



# ***THE WILKIE COLLINS SOCIETY***

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**NEWSLETTER**

**WINTER 2000**

## **WCS JOURNAL 2000**

Accompanying this Newsletter is Volume 3 of the *Wilkie Collins Society Journal*. Our thanks are due once again to the painstaking efforts of the editors, Graham Law and Lillian Nayder for putting together such an interesting collection of essays. These includes articles on *Basil*, Ellen Wood, Violence of the Working Woman, Evangelicism, Hugh Conway, and Dorothy L. Sayers.

## **DOROTHY L. SAYERS**

This last essay by Susan Haynes is particularly topical since a large archive of books and papers of Dorothy Sayers is being sold at the Sotheby's English Literature sale of 19 December 2000 (lots 251-302). Sayers, of course wrote the unfinished biography of Collins, edited by E. R. Gregory and published by Toledo University in 1977. She had accumulated a large collection of papers and manuscript material most of which had been sold to the Humanities Research Center at Austin, Texas. Although her own archive consisted of 37 works by Collins, 24 manuscripts and proof copies and 152 autograph letters, she apparently denied access to this material to both Kenneth Robinson and Robert Ashley when they were working on their own biographies. There is very little direct Collins material in the present sale although lot 289 contains the thirteen page typescript of her introduction to the 1944 Everyman edition of *The Moonstone* "with minor manuscript corrections in ink and annotations in pencil with the stamp of her agent Pearn, Pollinger & Higham Ltd, and date stamps 27 October 1942 and 9 February 1942."

Sayers, of course, was a great admirer of Collins, recognising his talents during the first half of the twentieth century at a time when he had lapsed from his earlier public popularity, and mentioned him frequently in her writings about the mystery or detective novel. In November 1930, for example, she published an essay in the *London Mercury* called ‘The Present Status of the Mystery Story’. Here she wrote “Wilkie Collins was a writer of very great literary merit, whose work was read and admired by Dickens, Tolstoy, Leigh Hunt, Swinburne, and other people of importance in their day and ours. He was in no sense of the word a hack writer; he took his art seriously.” She continues “we need a great new popular genius to ... give us a new *Moonstone* or a new Sherlock Holmes. And defending the Victorian sensationalists in her final paragraph, Sayers concludes “But read the scene where Walter Hartright meets Anne Catherick upon the road from Hampstead, or that in which Sir Percival Glyde is trapped in the burning church. Follow Betteredge and Franklin Blake as they track Rosanna Spearman to the Shivering Sands... if these passages are not good writing, then I do not know what good writing is.”

#### ***SERIALIZING FICTION IN THE VICTORIAN PRESS* BY GRAHAM LAW**

This new title by the co-editor of the *WCS Journal*, Graham Law, has just been published by Palgrave (Macmillan/St Martin’s Press), London/New York (ISBN 0-333-76019-0 (UK) or 0-312-23574-7 (US)). Graham, who has written several essays on the subject of serialisation and syndication, contributes the following notes, culled from the publicity material announcing his new book:

“That most Victorian novels were initially published and purchased in instalments is now well understood. But attention has tended to focus on monthly serialization in metropolitan literary magazines. However, this ground-breaking study shows clearly how, from the late 1860s at least, serial publication in syndicates of weekly news miscellanies issued throughout Britain, and indeed its Empire, was increasingly important in cultural as well as economic terms.

This approach generates new insights into the conditions under which novels were read and written, whether by long-forgotten explorers of the mass-market like David Pae, popularising authors like Braddon, or major artists like Hardy. However, Wilkie Collins, whose final six novels were

all published initially as newspaper serials, remains one of the most important cases brought forward. His career as a serial novelist and his relationships with the syndicating agent W.F. Tillotson and the literary agent A. P. Watt are all discussed here in some detail.

Drawing on extensive archival research, *Serializing Fiction in the Victorian Press* is the first comprehensive account of the publication of instalment fiction in Victorian Newspapers. A detailed descriptive history of the rise and decline of the practice of syndication is followed by a wide-ranging discussion of its implications for readership, authorship, and fictional form. The argument is supported both by illustrations and by tables presenting a wealth of data in easily assimilable form. This examination of a neglected corner of the market-place for later Victorian fiction represents an important contribution to both literary and publishing history.

## **OXFORD**

The enclosed 'Oxford World's Classic Magazine' shows that OUP now publish eight critical editions of Collins's works (*Armada*, *Basil*, *The Dead Secret*, *Hide and Seek*, *The Law and the Lady*, *Mad Monkton*, *Man and Wife*, and *Miss or Mrs?*). Some of these may be the only inexpensive editions available. The Wilkie Collins internet discussion group has reported that *The Dead Secret*, in particular, is currently out of print from Sutton Publishing who otherwise maintain a much longer list of Collins titles.

## **BOOK REFERENCES**

It is always remarkable how the standard reference books on quotations almost universally manage to neglect Collins's works. In the 1997 *Oxford Dictionary of Literary Quotations*, he does achieve a single reference in the section on 'Audience': "It is perhaps hardly too much to say that the future of English fiction may rest with the Unknown Public- a reading public of three millions which lies right out of the pale of true literary civilization - which is now waiting to be taught the difference between a good book and a bad." This was originally written in an essay for *Household Words* (21 August 1858) and reprinted in *My Miscellanies* (1863) although the current dictionary's source is the 1932 *Fiction and the Reading Public* by Leavis. Throughout his career Wilkie was keen to be published in cheap editions to achieve the widest possible readership.

