



THE WILKIE COLLINS SOCIETY

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NEWSLETTER

SPRING 1998

With Spring coming on the thoughts of some turn to outdoor activities such as training for the London Marathon. But don't forget Wilkie considered

“There is about as much variety in a flock of athletes as in a flock of sheep” (*Man and Wife*)

and “The worst curse of human life is the detestable necessity of taking exercise” (*The Moonstone*),

Miserrimus Dexter, however, leaped - or hopped - into action with “My brains are beginning to boil in my head. I must take refuge in physical exercise. I must blow off the steam, or I shall explode in my pink jacket on the spot!” (*The law and the Lady*).

MEMBERSHIP SUBSCRIPTIONS FOR 1998

The 1998 membership subscription is now due and should be sent to Membership Secretary, Paul Lewis, at the above address. (NB subscriptions run from 1st January - 31 December). For this year, we are maintaining the subscription at £8.50 for UK and European members and £12.50 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.

FRENCH PREFACE TO *THE WOMAN IN WHITE*

Paul Lewis has been taking a detailed look at the preface to the first French edition of *The Woman in White*, published in 1861. His translation and accompanying notes are being sent out with this Newsletter.

CONSIDERATIONS ON THE COPYRIGHT QUESTION

Long-standing member and regular correspondent, Muriel Smith, has written to add the following notes to Collins's essay on this topic circulated with the last Newsletter:

'The United States in the nineteenth century specialised in the short story. This had nothing to do with national psychology: it was a question of market forces. In the absence of international, as distinct from national, copyright, the competition of cheap new British novels made the publishing of new American novels by new writers a risk that American publishers were not prepared to take. A Senate Committee on Patents considered the matter in 1886¹ The Boston publisher, Dana Estes, testified that for two years he had not published an American manuscript: his house was not a charitable institution. He cited a particular author - the now acclaimed Charles Egbert Craddock, in real life Mary Noailles Murfree, a fragile spinster in her thirties, who would never have had her manuscript accepted had she not previously made herself known by getting local colour stories of life in the Tennessee mountains into the magazines. These were the salvation of beginning authors.'

I. George Stuart Gordon, *Anglo-American Literary Relations* (Oxford 1942).

Quoted from Muriel Smith's article 'Chesteron, Poe and Others' in *The Chesteron Review* (vol. 21, no. 4, November 1995)

SOME BOOK REVIEWS BY PAUL LEWIS

***WILKIE COLLINS - AN ILLUSTRATED GUIDE* BY ANDREW GASSON, OUP 1998 ISBN 0-19-866215-7, £19.99.**

Biographies put writers into a chronology and analyse their work in the context of their lives. Andrew Gasson's new book fills in all the details which biographers leave out but which collectors, admirers, students, and scholars want to explore. It is an A-Z - or more exactly an A-Y - of Wilkie Collins. From 'Ablewhite, Godfrey' to

'Youth's Companion', An *Illustrated Guide* is an encyclopaedia, drawing on Gasson's extraordinary knowledge built up during more than twenty years spent studying the man and collecting his work

To prepare for this book Gasson read again everything Collins wrote and that has resulted in useful plot summaries of all his fiction which will be turned to by scholars for a long time. It also enabled him to pull out a wide selection of Collins aphorisms and quotes which show how scandalously this writer has been omitted from traditional Dictionaries of Quotations. The book has entries on every friend, relative, and acquaintance of Collins; full details of the publishing history of every book, story, and play; potted histories of Victorian publishers and publishing practices; and concludes with a wonderfully full bibliography to match the comprehensive bibliographical detail throughout the work.

As if that wasn't enough, the book contains over 200 illustrations, many published for the first time. They include some extremely rare first editions of Collins's stories in obscure periodicals, play-bills, manuscripts, portraits and photographs of Collins and his relatives and friends, and pictures of buildings associated with Collins. The only pity is that none of it is in colour.

I have few other niggles, though I think the book touches too lightly on Collins extensive journalism, concentrating mainly on his fiction. Inevitably in a book of this length and comprehensiveness and despite the pains Gasson took, the odd mistake or omission will come to light. Not least because scholarship is constantly bringing us more on Collins's life and work. Gasson intends to put updates on his website (at <http://www.gasson.demon.co.uk>) as new information comes to hand. If you love Collins, **if** you study Collins, if you collect Collins or if you are just interested in the Victorian period, buy this well written and approachable Collins encyclopaedia.

CLASS, SEX, AND DOMINATION

Wilkie Collins, by Lillian Nayder, Twayne Publishers, New York, 1997, ISBN 0805770593. No.544 of Twayne's English Authors Series.

