



THE WILKIE COLLINS SOCIETY

PATRON Faith Clarke

Chairman Andrew Gasson, J Merton House, 36 Belsize Park, London, NW3 4EA

Membership Paul Lewis, 47 Hereford Road, Acton, London W3 9JW

NEWSLETTER

SPRING 1999

MEMBERSHIP SUBSCRIPTIONS FOR 1999

The 1999 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 once again 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.

BASIL

The film version of *Basil* after its single public showing on US television appears to have once again disappeared without trace. However, it has been possible to obtain a video copy and we are considering an informal showing in the near future, possibly in Belsize Park at the above address or at another venue in central London. Those interested should add their names and a telephone contact number to the enclosed membership renewal form and return before April 30.

‘THE EXHIBITION OF THE ROYAL ACADEMY’

Accompanying this Newsletter is the latest in the series of reprints of Collins’s shorter works which have never previously been republished. Wilkie’s review of the exhibition of the Royal Academy originally appeared in the June 1851 issue of *Bentley’s Miscellany*, then a popular and influential literary magazine but now almost unobtainable in any form. As Paul Lewis points out in his introduction, the Royal Academy occupied the eastern wing of what is now the National Gallery on the North side of London’s Trafalgar Square - literally round the corner from the current Millais exhibition where the 1850 Collins portrait is on display. [For a late correction please see back page.]

MILLAIS EXHIBITION

The exhibition 'Millais: Portraits' runs from 19 February - 6 June 1999 at the National Portrait Gallery, St Martin's Place, London WC2H 0HE. The famous 1850 image of Wilkie as a young man is included in the section on Early and Pre-Raphaelite Portraits. It is not a large picture, measuring only 10.5" x 7" (267 x 178 mm) and is executed in oils on canvas. It features twice in the handsome book which accompanies the exhibition. This includes 156 illustrations of which all but 20 are in colour and is written by Peter Funnell and Malcolm Warner (Hardback ISBN 1 85514 255 4, £35; paperback ISBN 1 85514 245 7). The commentary refers to Harriet Collins's hospitality in Hannover Terrace, the famous meeting with Wilkie's 'woman in white', Caroline Graves, and Holman Hunt's opinion that this portrait of Wilkie 'remained to the end of his days the best likeness of him', adding 'It will be seen that he had a prominent forehead, and in full face the portrait would have revealed the right side of cranium outbalanced in prominence that of the left.'

We also learn from the book that the *Wilkie Collins* '...is unquestionably Flemish in inspiration. It is unlikely to have been a commission, and was more probably a tribute of friendship to a man whose idiosyncratic appearance caught Millais's imagination and whose mother and brother were among his closest friends. The gesture of Collins's beringed hands, while probably characteristic of the man, is apparently a play on the Flemish practice of representing the sitter as if in prayer....the size and shape of the painting and the placing of the figure all reflect the Memling style, but Collins was neither saint nor man of prayer. The painting is no parody, but it has its own subdued humour.' The text continues with: 'The coat of arms at the upper left belongs to various Collins families, to which the sitter may or may not have been related. It was perhaps suggested by Thomas Combe, who had an interest in heraldry and whose own [Millais] portrait features a similar device.'

There are several other pictures of interest in the exhibition. It features Millais's 1850 pencil sketch of Charles Collins as well as the much larger 1880 oil painting of Kate Dickens (Collins) when she subsequently became Mrs Perugini. It is a good opportunity to see the various self-portraits of Millais as well as pictures of his wife, Effie, Holman Hunt and the eminent surgeon Sir Henry Thompson with whom Wilkie was also acquainted. Another curious coincidence emerges from the portrait of Lillie Langtry. Apparently she was introduced to society - and met Millais - at a reception given by Sir John and Lady Sebright in 1876. Mr Sebright, of course, is the name of the staid English oculist in *Poor Miss Finch* published a short while before in 1872.

