



THE WILKIE COLLINS SOCIETY

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NEWSLETTER

SUMMER 1999

Thus far, 1999 has been an important year for works relating to Collins. Wilkie's first novel *Ioláni*, discussed in the previous Newsletter, is widely available in bookshops and has been extensively reviewed in the press. This Newsletter, with the assistance of Paul Lewis, will concentrate on further texts with a Collins interest as well as giving details of special offers from Macmillan and Sutton Publishing.

THE LETTERS OF WILKIE COLLINS

At last there is an edition of Wilkie Collins's letters, most of which are now held in various libraries in the USA. Until now, there were few published sources for the great majority of Wilkie's letters, apart from one obscure PhD thesis and half a dozen letters reproduced by an American university library. The main sources for his letters were the few which had been printed in reminiscences by his contemporaries and the extracts published by his biographers, notably of course *The King of Inventors* by Catherine Peters and *The Secret life of Wilkie Collins* by William Clarke

William Baker (Professor of English at Northern Illinois University) and William Clarke have now published the first results of their major task of cataloguing each letter and putting it in context. For these first two volumes they have had to be very selective. Out of the 2,223 letters they have identified, space has limited them to publishing the full texts of just 464 and part-publishing and summarizing a further 127. But in a stroke of scholarly excellence, the remaining 1,632 are listed by date, correspondent, subject and current location – giving students, collectors and, inevitably, dealers, a hand list of known Collins letters. The authors plan a further two volumes, with a different publisher, in the next two to three years.

It would be invidious to criticize the editors either for publishing so few letters or for their selection of the ones which they have chosen. It is hoped that

eventually they will all be in the public domain. For ...,w all those with an interest in Collins's work can read the letters he wrote from Cornwall alongside the published text of *Rambles Beyond Railways*. They can read the accounts by the young Collins of his school days. They can puzzle over the curious correspondence with Anne le Poer Wynne when she was aged 12 and Wilkie was in his 60s – a correspondence given its own chapter and introduction. They can read the long letters to his mother and brother describing Paris, Italy, and his trips around the British Isles. And they can read Wilkie's own, plainly written, accounts of how illness dogged his life.

Sadly no-one can read a single letter to either of his lovers – Caroline Graves and Martha Rudd - none has survived. And there are just three letters to his close friend Charles Dickens - two of which are published here. Dickens burned most of the letters he received as part of his vain attempt to keep his 13 year affair with Ellen Ternan a secret.

Along with appreciating Collins's lively, engaging prose, we can also admire the work of the editors - useful introductions, both to his life and to each chapter, comprehensive indexes, notes to each letter, and the immense knowledge and scholarship they each have brought to this excellent work. No doubt, the publication of these two volumes will encourage the emergence of more letters currently languishing in family archives or collectors' cupboards. And with each one, we will learn a little more about Wilkie Collins. As the editors say "His friendship, good humour, social graces, candour, lack of pomposity, shrewd judgement, his capacity for work, play, and high living, as well as his constant battle with ill-health, shine through them."

The Letters of Wilkie Collins - Volume 1: 1838-1865 and Volume 2 1866-1889, edited by William Baker and William M. Clarke, Macmillan, London 1999, ISBN 0333 73247 2, £95 (each volume separately £50).

SPECIAL OFFER TO MEMBERS OF THE WILKIE COLLINS SOCIETY

The two editors and Macmillan have very generously arranged that paid-up members of the WCS can purchase the two volume set at the special offer price of £50 including post and packaging. Orders should be sent direct to Macmillan using the order form enclosed with this Newsletter.

ANOTHER SPECIAL OFFER - FROM SUTTON PUBLISHING

Wilkie would have approved of Sutton Publishing. They have over the last few years brought back into circulation the majority of his novels in nicely produced editions at reasonable prices. Affordable fiction for the reading public was always an ambition during his lifetime when dealing with contemporary publishers such as Smith Elder and more particularly Chatto & Windus. Sutton Publishing have now reissued a new paperback edition of William Clarke's *The Secret life of Wilkie Collins* and for members of the WCS they are making this available at the reduced price of £6.99. In addition, they are offering discounts

on eleven of Collins own titles. Full details are enclosed and orders should be sent direct to Littlehampton Book Services.

