



THE WILKIE COLLINS SOCIETY

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NEWSLETTER

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PUBLICATIONS

So far this year, there has been a wide and varied range of publications by and about Collins:

WILKIE COLLINS: THE COMPLETE SHORTER FICTION

Despite the publishers' best endeavours to keep it secret from the WCS, *The Complete Shorter Fiction*, edited by Julian Thompson, was brought out earlier this year (Robinson Publishing, ISBN 1-85487-264-8. Despite the high price of £30, its 925 pages include all the fiction under novella length (30,000 words) published by Collins in his lifetime. Readers will therefore find a comprehensive range of forty-eight stories from the obscure 'The Twin Sisters' (1851), to the often republished 'A Terribly Strange Bed' (1852). Each story is preceded by a headnote which gives details of its publishing history and other useful information.

Overall, a 'must' for readers and collectors of Collins. Dr Thomspson is a lecturer in English at Oxford University and has compiled a similar volume on Anthony Trollope. If Collins follows the same route, there may be a less expensive paperback version in due course.

VICTORIAN FICTION: Writers, Publishers, Readers

Written by John Sutherland, this title is published by Macmillan at £35.00 (ISBN 0-333-63286-9 hardcover) and £12.99 (ISBN 0-333-64422-0 paperback). It gives a fascinating insight into the cultural, social and commercial factors influencing the production of Victorian Fiction, a subject on which John Sutherland has published widely. Collins receives full mention, including Chapter Two devoted to the writing of *The Woman in White*. He argues that the book is peculiarly a product of the 1850s; is the formative text in the evolution of the Sensation Novel; uses the courtroom as a forensic narrative technique; and was influenced by the Rugeley poisoner, William Palmer. Sutherland also compares the novel's chronology in both the original manuscript and the first three-volume book edition. Of more general interest is Chapter Eight 'Who were they?' which analyses the demographics of Victorian novelists.

DETECTIVE FICTION: The Collector's Guide

The second edition of Detective Fiction: The Collector's Guide by John Cooper and Barry Pike has recently been published by Scalar Press. At 340 pages it is about 50% longer and therefore more comprehensive than the first edition which concentrated on 'Golden Age' authors. The book is intended as a handbook for collectors of the genre and gives practical advice on all aspects of assembling and maintaining such a collection. The main body of the book presents authors alphabetically, giving a brief resume of their background together with a checklist of titles.

Collins, alas, not fitting into the mainly twentieth century contents, doesn't receive an entry but my own lasting impression on looking through the nearly 150 author entries remains 'just look at what he started'. This is reinforced when reading Appendix A since Collins could be included in several of the 15 subject headings such as The humorous mystery, Police procedurals, Small town mysteries, Legal mysteries and Locked rooms. In addition, the general principles of collecting suggested in the introductory sections still apply equally well to a particular author such as Collins. Other Appendixes give details of publishers' practices, a glossary of terms, specialist dealers, and author societies in which the WCS is duly mentioned.

Detective Fiction is available direct from Scalar Press at £39.50 (plus 3.50 p & p), Gower House, Croft Road, Aldershot, Hampshire, GU11 3HR, (Telephone 01252 317707, Fax 01252 343151). Members in the USA should contact Scalar Press, Old Post Road, Brookfield, Vermont, 05036-9704 (800 535 9544).

WEST NORWOOD CEMETERY: The Dickens Connection

WCS member Paul Graham has just completed this excellent ninety-page booklet (ISBN 1 873520 10 7) for The Friends of West Norwood Cemetery (79 Durban Road, London SE27 9RW). It features thirty-nine 'residents', with several references to Collins. These include Richard Bentley, William Bradbury, Douglas Jerrold, Frederick Robson and David Roberts. Entries are illustrated with line drawings by Don Bianco and contain many useful references.

MR DICK'S KITE

Alan Watts of the Dickens Fellowship has recently sent out his latest issue of *Mr Dick's Kite* (No. 40). Wilkie receives a mention in connection with his identity as Thomas Idle in *The Lazy Tour of Two Idle Apprentices*. Much as Wilkie relished his air of indolence, as Alan Watts *The Kite's* creator writes, "The list of all these (Collins's) writings is most impressive. Can anyone seriously believe that their author was a born-and-bred idler, a consistent idler? Dickens, of course knew better."

ALAN SUTTON

ALAN SUTTON have published two new titles in their Pocket Classics Series: *The Two Destinies* (£4.99) and *I Say No* (£5.99). They have also reissued *Miss or Mrs?* in a larger format at £3.99. Alan Sutton tell me that they usually take texts from copies in the London Library. This means that in some cases the texts are drawn from first editions.

POOR MISS FINCH

Oxford University Press have now published their critical edition of *Poor Miss Finch* in the World's Classics Series. It is edited with valuable notes by Catherine Peters and is available at £5.99, paperback.

VICTORIAN STUDIES

The most recent issue of *Victorian Studies* publishes its bibliography for 1993. The listing for Collins has gradually expanded over the last few years and apart from book reviews currently includes:

Allen, Brooke. "More Than Sensational: The Life and Art of Wilkie Collins." *NewC* 12, 4:31-40.

Salee, Susan. "Wilkie Collins and Surplus Women: The Case of Marion Halcombe." *VLC* 20 (1992):197-215.