Those wishing to obtain a copy of the *Wilkie Collins* (ref. 967) - or any other NPG pictures - may like to avail themselves of a new service. The images have now been scanned into digital form and can be reproduced as full colour digital prints in a choice of four paper sizes: Small (10" x 6", £5.50); Standard (10" x 8",

£8.50); Large (12" x 10", £12.50); and Super (18" x 12", £17.50). The image size of the Large is very close to that of the original Collins portrait. The other Wilkie pictures available are the wonderful 1880 Rudolph Lehmann, (ref. 3333); the Vanity Fair Spy cartoon; and a black and white photograph originally taken by Sarony during Wilkie's 1873-4 reading tour of America. The service is provided by the NPG shop (Tel. 0171 306 0055). Also available from the bookshop is *The Pre-Raphaelites - their Lives in Letters and Diaries* by Jan Marsh. This contains a portrait of Charles Collins by Holman Hunt as well as a sketch by Charles Collins 'At Aunt Pat's' showing Thomas Combe and his wife Pat (patrons of Charles) and Millais.

'DIFFERENT WORLDS' BY GRAHAM LAW

Following on from his article in the new series of the *WCS Journal*, Graham Law has been investigating further the US newspaper publication of *Blind Love*. He has unearthed a surprising report in the *New York World* and his research is presented in his essay, 'Different Worlds', which accompanies this Newsletter.

VICTORIAN CRIME

The international interdisciplinary conference on Victorian Crime is being held at the University of London Institute for English Studies on Saturday 24 April. The aim of the meeting is to explore the relationship between crime and nineteenth century society. Speakers will include Stephen Knight, Jennifer Davis, Ann Heilmann, Sally Ledger, Laura Marcus, Lillian Nayder, Barbara Onslow, Lyn Pykett, Angélique Richardson and Chris Willis. Apart from Wilkie Collins and sensation fiction, they will cover themes such as sensation melodrama, forensic evidence, fictional criminals, Sherlock Holmes, women detectives, women and prisons, social problems and fin de siècle anxieties.

The meeting runs from 9.00am to 7.00pm and according to the provisional programme the main session on Collins begins at 4.30pm. It will include 'Her Resolution to Die: "Wayward Women and Construction of Suicide in Wilkie Collins' Crime Fiction' (Emma Liggins); 'Fallacies of Testimony: Wilkie Collins's *The Moonstone* and Victorian Theories of Memory (Cathy Tingle); and "'The Confidential Spy of Modern Times": the Sensation Novel, the Detective and Modernity'. The conference costs £18 (£10 concessions) and is organised by Chris Willis, Department of English, Birkbeck College, Malet Street, London WC1E 7HX; e-mail 100415.1234@compuserve.com. Bookings and enquiries should be made to Janet Josephs, Institute for English Studies, Senate House, Malet Street, London WC1E 7HU (tel. 0171 862 8675; e-mail ies@sas.ac.uk).

IOLÁNI

One of the main publishing events of 1999 will be the long-awaited appearance of Wilkie's first and long-lost novel, *Ioláni*. Paul Lewis is in the enviable position of having received an advance copy and writes the following as a first appraisal:

It's been a long time coming but Wilkie Collins's first novel *Ioláni* was well worth the 155 year wait. Written in 1844, rejected as Wilkie later explained because of 'scenes which caused the respectable British publisher to declare that it was impossible to put his name on the title-page', kept in a drawer, brought out in 1877 when the setting was used in a short story ('The Captain's Last Love') published in *Belgravia Magazine*, given to his friend the New York impresario Augustin Daly in 1878, auctioned in 1900, sold, auctioned again in 1903 when it disappeared from sight. All five of his modern biographers declared it lost. Then it turned up at New York book dealers Glen Horowitz in 1991 where it was offered at a price of \$175,000 and subsequently sold.

The current owner, identity unknown, has allowed this edition to be prepared by Professor Ira B Nadel of the University of British Columbia. And, until another is allowed, it will be the definitive text. So it is good that Nadel has kept most of Collins's own rather eccentric punctuation and spelling (though why not all?) and has published a complete list of all the emendations and deletions in the manuscript.

Set in Tahiti before it was discovered by Europeans, the story tells the tale of a mother trying to keep her baby safe from its father, a priest, who is determined to sacrifice it to the Gods. Against all odds she succeeds, helped by her own step-daughter and a mysterious mad man.

Nadel does an excellent job in his 25 page introduction pinning down the sources of the book, finding the elements of the story, the characters and even their names. He has tracked down and cites almost all the contemporary references to the book. And he points out many elements in the story which are found in Collins's later work.