THE MOONSTONE FROM BROADVIEW PRESS

Broadview Press have followed *The Evil Genius* and *Heart and Science* in their literary texts series with Steve Farmer's new edition of *The Moonstone*. This excellent version contains a detailed 30 page introduction, Notes on the Text with publication details, and copious annotations. Most of these are very helpful although some, such as details on sovereigns and guineas or the location of Brighton, are clearly designed for a North American audience. There are several Appendixes which include contemporary reviews; excerpts from newspaper accounts of the Constance Kent Road Case and the Major Murray Northumberland Street Case of 1861; Collins on Indians, a reprint of A Sermon for Sepoys' the *Household Words* article of 27 February 1858; letters by Collins concerning *The Moonstone*; and contemporary reviews of the dramatic version at the Olympic Theatre. The jewel in the appended crown, however, is Appendix F where the otherwise unobtainable text of the play is reproduced in full. This Broadview version will undoubtedly become the definitive critical edition of *The Moonstone* and deserves a five star rating.

THE STRAND MAGAZINE

The editor of the newly reincarnated *Strand Magazine* has kindly given permission to reproduce and circulate 'Wilkie Collins and Crime Fiction' which appeared in the first issue. The second number contains several short stories as well as articles on Conan Doyle, Agatha Christie, E. C. Bentley and The Great Detectives; an interview with Michael Bond; and several book reviews. The subscription is \$24.95 for the USA and Canada and \$29.95 worldwide. Correspondence should be sent to Andrew Gulli, The Strand Magazine, P. O. Box 1418, Birmingham, Michigan 48012-1418, USA. In the U. K., subscriptions can be sent to Diamond Magazine Distribution Unit 7, Rother Ironworks, Fishmarket Road, Rye, E. Sussex TN31 7LR.

MESMERISM

A new study of mesmerism by historian Alison Winter suggests that the Victorian audience expected to be held under a spell by sensation fiction. She looks briefly at Collins's essays on mesmerism ('Magnetic Evenings at Home' published in *The Leader* from January to March 1852 and sadly not available outside the British Library). She suggests that Collins was experimenting in the way he wrote *The Woman in White* with the physiological response of his readers. "I do think it plausible that this was an experiment in mental influence and nervous stimulus in a more literal way than his readers might assume." There are a few other references to Collins and Dickens in this long and thorough book about the phenomenon of mesmerism in Victorian England. Alison Winter is associate professor of history at the California Institute of Technology.

Mesmerized - Powers of Mind in Victorian Britain by Alison Winter, University of Chicago Press, 1998. £23.95 ISBN 0226902196.

COLLINS STUDIES

Collins scholar and professor of English, Lillian Nayder, is about to publish a bibliography of Collins's studies taking over from where Kirk Beetz's invaluable *An Annotated Bibliography 1889-1976* left off. Her 70 page piece in the forthcoming *Dickens Studies Annual* describes and discusses recent trends in Collins criticism and includes a substantial bibliography of writings, dissertations, and editions of his work from 1982.

Tennessee Studies in literature is looking for new essays for a volume entitled *Reality's Dark Light - The Transgressive Wilkie Collins*. Proposals of 750-1,000 words should be received by 1 February 2000. More details from Maria K. Bachman and Don Richard Cox, Department of English, University of Tennessee, Knoxville TN 37994-0430 or email to mkbachman1@earthlink.net or dcox@utk.edu

UNDER LOCK AND KEY

Under lock and Key by Thomas Wilkinson Speight was published in 1869 by Tinsley, shortly after *The Moonstone*. It is interesting for the following disclaimer which appears immediately after the title-page: "Injustice to himself the author thinks it requisite to state that the entire plan of this story was sketched out, and several of the chapters written, before the first lines of Mr. Wilkie Collins's "Moonstone" had been given to the Public. He has further declined himself the pleasure of reading "The Moonstone" till after the completion of his own story, so as to preclude any possible charge of having derived the outline of his plot from the work of another writer. London, *February*, 1869."