Bernstein, Stephen. Reading Blackwater Park: Gothicism, Narrative, and Ideology in *The Woman in White*." *SNNTS* 25:291-305.

Hendershot, Cyndy. "A Sensation Novel's Appropriation of the Terror-Gothic: Wilkie Collins' *The Woman in White*." *Clues* 13(1992):127-33.

Nayder, Lillian. "Aspects of Empire in *The Woman in White*." *VN* 83:1-7.

Tutor, Jonathon Craig. "Lydia Gwilt: Wilkie Collins's Satanic, Sirenic Psychotic." *UMSE* 10(1992):37-55.

Zander, Andela. "Spot the Source': Wilkie Collins' *The Moonstone* und John Fowles' *The French Lieutenant's Woman*." *ZAA* 41:341-48.

FILM VERSIONS OF COLLINS

As mentioned in the last Newsletter, a select band of members gathered to watch the film version of *The Woman in White*. James Agee probably summed it up best with:

"The Wilkie Collins novel is given the studious, stolid treatment ordinarily reserved for the ritual assassination of of a great classic. This is not intended as a recommendation."

Whilst not exactly Hollywood at its best, most of the plot does bear some resemblance to the book and Sidney Greenstreet carries off the part of Fosco with his usual style. Also in the cast are Gig Young and Eleanor Parker.

The newly found 1934 version of *The Moonstone* is probably Hollywood at its worst and can only be recommended to broad-minded devotees. Set in the twentieth century, Sergeant Cuff is the suave emissary of Scotland Yard, complete with Anglo-American accent, sent North to protect the diamond. Lady Verinder is altered to Sir John, an eccentric country doctor being pressurised for money by an archetypal foreign villain. Rachel is renamed Anne, and Betteredge has also undergone a sex change into a faithful lady housekeeper. But there is an Indian, who doesn't end up with the jewel - and perhaps Wilkie might have liked the whole thing as a parody!

MEMBERSHIP SUBSCRIPTIONS

Any membership subscriptions for 1995 which are still unpaid should be sent to Louise Marchant, our membership secretary, at her usual address.

WANTS LIST

If any members are searching for particular titles, editions or odd volumes, or if they have duplicate copies to dispose of, details can be included in future Newsletters. A current request is for an odd volume two of the first English three volume edition of *No Name*. The binding and condition are immaterial as long as the preliminary leaves are complete and in good state.

HOUSEMAN SOCIETY

The Houseman Society have asked us to publicise their forthcoming Centenary of *A Shropshire Lad*. Enclosed is their illustrated brochure of events which WCS members will be welcome to attend.

BLOOM TOURS - IRELAND

Bloom Tours have asked us to mention their literary tours. They are arranging two Autumn, eight-day itineraries 'Joyce's City and Yeats' Country' at £780 per head. Further information from Caragh House, Prosperous, co. Kildare, Ireland (Tel/Fax 35345-60118).

APG

THE EVIL GENIUS

Katherine Haynes has been reappraising *The Evil Genius* (Alan Sutton £4.99). Apart from very favourable comment on William Clarke's new introduction to the Collins titles in the Pocket Classics Series, Katherine has written the following

The opening sentence of *The Evil Genius* catches the attention immediately and you instantly want to know what is going to happen. A man has been found guilty committing a crime. He leaves a cryptic note for his wife, telling her where some diamonds are to be found. From this the reader gains the impression that this is to be a story of mystery and detection. Is the man, in fact, innocent of the crime? What has become of the diamonds? I imagined we might follow the wife as she pursued her investigations, but no. Having remarried she deserts her daughter and travels abroad.

Instead of following the fortunes of the woman, we are told of the wretched childhood of the deserted daughter. She goes by the strange name of Sydney and advertises her

services as a governess. Mr Herbert Linley engages her and we soon find ourselves entangled in a domestic drama brought about by the eternal triangle. Events we have followed closely at the beginning of the book are not referred to again and characters introduced in the early part of the story disappear, never to grace its pages again.

Having imagined that Sydney might try to move heaven and earth to clear her father's name, we find her being told very briefly of his complete innocence with virtually no reaction from her on receiving this information. There is no explanation of how it was her father came by the diamonds if he was really innocent of any crime.

Although there are domestic dramas and intense scenes between husband, wife and mistress the passages on the sanctity of marriage, divorce, the laws of man as opposed to the laws of nature and so on, become a little wearing. I have admired Collins use of coincidence in other works but here our belief in random chance is at times stretched to breaking point.

Amongst the main characters there are neither true villains nor heroes. Collins is at great pains to point out that his characters are human, with an equal mixture of good and bad. Mr Linley's brother is at one time described as 'the evil genius' and on other occasions the expression is used for Mr Linley's mother-in-law, Mrs Presty. So who is 'the evil genius' of the title?

As in other works, Collins is concerned here with what is expected by polite Society and what is expected of human nature. Because a woman is divorced, is she to be ostracised? Because a man is divorced is he never to see his child again? Should someone who has committed adultery be denied forgiveness?

Whilst applauding Collins for his views on such matters, I regret that he did not pursue the 'mystery angle' which would have made this well-written and well-meaning novel even better. That said, in my opinion, I would rather read a second-rate work by Wilkie Collins than a so-called best seller by many another author!

KH