There are indeed many classic Collins elements to find. Powerful women characters, one of whom sacrifices everything. A villain who, frightening though he is, has redeeming features and a villainy that has some cause. Scenes of great violence and tender and sexual love. At least one very eccentric character who is nevertheless central to the plot. Descriptions of landscape like works of art, and climate which sets the scene for the story and changes with its mood. A structure that already seems designed for periodical publication - cliffhanger endings to chapters as the action moves elsewhere. And above all a story that keeps you reading and surprises you at every turn. And there are deeper themes - about class, and gender, about religion. That is not to say it is perfect. It is not.

It contains great clunky bits of exposition, it rushes to its end as if the author had run out of plot, and the character development is rather shallow at times. But it is an enjoyable read, not just an interesting early novel of a man who became a famous writer. The London publishers who rejected it - Longmans and Chapman missed a great opportunity.

Wilkie Collins, *Iolani; or Tahiti as it was. A Romance* (Edited by Ira B Nadel, Princeton University Press, 1999 ISBN 0691 03446-X) will be published in the USA in April and the rest of the world in May.

WORLD CLASSICS FROM OUP

A new edition of three of Wilkie's novellas has been published by Oxford University Press in its World Classics series. It is edited with a sound 20 page introduction by Norman Page (Emeritus Professor of Modern English Literature at the University of Nottingham and editor of the excellent *Wilkie Collins - the Critical Heritage* in 1972) and Toru Sasaki (Associate Professor of Kyoto University in Japan, one of a growing number of Japanese academics with an interest in Wilkie) The book also contains an updated and revised chronology - though why do all printed chronologies omit the family's move from Oxford Terrace to Devonport Street in 1844? The endnotes are a little brief, but a nice addition to the republished work of Wilkie Collins.

Miss or Mrs?, The Haunted Hotel, The Guilty River, edited by Norman Page and Toru Sasaki, OUP 1999, £6.99 or \$10.95 ISBN 019 283307 3.

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THE HAUNTED HOUSE

Nekta Publications (P.O. Box 18514, London E11 2YH) have reprinted in paperback 'The Haunted House' by Charles Dickens and others, originally published as the first of the Christmas Numbers of *All the Year Round* in 1859. This current edition is supplemented by a brief editorial introduction and a ten page Afterword by Peter Rowland. Collins contributed 'The Ghost in the Cupboard Room' which subsequently appeared as 'Blow up with the Brig!' in *Miss or Mrs? And Other Stories in Outline* (1873). The price is £7.95 including postage and packing.

THE STRAND MAGAZINE

The first issue of the newly revived *Strand Magazine* has now been published. Elegantly produced, it contains a mixture of short stories and articles. The editorial by Andrew Gulli sets out the magazine's intention: 'The original *Strand* (1891-1950) established a tradition of exceptional mystery fiction which we plan to continue. In addition to mysteries readers will find superb Sherlock Holmes

pastiches, unsurpassed articles and columns, as well as insightful book reviews of the latest mysteries, pastiches, and anthologies.’ The first piece, by Chris Willis, is a short history of the *Strand Magazine*. There is a horror story by Emmy award-winning writer Henry Slesar, a humorous attack on modern unsolicited post by novelist James Sallis, and a mystery set in Rome by Verbena Pastor. Andrew Gasson contributed ‘Wilkie Collins and Crime Fiction’ which with permission from the *Strand* we hope to circulate with the next Newsletter.

The *Strand Magazine* is published quarterly at \$24.95 in the US and Canada, \$29.99 elsewhere. Details from P.O. Box 1418, Birmingham, Michigan, 48012-1418, USA; e-mail strandmag@worldnet.att.net.

CHAUNCY HARE TOWNSHEND

The recent exhibition at the Wisbech Museum was accompanied by an excellent illustrated 32 page booklet, *The Life and Times of Chauncy Hare Townshend: a Victorian Collector* (ISBN 0 9519613 2 20). This is modestly priced at £2.50 and is available from The Wisbech & Fenland Museum, Museum Square, Wisbech, Cambridgeshire PE13 1 ES (Tel. 01945 583817).