Whether this disclaimer was inserted at the request of Speight or whether William Tinsley was playing safe, having just recently had a disagreement with Wilkie over the publication of the second edition of *The Moonstone*, we cannot be sure. The plot of *Under lock and Key* certainly figures a large Indian gemstone, the Great Mogul Diamond, and one of the characters, Paul Platzoff, is a regular consumer of opium. There are several other similarities to Wilkie's works, including multiple narrators; a father and son as business advisers rather like Pedgift and Pedgift Jr in *Armada*; a daughter reunited with her mother on the latter's deathbed as in *The Dead Secret*; and a servant who is really a spy looking to steal the treasure like Magdalen Vanstone in *No Name*. Whatever T. W. Speight did or did not borrow from Wilkie, the main thrust of the plot is very different from *The Moonstone* and the story is very readable in its own right.

It is currently available in one volume as a facsimile reprint of the original three-decker, complete with typically large type, wide line spacing and large areas of

white page, from Ayer Company Publishers on the internet at <http://www.scry.com/ayer> or at 6 Lower Mill Road, North Stratford, NH 03590, USA, 888-267-7323, fax 603-922-3348 (ISBN 0405079001, \$68.95). NB. Like most US publishers, however, they are particularly bad at ignoring order queries and requests for further information.

Nevertheless, available from the same source are several interesting reprints of hard to find material relating to Wilkie. There is the only copy in print of *The Queen of Hearts* taken from the 1859 Harper edition (ISBN 0405078684 at \$39.95). *Studies in English* includes a short essay by C. K. Hyder 'Wilkie Collins in America', costing \$18.95 (ISBN 0836909135). There is also Parrish's assessment of Wilkie Collins and Charles Reade for \$24.50 (ISBN 0833726757) and the earliest biographical treatment of Wilkie in English by S. M. Ellis, *Wilkie Collins, Le Fanu and others*, which also includes a chapter on Wilkie's brother Charles Allston Collins. This costs \$21.95 ISBN 0836904133. Finally, there are two other books related to Collins's writing - *The Notting Hill Mystery*, by Charles Felix (very similar to 'The Biter Bit' but often cited as the first true English detective novel) and *The Rose and the Key* by J. S. Le Fanu which was also similar to *The Moonstone*.

THE TEAR OF KALEE

Rather tediously written in deliberately archaic style and much more guilty of *Moonstone* plagiarism than *Under Lock and Key* is the 1902 story, *The Tear of Kalee*, jointly written by Herbert Inman and Hartley Aspden. This, too, features a great diamond stolen from the forehead of an Indian idol followed across the seas by high caste Brahmins. There is another storyline in which the jewel is stolen from a locked safe by its custodian whilst sleep-walking under the influence of an accidentally administered drug containing opium, watched by another member of the household. Franklin Blake's line "Carbon, Betteredge,! Mere carbon." reappears as "only a little piece of carbon". There is also a similarity to *The New Magdalen* where one of the main protagonists steals the identity of another character he assumes to be dead. *The Tear of Kalee* is not to be recommended as a good read but represents an interesting derivative of *The Moonstone* over 30 years after it was originally published in 1868.

THE OXFORD READERS COMPANION TO DICKENS

The Oxford Readers Companion to Dickens (OUP, ISBN 0-19-866213-0, £40) is an infuriatingly brilliant book. In addition to the General Editor, Paul Schlicke, there are three Consultant Editors, Philip Collins, Michael Slater and Eric J. Stevens, seven Consultant Editors, and some 50 or so other specialist contributors. The preface proclaims that "The *Companion* is organized to provide in one volume easily accessible, meticulously reliable information for the general reader and specialist alike. It offers breadth of scope allied to depth of detail, in order to serve both as a resource of first resort for the specialist, and as a source of accessible and dependable information for the general reader."

