



THE WILKIE COLLINS SOCIETY

WORLD WIDE WILKIE

By Paul Lewis

The Internet should be there to give you information you cannot get elsewhere - or find it for you more easily. Sadly much of the effort put into finding information is wasted. This short guide leads you to the best of Wilkie on the Web.

The text of this piece is also on the Internet at www.wilkiecollins.org - follow links to Wilkie Collins Society and Winter 1999/2000 newsletter.

If you have access to a computer and the Internet, many hours can be spent searching for pages relating to "Wilkie Collins". There are thousands. But by the time you have thrown out all the links to pages selling modern editions of his books, removed pages with a brief biography and couple of links to other pages, and of course failed to find those pages which have a wrong or out of date reference, the number of sites which are actually useful or interesting is fairly small.

Modern bookshops

One of the great developments of the Internet has been the online bookshops. They enable you to find any book in print - and some that are technically out of print. Many sites offer discounts on the price of the books and that can more than pay for the cost of postage. Amazon at www.amazon.com in the US or www.amazon.co.uk in the UK is one of the best known. But it is not always the cheapest or the best. Now there is a new site that will search all the online sites in the UK and find the cheapest deal. Type www.bookbrain.co.uk into your browser and then do a search on Wilkie Collins - as author or in the title - and you will get more than 150 editions of his own books and eight books about him. If you want a copy of Lyn Pickett's collection of essays on Wilkie you can get it for £12.34 from www.alphabetstreet.infront.co.uk, more than £3 cheaper than from Amazon. But Bookbrain is not always comprehensive and it is worth checking out the individual sites. A search on the Amazon site for example produces some titles for Wilkie that Bookbrain misses.

It is often very difficult to find modern editions of Wilkie's short stories when they are buried away in other collections. To the rescue comes the science fiction and fantasy net. This page <http://www.sff.net/locus/s144.html#A3198> contains what it says is a comprehensive list of Wilkie's short stories in modern collections.

You can also use the Internet to find second-hand copies of those obscure titles to complete your Wilkie Collins collection. The best place to start is www.bookfinder.com which searches half a dozen antiquarian bookshop market sites and brings up long lists of Wilkie titles. Most of them are in the United States of America and a surprising number do not take credit cards so you will have to cope with sending money, paying international postage, and waiting for the book to arrive. But you can find things you would not easily get in any other way.

Electronic texts

Of course, printed books may seem a bit dated to real net-heads. And there is now no shortage of Wilkie's texts in electronic form. You can download the text of most of his work free onto your computer and, if you want, print it out and read it in bed. Several of these texts are not in print and are very hard to find anywhere else. James Rusk produces the major e-text site at www.freespeech.org/collins. James has taken on the task of turning Wilkie's work into electronic form and he is nearly finished. He has 23 novels and novellas, Wilkie's own three collections of short stories, and several other short stories not available in those collections. The most interesting books are probably *Antonina*, *The Queen of Hearts*, and *After Dark*, all of which are out of print.

He has also put into e-text the 1892 edition of *The Letters of Charles Dickens to Wilkie Collins* and has now added letters to Wilkie from the 1880 collected edition of Dickens's letters. For the other texts, James uses mainly the 1900 Peter Fenelon Collier edition of Wilkie's works so these are US versions, though often a strange mixture of the original Harper US edition and later English editions. James also has put up 19 illustrations from the US edition of *Armada*.

There are other stories and non-fiction pieces available on the Internet apart from James Rusk's work. The Mad Cybrarian has a page of links at www.fortunecity.com/Victorian/richmond/88/collins.htm which include some alternative versions of some of the texts which James Rusk has.

Smaller sites include more obscure texts.

<http://www.mtroyal.ab.ca/gaslight/amerhosp.htm> is the text of Wilkie's address to the Lotos Club, in his honor, New York City, September 27, 1873. And

<http://www.mtroyal.ab.ca/programs/arts/english/gaslight/casemenu.htm>

has the texts of three short stories from *Household Words* and *All The Year Round* -- *Memoirs of an adopted son* (1861), *The poisoned meal* (1856) and *The caldron of oil* (1861). My own site has the text of five non-fiction pieces and one translation that are almost impossible to find elsewhere. Follow the links to Unknown Collins from www.wilkiecollins.org

The original e-text service is Project Gutenberg and you can do a search on its e-texts at <http://promo.net/pg/query.html>. Many of the Wilkie texts have been donated by James Rusk. But it is the only source I know for Wilkie's short story 'A Fair Penitent' (*Household Words* July 1857) and 'The Dream Woman' is also there.

