay dated 1909 included *The Queen of Hearts* in a stack of seven books held between bookends. This particular figural tin was the fifth in a series of ten which Huntley & Palmers began releasing in 1900. Wilkie was in excellent company, including John Keats and Arthur Rackham. Several well illustrated examples can be found by searching online for ‘Huntley & Palmers biscuit tins.’ There are at least two books on the subject and they appear to be highly collectible items: this particular example was offered at \$425.

THE HAUNTED HOTEL IN ITALY

The Haunted Hotel appeared in an auction of ‘Original and Comic Arts & Illustrations’ in Rome on 21-22 October 2022. Lot 168 was an ink and tempora illustration by Aurelio Galleppini for *l’Albergo Della Paura (Hotel of Fear)* by Wilkie Collins in a 1948 series of successful detective stories. Aurelio Galleppini (1917-1994) was better known by his nickname Galep and was an Italian comics artist and illustrator.

QUESTIONS

A new artificial intelligence chatbot is astonishing. Ask chat.openai.com/chat anything and it will produce concise paragraphs in plain English to answer your question. Like humans, it occasionally gets things wrong. Unlike humans, it has no access to the internet or anything that happened after 2021. What it produces in answer to ‘what is Wilkie Collins’s greatest novel’ could form part of an essay. A more difficult questions like ‘what is the plot of *Armada*’ is even better. Each time it is asked it produces a fresh and different answer. It will of course answer any question about anything and in several languages if required. Astonishing.

But if you prefer to read what a human thinks of *The Moonstone* there is an interesting alternative take by Katelyn Nelson titled “‘She Might Have Been Happy with Me’”: Queerness and Disability in Wilkie Collins’ ‘*The Moonstone*’.’ Search for ‘moonstone’ at dreadcentral.com.

QUIZ

In *The Times* on 20 October a question (No. 8) to tax the brains of all WCS members: “In the Wilkie Collins novel *The Moonstone*, what type of gemstone is the title object?” Answers on the proverbial postcard!

AUTOMATED PR

In September this email appeared in Paul Lewis’s inbox:

Hi Wilkie Collins, Do you want us to include your book "**The Woman in White**" in our newsletter sent to 85k Subscribers? Also to tweet about your book to 20K Readers 105 times? On Wilkie’s behalf, he declined.

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