Indeed, this very handsomely produced book consists of 654 pages, mainly presented in double column format. It is well illustrated with numerous black and white pictures and photographs, four pages of maps, a rather limited bibliography, an alphabetical list of characters, a chronology rather grandiosely described as a Time Chart, the Dickens family tree, a classified contents list and an index. So everything is there, but...

The expectation for the '*Companion*' was that entries would be entirely alphabetical and, with the help of cross-references, self sufficient. The cross-references are good but without the help of the index, classified contents and the page and a half of 'how to use this book', the reader could easily be lost. Wilkie Collins appears where expected and receives a little over two columns from the pen of Professor Michael Holligton. The next three topics consulted at random were Charles Dickens Junior, Kate Dickens (Perugini) and Gad's Hill, and it came as a surprise to find that none had its own separate entry. The first two figure briefly under Dickens's Children and the last under 'Homes of Dickens' in company with the similarly placed Tavistock House. Doughty Street on the other hand sneaks in with its own entry as Dickens House Museum. Similarly, Chauncey Hare Townshend and John Elliotson are indirectly located via the index, under mesmerism.

The designers have also been at work on this book and not always to best effect! The main entries, particularly the major novels, are distinguished from the rest of the text by departing from the double column format and having larger text in full-page shaded boxes which really do little to enhance readability. The overall format therefore incorporates problems with layout and structure. Thus the entry on Television Adaptations on page 548 is interrupted by five and a half pages of shaded *A Tale of Two Cities* only to resume on page 554. The designers obviously had something against religion since The Bible on page 37 has to make way for *Bentley's Miscellany* until its completion on page 41, and The Book of Common Prayer is interrupted by seven pages of *Bleak House*.

Notwithstanding the above, the treatment of the novels is generally excellent; there are acres of contextual entries and social history, and few obvious omissions. Overall the *Companion* is destined to become a standard reference book on Dickens, his life and works. It is likely to replace the various Dickens Indexes which have been published from time to time and are now generally out of print. The narrow reader of specifically Collins's works may not necessarily gain a great deal from this tome but anyone with a wider interest in Dickens and his time will find the book indispensable.

APART FROM THE TEXT

Both readable and useful for those with an interest in book production and its history is Anthony Rota's *Apart from the Text*. Its publication coincides with the 75th anniversary of antiquarian booksellers Bertram Rota and gives an excellent

overview of nineteenth century publishing practice. The book contains chapters on Part-Issues and Serials, The Three-Decker, Book Illustration, Series Publishing & the Yellow-Back; Bindings, Dust-Jackets, Paper and Design. It is usefully illustrated and good value at £20. In the UK, it is available from the Private Libraries Association, Ravelston, South View Road, Pinner, Middlesex HA5 3YD (ISBN I 900002 47 6); in the USA publication is by Oak Knoll Press, 310 Delaware Street, New Castle, Delaware 19720 (ISBN 1 884718 52 3)

THE LETTERS OF CHARLES DICKENS TO WILKIE COLLINS

Paul Graham has sent the following piece concerning the Laurence Hutton edition of *The letters of Charles Dickens to Wilkie Collins*:

The collection of letters from Dickens to Collins was published in both London and New York in 1892. The editor was Laurence Hutton. A recently published collection of articles, *American Episodes Involving Charles Dickens* by Sidney P. and Carolyn J. Moss (ISBN 0-87875-504-7), includes a short (four page) essay by the latter in which she seeks to solve "a minor mystery...which...no Dickens or Wilkie Collins scholar has yet explained", namely why and how Hutton, a relatively obscure New York journalist, came to be chosen for the task.