I approached Lillian Nayder's new book on Wilkie Collins with caution. Literary analysis of books which were primarily intended as exciting and popular fiction runs the risk of over-reading - putting modern day motives and insights into the mind and intentions of long dead writers. But the more I got into Nayder's careful and detailed probing into what lay behind Collins's stories the more convinced I became that much of what she concluded was true. And that was not least because her work is grounded in the most thorough research into original sources.

She concludes that Wilkie had very advanced views on women's rights, on class, and on colonial power. But that his expression of these views in his books is always tempered by a conclusion which supports the Victorian status quo.

She examines in detail the art of his father, William Collins, and the views on class that shows, contrasting them with Wilkie's views and finding coded references to his rejection of these views in his otherwise hagiographic biography of his father. She looks at class in *Hide and Seek*, *The Dead Secret*, and *The Law and the Lady*; at what are nowadays called 'gender issues' in *The Woman in White*, *No Name*, and *Man and Wife*; and at empire and colonization in *Armadale*, *The Moonstone*, and *The New Magdalen*.

The first two chapters are biographical and she concludes with a look at some of Collins's lesser known work and a wonderfully complete bibliography of modern studies of Collins. And within the text are detailed, unravelling plot summaries of the works covered.

Agree with her or not, once you've read Nayder's forensic analysis, you will never read Collins in quite the same way again.

THE LETTERS OF CHARLES DICKENS, VOL IX 1859-1861 **(EDITED BY GRAHAM STOREY) OUP 1997**

Three completely new letters from Charles Dickens to Wilkie Collins are just some of the delights to be found in volume IX of *The Letters of Charles Dickens*, edited by Graham Storey and published recently by Oxford University Press. The lives of Dickens and Collins were so closely linked from the time when they first met in 1851 to Dickens's death in 1870 that any scholarship about Dickens in that period is useful to Collins studies.

This latest volume covers the crucial time when Dickens set up *All The Year Round* and Collins wrote *The Woman in White*, his best known and most successful work.

Even familiar material is re-evaluated by the meticulous scholarship of Storey and his team. The letter from Dickens to Collins (26 January 1859) which lists other possible titles for the as yet unnamed *All The Year Round* has always been cited as a Dickens holograph. But Storey reveals that part of the list - including the first appearance of the title *All The Year Round*- is in Collins's hand. As Storey says "it is just possible that Collins... himself originated the title". If that is not the case, it is Collins' own manuscript note taken on the back of the letter when he met Dickens to discuss the title on 27 January 1859.

Other familiar material - such as Dickens's comments on *The Woman in White* - previously scattered over several different books - is collected here between two covers with Storey's detailed and careful footnotes. And new letters - as well as new details in old ones - tie down Collins life.

He went to Gloucester for a week on Tuesday 4 September 1860, he dined with Dickens at 5 on 16 May 1859 at Vereys in Regent St. Apart from the 22 letters to Collins (3 new, one partly new, and six others missing from the 1882 *The Letters of Charles Dickens to Wilkie Collins*), Collins is mentioned in many letters to other people and appears in numerous footnotes. His lover Caroline Graves crops up in a few, obscure references, usually excised from other editions. On 19 August 1860 Dickens wrote to Mrs Frances Dickinson "Wilkie has finished his White Woman (if he had done with his flesh-coloured one, I should mention that too) and is in great force." And on 5 March 1861 he wrote to Mrs Nash "He [Wilkie] has made his rooms in Harley Street, very handsome and comfortable. We never speak of the (female) skeleton in that house, and I therefore have not the least idea of the state of his mind on that subject. I hope it doesn't run in any matrimonial groove. I can imagine similar cases in which that end is well and wisely put to the difficulty. But I can *not* imagine any good coming of such an end in this instance."

Finally, an appendix prints in full - and for the first time - Collins's letter of 7 August 1860 accepting a two year appointment to *All the Year Round* to write, among other things, "a serial story of about the same length as *The Woman in White*" at pay of £7-7s a week and an eighth share of the profits. That book was *No Name* but Collins' withdrew from this agreement early, in January 1862.

KATE FIELD- SELECTED LETTERS (EDITED. CAROLYN J. MOSS), SOUTHERN ILLINOIS UNIVERSITY PRESS, 1996

Two new tidbits about Collins appear in a new biography and letters collection of the American writer and lecturer Kate Field (1843-1896). Collins wrote a chapter for her biography of the American actor Charles Fechter, a close friend of Collins who appeared in two of the author's plays. Writing on 16 February 1882 to Lawrence Hutton, who edited the series in which the Fechter biography appeared as well as editing a volume of Dickens's letters to Collins, Field says: "I intend to wind up the book with accompanying recollections which I have had copied. For this boon bless me, as Collins's mss would have made you somewhat profane, clear as it is. The erasures and interpolations are many." And writing on 13 July 1882, during her visit to England, she tells a friend that she is visiting Collins the next day.