FEMALE EMIGRATION FUND

On a recent trip to Tasmania, it was interesting to see in the centre of historic Hobart a commemorative plaque featuring a copy of an early 1850s advertisement for ‘Single Women and Widows of good character’ sponsored by The Committee for promoting the Emigration of Single women. ‘A fine ship of about 500 tons burthen carrying an experienced surgeon and a respectable superintendent to secure the comfort and protection of the emigrants during the voyage, will sail from Gravesend on Thursday 1st of May next for Hobart Town Van Diemen’s Land on payment of five Pounds only.’

Wilkie’s early excursion into dramatic adaptation as well as his first appearance on a public stage was *A Court Duel* on 26 February 1850. The play was staged at Miss Kelly’s theatre in aid of the Female Emigration Fund which assisted impoverished women to settle in the colonies. Advertisements in the *Times* of 22 and 26 February 1850 note ‘A COURT DUEL will be performed by gentlemen amateurs, assisted by Miss Jane Mordaunt, who has kindly given her gratuitous services.’ Jane Mordaunt was a professional actress while the gentleman amateurs included Charles Collins in the lead, Wilkie and Henry Brandling (illustrator to *Rambles Beyond Railways*). The theme of emigration subsequently featured in *No Name* (1862) where Magdalen’s maid, Louisa, departs for Australia.

ARMADALE

On the same trip, one of the participants came from a town in New South Wales called Armidale. Checking the local guide books shows that there are also two Armadales correctly spelled, one in Victoria and one in Western Australia. Further investigation reveals another in Canada and three in Scotland - at Inverness, Sutherland and West Lothian. Presumably one of these provided the title for *Armadale*, possibly the one in Sutherland, just along the coast from Thurso which the eighteen year old Wilkie visited in the summer of 1842 while touring Scotland with his father. As he noted in *The Memoirs of William Collins*, 'The coast scenery of Thurso and its immediate neighbourhood, though less wild and extensive, was perhaps more varied than the shores of Shetland itself.' The other possibility is the West Lothian Annadale which Wilkie and his father may have seen as they travelled home via Inverness, Glasgow and south to Liverpool

KENSAL GREEN

The Friends of Kensal Green Cemetery will hold their annual open day from 10.30 am on Saturday 10 July. Apart from the opportunity to visit Wilkie's grave (31754/square 14l/row 1, located behind the central church), there will be specialist tours of the cemetery, catacomb and crematorium, a Victorian horse hearse, a motorcade of historic hearses, poetry readings, organ recital, stalls and refreshments. Further details of this and other events can be obtained from Robert Stephenson, FOKGC, PO. Box 1035, London W2 6ZX.

GEORGE ELIOT COUNTRY

Guided tours of George Eliot Country, organised by Nuneaton and Bedworth Borough Council in association with the George Eliot Fellowship, will take place on the following Sundays during 1999: 16 May, 27 June, 8 August and 12 September. Further details from Rose Selwyn, Nuneaton & Bedworth Borough Council, Town Hall, Coton Road, Nuneaton, CV11 5AA (tel. 01203 376490).

LEDBURY POETRY FESTIVAL

This year's Ledbury Poetry Festival runs from Sunday 27 June to Sunday 11 July. There is a very wide range of events and further details can be obtained from the Town Council Offices, Church Street, Ledbury, Herefordshire HR8 1DH.

INTERNATIONAL PLAYWRITING FESTIVAL

The 1999 International Playwriting Festival will take place from Friday 19 to Sunday 21 November and is currently receiving entries for its annual competition. Further details from Rose Marie Vernon, Festival Administrator, Warehouse Theatre, Dingwall Road, Croydon CR0 2NF.

‘In all the thousands of times I have asked other people for advice, I never yet got the advice I wanted’ (*Armada/e*)

‘He was honourable, in the second place, as having won the highest popular distinction which the educational system of modern England can bestow - he had pulled the stroke-oar in a University boat-race’ (*Man and Wife*)

‘There is only one kind of speaker who is quite certain never to break down under any stress of circumstance - the man whose capability of talking does not include any dangerous underlying capacity for knowing what he means’ (*The Dead Secret*)

CORRECTION TO ‘THE EXHIBITION AT THE ROYAL ACADEMY’

In the final paragraph of the Introduction, all of the payments incorrectly begin with the figure ‘3’. Thus £36-18s (£36.90) should read £6-18s (£6.90) and so on.