The letters were the property of the Collins estate. Alexander Watt, Collins's literary executor, sought permission from Georgina Hogarth, sole surviving executor of Dickens, to publish them to benefit Collins's heirs. Georgina gave her permission, with the proviso that she was to have power of selection and final approval. Her experiences of editing a three volume edition of Dickens's letters with Mamie Dickens, which included twenty letters to Collins, was such as to deter her from taking on the editorship. Watt then negotiated with Harper & Brother, Collins's usual publishers in the USA. Once they agreed to publish, the choice of Hutton as editor was "an obvious one" since he was literary editor of *Harper's New Monthly Magazine*, where these letters first appeared in 1891 (not so much of a mystery then, however minor). There is no discussion as to why one of Wilkie's regular English publishers was apparently not approached to publish the letters. This surely is the unresolved mystery. If the purpose was to benefit the heirs of Collins's estate, then negotiations with more than one firm would seem to have been in order.

The article does include hitherto unpublished letters to Hutton from Georgina Hogarth and Henry Mills Alden, Harper's editor-in-chief, on the enterprise. These letters, and the proofs that Georgina returned to Harper's, are now located in the Laurence Hutton Collection in Princeton University Library.

BASIL - THE FILM

On Monday 7 June, twenty or so WCS members and guests met at the Bonnington Hotel in central London to see the video film version of *Basil*. The cast includes Claire Forlani, Christian Slater, Jared Leto and Derek Jacobi who,

as Basil's father, carries the film with an excellent performance. Inevitably there were differences from the true Collins story but most alterations did not prove too intrusive. The general consensus considered it an enjoyable film well worth seeing. In addition, the evening proved a useful opportunity for WCS members to meet each other socially. There is no news yet of a distributor or an official release date for *Basil* so we hope it will not disappear into oblivion.

THE FROZEN DEEP - NOW

Collins's story of the Northwest Passage, *The Frozen Deep*, featured two ships the *Sea-Mew* and the *Wanderer*. The plot was largely based on the expedition to find Sir John Franklin in which the real life ships were called the *HMS Breadalbane* and the *Phoenix*. The *Breadalbane* is probably the world's most northern shipwreck, dramatically sunk within 15 minutes when her hull was ripped open by blocks of ice in 1853. 130 years later a Canadian research team discovered the remains, upright and well preserved on the sea bed, some 350 feet below the ice. The wreck has become a national monument and those with a liking for ice, a taste for adventure and the odd £6,449 to spare can now visit it on the sea floor near Resolute Bay in one of the new breed of 'submersibles'. Details from Wildwings Worldwide Travel in Bristol (whence sailed Frank Aldersley and Richard Wardour in *The Frozen Deep*) - telephone 0117 9848040.

THE UNDER-RATED WOMAN IN WHITE

In a recent literary interview (The Sunday Times of 4 April 1999), James Callaghan as well as nominating Charles Dickens as his favourite author, *Jude the Obscure* as the saddest book he has read, described the *The Woman in White* as "a dramatic story powerfully told" and considered it his most under-rated book.

M. R JAMES WEEKEND

Ghosts and Scholars, the magazine devoted to M. R. James and his work will celebrate its twentieth anniversary during 1999. To mark the event, an M. R. James weekend is being held on Saturday 30th and Sunday 31st October at the Royal Victoria and Bull Hotel, 16-18 High Street, Rochester, Kent. The weekend will consist of talks, a quiz, dramatised short stories and a panel chaired by the guest of honour, Professor Christopher Frayling. For further information send a stamped addressed envelope to Katherine Haynes, 150 Elstree Park, Barnet Lane, Boreham Wood, Herts WD6 2RP.

It is the nature of Truth to struggle to the light. (*Man and Wife*)

If you want to make a dish of lies digestible, always give it a garnish of truth. (*Armada*)

Telling the truth...is a more complicated affair than you seem to think. (*The Evil Genius*)