P.L.

DICKENS'S YOUNG MEN BY P. D. EDWARDS

Recently published as part of the 'Nineteenth Century Series', under the general editorship of Joanne Shattock and Vincent Newey, is *Dickens's 'Young Men': George Augustus Sala, Edmund Yates and the World of Victorian Journalism* by P. D. Edwards, Darnell Professor of English at the University of Queensland. (ISBN 1-85928-043-9, £42. Ashgate Publishing Ltd, Unit 3, Lower Farnham Road, Aldershot, Hants GU12 4DY, Tel 01252 331551, Fax 01252 317446).

As the jacket blurb says, "Yates and Sala were possibly the best known and most successful of the 'young men' during Dickens's lifetime and for a generation or so after it." Other writers in the circle included Moy Thomas, John Hollingshead, Percy Fitzgerald and Blanchard Jerrold. Wilkie Collins, the author emphasises, rapidly acquired an independent reputation and was not one of them. Nevertheless he makes occasional but brief appearances with his early relationship with Dickens and *Household Words*, the staging of *The Lighthouse*, the blackballing of Wills, his and Dickens's candidate for admission to the Garrick Club, and his support in connection with the libel case against Yates.

Despite the title, this is not really a book about Dickens. Although considering the personal and literary relationships with Dickens of both Yates and Sala, it views the world of journalism very much from their point of view. It charts their respective rises to literary fame, compares their different approaches to life - the Bohemian, dissolute and unreliable Sala and the more stable, respectable Yates. Throughout their careers they veered from warm friendship to periods of enmity. They came from similar artistic backgrounds and both developed as prime exponents of the 'new journalism', becoming respectively special correspondents for *The Daily Telegraph* and *The New York Herald*. They were both made bankrupt in the 1860s but Yates eventually achieved success and wealth as the proprietor of *The World*, whereas Sala, also a household name, died in poverty. The book is expensive at £42 but nicely produced with sixteen illustrations most of which are quite unusual. It provides a useful insight into the world of Victorian journalism, the same background from which Wilkie graduated into the league of major author. The lives of Yates and Sala make an interesting comparison since, despite their lifetime fame, neither achieved enduring success as a novelist. APG

BBC TELEVISION'S *WOMAN IN WHITE* GETS THE BIRD

The Woman in White, BBC ONE, 28 and 29 December 1997 2x65 minute episodes, screenplay David Pirie, Director Tim Fywell.

The BBC followed 1996's distressingly bad *Moonstone* with the only slightly less disappointing *The Woman in White*. WCS member, P. Tohen of Kent described it

aptly as 'a travesty' - dictionary definition 'an imitation or description that misrepresents the original'. Paul Lewis in his review below has been equally unimpressed:

The BBC seems determined to have a turkey every Christmas. A year after the disastrous 1996 version of *The Moonstone*, we were given a pastiche of *The Woman in White*. Of course it is difficult to translate the complex, quarter of a million word plot of Collins's masterpiece into two hours of television. But when the BBC took so many pains with the costumes and the sets and when the actors put so much into their roles, it is sad how little care was taken with the two things which Wilkie Collins himself gave us - the plot and the language.

The screenplay by David Pirie (*Black Easter, Element of Doubt*) opens in Limmeridge. Walter Hartright, unmet at the station, walks to the house and encounters Ann Catherick. Exactly the same opening was used in the 1948 Hollywood version. And the rewritten encounter loses all its dramatic force and it is a good ten minutes into the story before a cheer can go up for the first words that are vaguely based on what Wilkie wrote.

Taken as a new, Victorian melodrama the production had some merit. Several people who had not read the original told me they enjoyed it and some then went on to read the book which enthralled Victorian England in 1860. But what a surprise they were in for! The BBC cast the more beautiful woman to be the ugly Marian (and changed her name to Fairlie in case we could not cope with the complexities of two half-sisters with different surnames) and the plain one to be Laura, as well as the thinnest man ever to be the fat Count Fosco. Percival Glyde's secret which Wilkie gave us - and which he claimed no-one ever guessed before he revealed it - was transformed into a vague problem with a will and allegations of under-age sex with Ann Catherick. The story was brought forward 18 years to 1869 so that reference could be made to the Rosettis as a way of justifying an entirely new - and in the event unbelievable - grave opening scene. Poor Hartright is sent away from Limmeridge after an allegation of sexual harassment from which point he degenerates into a drunk who sketches for a living in bars; Marian, who is the strong one in the first half of the book and the weaker one in the second becomes the dominant force in the second half of this adaptation, using her sexuality to get her way with both Hartright and the doctor who holds the key to Laura's identity. And it ends with mass meeting at Limmeridge in which everyone takes leave of their carefully drawn characters in a scene reminiscent of the schmaltz at the end of *Star Wars*.

