



# **THE WILKIE COLLINS SOCIETY**

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**NEWSLETTER**

**SPRING 1995**

## **MEMBERSHIP SUBSCRIPTIONS FOR 1995**

The 1995 membership subscription is now due and should be sent to Louise Marchant at the above address. It has been held at £7.50 for UK and European members but in view of the high cost of overseas postage it is now necessary to charge £10 for those outside of Europe.

## **TITLES IN PRINT**

Following December's review of current titles, Robin Tucker writes that he has found *Rambles Beyond Railways* still available from W.H. Smiths. This is the Cornish Library edition and also contains *The Cruise of the Tomtit*. The ISBN number is 0 90774 605 5. (Also obtainable from W. H. Smith, Wilkie features on the back cover of *The Great Writers* - see review below). Penguin Books have recently published a new edition of *No Name*.

## **ALAN SUTTON**

Alan Sutton continue to expand their list of Collins titles and in May expect to have available both *Jezebel's Daughter* and *The Evil Genius*. They are considering other titles for late summer. (*The Evil Genius* has also been published in Canada by the Broadview Press with extensive introduction and notes by Graham Law).

## **FILM VERSIONS OF THE MOONSTONE AND THE WOMAN IN WHITE**

Until recently most of the cinema reference books, such as Halliwell, have denied the existence of a film version of *The Moonstone*. However, a mention has just come to light in the mystery magazine *Scarlet Street*. Produced

in 1934, the film stars David Manners and Phyllis Barry. The description, rather in the way of Hollywood, seems to bear little resemblance to the authentic Collins plot: "A young adventurer and his Hindu servant arrive at a gloomy mansion during a terrific storm. There they deliver The Moonstone, a famed gem recaptured from a lost temple in the wilds of India. The creepy estate is filled with a cast of sinister looking guests and servants and during the night the gem disappears. A great old-dark-house thriller from Monogram."

Incidentally, there have been at least two film versions of *The Woman in White*. One with the real title, starring Sydney Greenstreet as Fosco (1948); the other called *Crimes in the Old Dark House* (1940). I have a copy on video of the 1948 version and at a recent committee meeting it was suggested that we could hold a film evening to show this. If members are interested in seeing a rather creaky version of *The Woman in White*, they should let me know on the enclosed membership renewal form and we'll try to arrange a convenient date - probably a mid-week evening in the London area.

I would also be interested to hear from members who know of any other film (or television) versions of Wilkie's works, either English or foreign language productions.

#### **ALLIANCE OF LITERARY SOCIETIES**

The WCS continues to be affiliated to The Alliance of Literary Societies. The AGM and Forum at which the various Societies display their activities will be held on Saturday 29th April at the New Unitarian Hall, Ryland Street, Birmingham. This year's Forum will be hosted by The Friends of Keats House and the Alliance President, Gabriel Woolf, will present readings from Keats. Apart from the WCS 'official delegate', visitors are welcome at the nominal cost of £1.00.

#### **COLLINS AT THE NATIONAL PORTRAIT GALLERY**

The famous Millais portrait of Wilkie as a young man has been brought out of storage and is currently on show at the National Portrait Gallery. Incidentally, members are reminded that Katherine Haynes, who a few years ago was single-handedly responsible for persuading the NPG to reprint the portrait, still has supplies of the postcards available at a cost of 20p each. Anyone wishing to obtain copies should contact her direct at 150 Elstree Park, Barnet Lane, Borehamwood, Herts, WD6 2RP.

Katherine has been very busy on behalf of the WCS and has also written the following two pieces. (I would be pleased to hear from other members with either brief snippets of news or longer contributions).

### **THEATRICAL VERSION OF THE MOONSTONE**

*The Moonstone*, adapted by Anthony Peters, was staged at the Maltings Art Theatre, St Albans, 19th - 21st January. This was a very simply staged production, the cast consisting of four people in various roles, using a minimum of props and costume changes. During the first act the stage was dominated by a large diamond-shaped board which could be tilted in various directions and became, amongst other things, a table, the bank above the Shivering Sands and even *The Moonstone* itself. At times this was lit with eerie ultraviolet light which helped enforce the idea of the brilliance and value of the gem.

The stage contained four gothic pointed chairs; four tall lamps - like street lamps with globes; and four small lamps also shaded by globes which, like the board, were used to represent for example *The Moonstone* and a rose in Sergeant Cuff's hand. At first we found it a little odd that *The Moonstone* was not represented by one single object, but we soon found the actors slipping from one character to another, and all the props used in such effective and imaginative ways that we quickly adapted to the idea.

When we first became acquainted with the actors I was a little disappointed that Franklin Blake was played by Adam Cockerton rather than Callum Coates who was just as I had pictured Blake to be. Coates, however, turned out to be a splendid Cuff, particularly in his scenes with Ian Ramage as Gabriel Betteredge. The fourth member of the team was Susanna Northern, who brought out the pathos and tragedy in the character of Rosanna Spearman.

The story was in part narrated by the four members of the cast, with key scenes being acted out. For the second act the diamond-board was removed and the four street lamps were used to transport us to a foggy London street and the attack upon Godfrey Ablewhite (Coates). This was almost a 'black-and-white' production, with very little colour about the stage and costumes. As a result of this, the sparse set and strong story-telling, the audience could to a large extent use its imagination. Weird electronic music added to the atmosphere.

We attended the performance on 19th January, the two later dates having been sold out. The theatre seemed

packed out and we all had to edge up on the benches to squeeze a few more people in. It is good to see in this day and age that Wilkie Collins is just as popular as ever.

### **GREAT WRITERS**

*Great Writers*: an illustrated companion to the lives and works of Britain's most celebrated writers. W. H. Smith Exclusive Books, 1992. (Originally published at £11.99 but priced in their recent sale at £5.99).

This large book reproduces material originally used by Marshall Cavendish in their 'Great Writers' series, in which Collins's *The Woman in White* was Number 11. The picture of Wilkie by Charles Collins, his brother, is reproduced on the back cover.

Those who missed out on the magazine publication can here catch up on the pieces 'Runaway Success' about Collins's life and '**Fear** of the Madhouse' concerning his sources and inspiration. These cover eleven pages of the original magazine to give a fair sized piece on Wilkie.

Obviously, in a volume covering so many writers, they have not used all of the material published by Marshall Cavendish from 1986-1988. The two other pieces on Collins were '*The Woman in White*, a reader's guide' and 'Thrilling Tales, the writer at work'. All the articles are richly illustrated. Other writers in the book include Mary Shelley, Sir Arthur Conan Doyle and, of course, Dickens. KH

### **REFERENCE HANDBOOKS**

The fourth edition of the *Marcan Handbook of Arts Organisations* is now available from PO Box 3158, London SE1 4RA at a cost of £20 plus £1.20 p & p. It gives a compendium of information on the activities and publications of national, regional and international arts and cultural organisations.

The ninth edition of Macmillan's *Writer's Handbook* is due for publication in August at a cost of £13.99. It will be obtainable from bookshops or direct from Dominic Taylor, Macmillan Publishers, 18-21 Cavaye Place, London SW10 9PG (£14.99 with p & p).

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