Finally, if you want to know where Wilkie uses a particular phrase, a brilliant new site is www.concordance.com/collins.htm. It contains the text of 22 novels and you can search for a word or a phrase in any or all of them. For example, it reveals that Wilkie uses the phrase 'plain words' 68 times in 18 of these books. Research possibilities are endless.

Background information

There are probably only four serious Wilkie Collins sites on the Internet with a significant amount of background information and useful material and around a dozen more with one or two useful things on them.

My own Wilkie Collins site is referred to and cited more often than any other. It also owns the domain names www.wilkiecollins.com and www.wilkiecollins.org and can be accessed through either. However it has to be said the site has not been updated for some months and does contain some links that do not work. It has been selected as a web resource by the BBC which says

"This site is a curious compendium of material on Collins, including online texts of some rare non-fictional writings (introductions, reviews and even his will), links to online versions of his fiction, a well-organised primary bibliography and sections of varying quality on such subjects as his monogram, his relations with Dickens and his various homes."

It also contains the text of some unpublished letters, links to other sites, photographs of Wilkie and some material about his brother Charles and father William Collins RA, both artists.

On the other side of the world, David Grigg's Wilkie Collins Appreciation Page at <http://www.ozemail.com.au/~drgrigg/wilkie.html> is the oldest of the Wilkie websites. David has confirmed that his site too is suffering from neglect. Though it does contain some useful material including pictures, a short biography and links to other sites.

More serious is the site maintained by Mitsuharu Matsuoka an English professor at Nagoya University in Japan at <http://www.lang.nagoya-u.ac.jp/~matsuoka/Collins.html>. His page contains useful links and is kept up to date with news of Wilkie Collins happenings on the web, including societies and discussion groups. He has some pictures and some biographical material. Elsewhere on his extensive English literature site he has links to Victorian sites, particularly those specialising in 19th century authors. He also has a lot of his own material on Dickens, Gaskell, and Gissing on what is generally an excellent and professionally presented web site. And if anyone doubts the interest in Wilkie in Japan, check out <http://www.cityfujisawa.ne.jp/~katsurou/mystery/collins/index.html>.

Andrew Gasson, the Wilkie Collins Society chairman and author of *Wilkie Collins - an Illustrated Guide*, also has his own site at <http://www.gasson.demon.co.uk>. It contains the text of an unpublished fragment of story by Collins called 'A Little Fable' together with an image of a portion of the manuscript. There are numerous quotations from Collins, a

discussion of his handwriting and the 'gout' he said affected his eyes, details of the publishing history of *The Guilty River* and a discussion of Wilkie's influence on detective fiction - both taken from Andrew's book, as well as updates and additions to the book. Like several other Wilkie Collins sites, this one too is a little out of date.

There is also useful material on the site of the *Encyclopedia Britannica*. The whole text of *Britannica* is now available on line at www.britannica.com. Go to the research page and do a search on Wilkie Collins to produce not only all the pieces in *Britannica* which mention him, including a piece about him, but also useful links to web sites and other sources of information. The Wilkie piece itself is at <http://www.britannica.com/bcom/eb/article/8/0,5716,25188+1+24786,00.html>.

There are many other sites with some interesting Wilkie Collins material. These six are the best.

- There are two sites with pictures of his grave at http://ostavizn.com/site/08rest_in_peaceF/WCollins.html and www.xs4all.nl/~androom/dead/kensal.htm.
- For a bibliography of Danish editions of his work go to <http://home2.inet.tele.dk/bibliste/fbib/collins.htm>.
- This Dickens site has links to friends of Dickens, most of whom were also Collins's friends <http://www2.ucsc.edu/~varese/ghosts.htm>.
- There is an essay on the influence of *The Woman in White* on *Dracula* at <http://userwww.sfsu.edu/~arf/lit.html>.
- And if you're really stuck for an undergraduate essay on sensationalism in *The Woman in White* there's a high 2.2 or a low 2.1 waiting to be stolen at www.york.ac.uk/student/su/essaybank/english/sensationalism_in_the_woman_in_white!

Discussion groups

Internet discussion groups also provide a new way of enjoying and studying Wilkie Collins. They work by exchanging ideas, asking questions, and discussing books by email. There is one dedicated to Wilkie Collins. Contact SusanDara@aol.com about joining Wilkiecollins@onelist.com. Most Victorian authors have a discussion group dedicated to them and their work. Through these groups you can contact people all over the world with a similar interest to your own. There is also the magisterial Victoria List for Victorian fiction, history and life. It is run by Patrick Leary at Indiana University and all these contacts are best found through his wonderful Victorian Research Web at <http://www.indiana.edu/~victoria/>.

Anyone who finds other Internet sites with useful or interesting material about Wilkie Collins can email me at paul@paullewis.co.uk.

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