



THE WILKIE COLLINS SOCIETY

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NEWSLETTER

WINTER/SPRING 1997

NEW MEMBERSHIP SECRETARY

Because of her other personal commitments, our very efficient Membership Secretary, Louise Marchant, has been forced to give up the position which she has so ably filled for the last few years. She will remain on the committee where she will continue to give us the benefit of her advice and personal knowledge of Society members.

The WCS is grateful to Paul Lewis for taking over the post from 1st February and all membership enquiries should now be sent to him at the above address. Members will remember his excellent article from last year about Wilkie Collins on the Internet. His e-mail address is: paul@deadline.demon.co.uk.

MEMBERSHIP SUBSCRIPTIONS FOR 1997

The 1997 membership subscription is now due and should be sent to our new Membership Secretary, Paul Lewis, at the above address. (NB subscriptions run from 1st January - 31 December). For the first time in several years, there is a modest increase for UK and European members to £8.50. Because of the very high overseas postage rates, a larger increase to £12.50 is necessary for those in the USA and outside of Europe. Payments from abroad must be made in Sterling otherwise bank charges for conversion absorb almost all of the subscription.

BOOKSELLER'S PAGE

Long-standing member, Richard Beaton, writes that he has now established himself as a second-hand and antiquarian bookseller. He specialises in nineteenth century fiction and will include several Collins items in his forthcoming Catalogue 4. Members wishing to obtain a copy should contact him at 11a St John's Terrace, Lewes, East Sussex, BN7 2DL (Tel. 01273 474147).

Sarah Wyatt of Phaistos Ephemera & Books (Hillside, 62 Victoria Road, Wargrave, Berks, RG10 BAE, Tel. 073 440 3454) has an original programme for the dramatic version of *The Dead Secret*; it is for the first night, 29 August 1877.

US bookseller, MacDonnell Rare Books (9307 Glenlake Drive, Austin, Texas 78730, Tel. 512 345-4139) also issues regular catalogues on nineteenth century literature. These obviously have a strong American flavour but Collins material is frequently included. The recent Catalogue 18 features the first English edition of *Mr Wray's Cash-Box* and the first American edition of "*I Say No*". The latter is particularly interesting as it precedes the English edition by about three months.

For those keen on mystery, detective and crime fiction, *The Deadly Directory*, International Edition for 1997-1998 has recently been announced. It records all of the businesses, publications and organisations specialising in the field with each entry coded, described and listed both alphabetically and by category. The Directory is available at \$25 from Deadly Serious Press, PO Box 1045, Cooper Station, New York, NY 10276-1045; or in the UK from Zardo Books, 20 Whitecroft, Dilton Marsh, Westbury, Wilts, BA13 4DJ, Tel. 01373-865371.

NB Any other bookseller members will be welcome to let me know of Collins items or catalogues with Collins entries for inclusion in future Newsletters.

THE NEW NINETEENTH CENTURY: FEMINIST READINGS OF UNDERREAD VICTORIAN FICTION

This new title, edited by Barbara Leah Harman and Susan Meyer, has been published by Garland at \$50 (ISBN 0-8153-1292-X). The forward has been written by John Sutherland who notes that approximately 50,000 novels were published during the Victorian period by some 3,500 novelists. Quoting from a recent review by P. W. Strine, Gordon College (I don't have the source) "This book is about the

task of rethinking that granite-etched reading list of 19th-century novels, a list used in the classroom for five generations. These 15 essays on "underread" Victorian fiction treat the work of novelists normally considered "second-tier" - Anne Bronte, Wilkie Collins, Charles Reade, Walter Besant, George Moore, George Gissing - and those so minor as to appear hardly ever on any syllabus anywhere - Sarah Grand, George Egerton, Flora Annie Steel, and Geraldine Jewsberry." The review continues "...that a fuller knowledge of these unfamiliar novels would bring a deeper appreciation of the Victorian female novelist, since most of the lesser-known novels in the Victorian period were written by women." Wilkie would have undoubtedly agreed. In *The Black Robe* he describes "A very remarkable work ... in the present state of light literature in England - a novel that actually tells a story ...it has another extraordinary merit - it isn't written by a woman." In *The Evil Genius* Mrs Presty tells how her late husband called her "one of the most remarkable women in England - you have never written a novel."

THE MOONSTONE ON TELEVISION

As predicted in the last Newsletter, the BBC Television film of *The Moonstone* was shown in two parts on 29 and 30 December. Apart from their continued lack of originality in choosing *The Moonstone* at the expense of any other of Collins's works, they produced a lamentably poor adaptation. The script might have been forgiven for omitting subplots because of the constraints of time, but cannot be excused omitting Betteredge's beloved *Robinson Crusoe*; or for turning Dr Candy into Mr Murthwaite; or for disinheriting Penelope as Betteredge's daughter. The shivering Sands looked like a landfill site; Rosanna Spearman dramatically acquired an audience for her suicide; Superintendent Seegrave was demoted to constable; and Sergeant Cuff, described by Collins as 'a grizzled elderly man' with eyes 'of a steely light grey' was transformed into the much younger, dark-eyed Antony Sher. But the film's worst fault was its failure to re-create the air of mystery and intrigue of the original. Indeed, if the original had been like this, then the whole detective genre might never have been invented - but the costumes were good! According to the BBC Production Notes, the writer of the screenplay, Kevin Elyot, considered it necessary to 'take it apart, strip it down to what actually happens, and put it back together again as a film which is faithful to the spirit of the original' - a singular failure.

Very much better was the introductory piece shown the previous week on BBC's *The Bookworm* programme. This managed to set *The Moonstone* in its proper context much more dramatically than the actual production!

MEMBERS' ARTICLES

Hilary Newman has taken up the invitation to contribute an article to accompany the Newsletter, in the absence of the *Journal*. Future contributions from other members will be welcome but publication would be greatly assisted if they could be sent on disk.

COLLINS TITLES IN PRINT

The listing of Collins's books currently available has been brought up to date. As ever, if members knows of any titles that may have been omitted, please let me know for future updates. With the exception of *Antonina* - which is not as unreadable as some critics have claimed - virtually all of Wilkie's fiction is now back in print, mostly in affordable editions which would have pleased him immensely. Full marks to Sutton Publishing who have re-introduced the majority of his less well known works; and to OUP and Broadview Press for their excellent critical editions.

BOOK OF THE YEAR

Member Mark Valentine has sent a cutting from *The Spectator* of 23 November where regular contributors nominate their books of the year. Craig Brown wrote "I would hate to be too cravenly Spectatorish in choosing a novel that is 134 years old, but Wilkie Collins' *No Name* (Penguin, £2.99) really was the best book I read this year. By turns witty, gripping, ingenious and creepy, it beats *The Woman in White* hands down."

THE HISTORICAL NOVEL SOCIETY

The newly formed Historical Novel Society thought that its activities might also be of interest to some members of the WCS. Further details are available from Richard Lee, Marine Cottage, The Strand, Starcross, Devon, EX6 8NY.

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STOP PRESS. THE MOONSTONE - THEATRICAL VERSION

Paul Lewis has heard of a forthcoming play version of *The Moonstone*. It will be staged by the Barebones Company at various theatres, mainly in the south and west, between April and November. Towns include Shaftsbury, Rugeley, Cheltenham, Devizes, Bath, Ferndown, Midsomer Norton, Purton, Milton Keynes, Reading and Bristol. Further details in the next Newsletter.