The acting on the whole was excellent. Though a mere scrap of a man, Simon Callow (*Four Weddings and a Funeral, A Room with a View*) conveys a real hard menace beneath Fosco's wonderfully precise politeness. Ian Richardson (*House of*

Cards, The Fourth Protocol), was a brilliant hypochondriac Mr Fairlie (the part he had originally taken in the much better 1982 BBC Television production). And what Wilkie called “the two women’s roles” were both played with passion and care by Tara Fitzgerald (*The Tenant of Wildfell Hall, Brassed Off*) and Justine Waddell in her first television role. But although it was cooked, basted and dressed to perfection, the screenplay that changed the plot and made up the dialogue was still a turkey at heart. And it was Wilkie who was stuffed.

Other views

Ronald Taylor writing to Radio Times also called it ‘a travesty of Collins’s masterpiece.’ H. R. F. Keating wrote ‘Planners should think twice before setting out to murder...great novels’. And Laura-Louise Blair, an ‘A’-level student, asked ‘if a 17-year-old can fully comprehend a novel of such brilliance, why is that a whole BBC team can be so wrong?’. Louise Marchant, our former membership secretary, thought ‘it started with promise and went downhill rapidly’. And chairman Andrew Gasson said ‘Wilkie gave us a perfectly good secret, why change it?’

RADIO STARS - FIVE STORIES FROM *LITTLE NOVELS*

‘Mr Policeman and the Cook’, ‘Miss Jéromette and the Clergyman’, ‘Mr Marmaduke and the Minister’, ‘Miss Bertha and the Yankee’, ‘Miss Morris and the Stranger’, BBC Radio 4, Wednesdays at 12.25 from 31/12/97 to 28/1/98, dramatised by John Arden, with Ronald Pickup as Wilkie Collins.

The BBC followed its Christmas television version of *The Woman in White* with a rather better series of five short stories by Wilkie Collins on Radio 4. They were based on the false - and annoying - premise that Collins was so dependent on laudanum in his later years that he was incapable of writing full-length novels so he was reduced to writing short stories. This myth was repeated in Radio Times (3-9 January p131) and the writer also made the howler that because we knew Collins died in 1889, he also knew that in the early 1880s. But that aside, these five dramatised adaptations, with Collins as narrator and woven into his own life, kept faithfully to the original plots and used much of the original language. The stories were taken from the fourteen tales collected in *Little Novels* (1887) and originally published between 1875 and 1887. Overall, thoroughly enjoyable and worthwhile. Let’s hope BBC Worldwide puts them on sale

P.L.

WILKIE COLLINS AND FRANK BEARD - ALSO ON THE RADIO

Coming up soon on BBC Radio 4 is an interesting series on writers and the subjects of their dedications. Wilkie dedicated *No Name* (1862) to his friend and physician, Francis Carr Beard. The programme will explore their friendship, Wilkie's medicinal use of laudanum, his attempts to give it up and how it features in his books.

The series will be broadcast at the beginning of the new Radio 4 schedules at 3.30 p.m. during the week of 6 - 10 April 1978.

THE ARTS CLUB

Louise Marchant - to quote her own words again - is 'always amazed where Wilkie turns up'. She recently visited the Arts Club and discovered that Wilkie had joined in 1866 prior to its move to central London's Dover Street. The club produced a book entitled *A Most Agreeable Society*, celebrating 125 years of its existence dating from its beginnings in Hanover Square in 1863. On page 11 we learn that, according to John Forster, it was in the club's dining room that Wilkie confided to Charles Dickens that he had lost his virginity in Rome at the age of fourteen. With some inaccuracies, the book continues:

'As the son of a painter and Royal Academician, Collins was an ideal member, with his placid, benign, bespectacled face and courteous manners, but it would be wrong to take too simple a view of him. Like Dante Gabriel Rossetti, he was passionately addicted to opium, and though a 'confirmed bachelor' in the eyes of the world, maintained, under the name of Mr Dawson, two mistresses, by one of whom he had a family. Each lived in a separate house in adjoining squares in Bayswater, and he divided his time equally between them, taking out in favour of each a life insurance policy on himself, and at his death dividing his estate of £11,000 between them.'

Other members during Wilkie's time included Charles Dickens, Charles Reade, Edmund Yates, Swinburne, Whistler, Du Maurier (illustrator of *The Moonstone*, *Poor Miss Finch*, *The New Magdalen* and *The Frozen Deep*), Henry Irving, Richard Monckton Milnes (later Lord Houghton and who had proposed Collins for membership of the Athenaeum in April 1861), Luke Fildes (illustrator of *The Law and the Lady* and *Miss or Mrs?*), and Carlo Perugini (whom Kate Dickens married after the death of her first husband, Charles Collins).

TWO POSSIBLE OUTINGS

Paul Lewis has identified the house in Gower Street occupied by Millais at the time of the supposed night-time meeting with Caroline Graves. He would like to organise a walk commencing at this meeting point to take in several Wilkie locations in the Central London/Marylebone area and finishing at Gower Street. This would probably be arranged for a weekend at the start of the Summer. Would anyone interested please contact Paul at his usual address.

The other possibility was mentioned in a Newsletter last year and would be a joint meeting with the Pugin Society. This is based in Ramsgate, a favourite seaside haunt of Wilkie from the 1870s which also featured in several of his stories. The proposed outing would also be planned for a weekend, probably at the start of September 1998, and anyone interested should contact Andrew Gasson.

GEORGE MACDONALD

John Docherty of the George Macdonald Society is attempting to discover why *Thomas Wing/old, Curate*, one of the worst-written of all the author's novels (J. D.'s words!), is nevertheless one of the most popular. Macdonald apparently imitated the style of contemporary Sensation Novels and possibly some of Wilkie's detective stories. John Docherty has found parallels in two short stories of Margaret Oliphant (she who admired *The Woman in White* but called *Basil* 'a revolting story') and wonders whether anyone can cite an individual work of Collins which includes more than one of the following incidents:

- The murderer concealing evidence by dumping it down a mineshaft.
- An amateur detective discovering some of this by pretending to be a geologist.
- The murdered girl's mother a bigamist and vulnerable to blackmail.
- The victim killed by her lover because seen with another at a masked ball.
- The murderer a well-to-do southerner; the victim from the Midlands.
- The murderer hidden by his sister in a lonely house.
- The murderer escaping to Holland, aided by accomplices with a small boat.

Any suggestions to John Docherty, 9 Meadway Drive, Forest Row, RH18 5NU.

DAPHNE DU MAURIER FESTIVAL

A second Daphne Du Maurier Festival of Arts and Literature is being held from 8-17 May 1998 in Fowey, Cornwall. Events are too numerous to list but full details can be obtained from Jonathan Aberdeen, Festival Co-ordinator, Restormel Borough

Council, Penwinnick Road, St Austell, Cornwall, PL25 5 DR (Tel. 01726 74466,Fax. 01726 68339).

I have always thought there are some interesting coincidences in the works of Wilkie Collins and Daphne Du Maurier, grand-daughter of George Du Maurier, one of Collins's illustrators. Their first books were both biographies of their respective fathers (*Memoirs of the life of William Collins* and *Gerald*). But in addition they both wrote:

A ghost story set in Venice (*The Haunted Hotel* and *Don't Look Now*).

A novel with a sinking ship in which someone is allowed to die (*Armada* and *Rebecca*).

A travel book of bygone Cornwall (*Rambles Beyond Railways* and *Vanishing Cornwall*)

Novels with stolen or substituted identity (*Woman in White* and several others as this was a favourite Collins theme and *The Scapegoat*)

Novels set in Cornwall (*The Dead Secret* and *Rule Britannia* plus others since Daphne Du Maurier lived there)

Stories with prophetic dreams (*The Two Destinies* and *The Flight of the Falcon*)

In *The Moonstone* both Franklin Blake and Godfrey Ablewhite wanted to marry *My Cousin Rachel* (Verinder); and N. P. Davies in his biography of Collins considered that *The Law and the Lady* was the inspiration for *Rebecca*..

GEORGE ELIOT COUNTRY

The George Eliot Fellowship working in association with Nuneaton and Bedworth Borough Council is arranging five guided tours of George Eliot Country between 10 May and 13 September. For further information contact Rose Selwyn, Town Hall, Coton Road, Nuneaton, Warwickshire, CV1 1 5AA (Tel.01203 376490). For details of the George Eliot Fellowship contact Mrs Kathleen Adams, 71 Stepping Stones Road, Coventry, CV5 8JT (Tel. 01203 592231).

APG

“Books are companionable creatures” (*The Black Robe*)