He consistently aspired to gain “The readers who rank by millions ... who give the widest reputations, who return the richest rewards, and who will therefore command the service of the best writers of their time.” He would therefore have been pleased to be in the present company of Charles Dickens, P. D. James and possibly even his namesake Joan Collins (“I’ve written bits of novels since I was six or seven. I was always very good at English at school.”). Wilkie, on the other hand, was often self-disparaging about his own English

Collins also appears in the 1999 paperback version of *The New Oxford Book of English Prose*. In the company of over 100 other distinguished authors, the editor John Grose includes three passages from Collins. These are the first meeting with Marian Halcombe at Limmeridge House which concludes with the famous sentence “The lady is ugly!”; a description of the shabby lawyer’s clerk from *Armadale*; and the passage from *The Moonstone* where Sergeant Cuff discovers the smear of paint and dismisses the bungling Superintendent Seegrave.

*The Moonstone*, together with a small portrait of Collins, also features on p. 377 of *The Illustrated History of the 19<sup>th</sup> Century*, published earlier this year and now to be found in remainder bookshops. “This, the most famous novel by British writer William Wilkie Collins (1824-1889), introduces the figure of Sergeant Cuff\_ and confirms Collins’ status as the first author in English to write full-length detective novels. His *The Woman in White* (1860) is generally considered to be the first of the genre.” Some might argue with the details of the above but it is encouraging to find Collins noted as a figure of importance in a non-specialist and essentially popular book.

### **BROADVIEW EDITION OF *BLIND LOVE***

Don Richard Cox, Lindsay Young Distinguished Professor of the University of Tennessee, together with a colleague, Maria Bachman, are preparing a critical edition of *Blind Love* for Broadview Press. This was Collins’s last novel, eventually completed by Walter Besant, and. is particularly interesting because of it was based on a true life crime known as the Von Scheurer Fraud. In keeping with the previous, always excellent Broadview editions of Collins’s work (*The Evil Genius*, *Heart and Science* and *The Moonstone*) there will be extensive notes and full details of the

background to the case. It is expected that *Blind Love* will be published in about eighteen months time.

## **SUMMER WALK**

As mentioned in the last Newsletter, the WCS held a joint meeting with the Victorian Society on the 9 September. Altogether about 30 of us met outside 17 Hanover Terrace where Wilkie lived from 1850 to 1856. The WCS contingent was truly international with six members from Holland over for the weekend and one from Chicago who had come more or less directly from the airport. The Chairman welcomed everyone to the walk and outlined the proposed route, which was loosely based on William Clarke's *Rambles around Marylebone*. This had, however, been expertly rearranged by Paul Lewis to take in most of the Marylebone places of Collins interest and to form a circuit finishing conveniently close to the starting point. Paul has recently spent a good deal of time in various archives identifying where street numbers and names have changed since the 1900s and we all had the benefits of his research during the afternoon. Andrew Gasson added some extra details and supplied some contemporary quotations from Wilkie's writings and the recently published *Letters*. The walk covered about four miles and took about three hours at a fairly leisurely pace.

For those unable to attend, a printed version of the walk is included with this Newsletter. Also, there is advance notice of a future walk by the Manor House Operatic Society for one evening next summer. This organisation runs an annual treasure hunt as a fund raising exercise and - with a little bit of persuasion - have decided use the Marylebone area for their next outing. Although not specifically a Collins walk it will cover much of the same ground and knowledgeable WCS members should have a head start with the questions! Further details will be available for the next Newsletter.

## **RECOLLECTIONS OF WILKIE COLLINS IN CASSELL'S JOURNAL**

WCS member and antiquarian bookseller from Lewes, Richard Beaton, must take the credit for finding previously unrecorded memoirs about Wilkie Collins. *Cassell's Saturday Journal* for Saturday 5 March 1887 (No. 179 Vol. 4, pp. 355-356) contains 'A Novelist on Novel-Writing. An Interview with Mr. Wilkie Collins'. This short piece is particularly

interesting since it has not been noted in any of the standard bibliographies or biographies. Wilkie was never keen on publishing his memoirs and two years later, in 1889, he declined a similar proposal from the Dutch-American publisher Edward Bok by saying “we have had (to my mind) more “Reminiscences” latterly published in England than are really wanted. It will soon become a distinction not to have written one’s autobiography.” This present interview mainly covers familiar ground, discussing his approach to plot construction, regarding *Armadale* as his best book, and his high opinion of Sir Walter Scott, Charles Dickens and Fennimore Cooper. We hope to provide this as a reprint for WCS members some time in 2001.

### ***THE WOMAN IN WHITE - THE 1982 TELEVISION SERIES***

By comparison with the appalling recent BBC television adaptation of *The Woman in White*, the 1982 version is in a different league. It starred Jenny Seagrove as Laura Fairlie, Diana Quick as Marian Halcombe, Ian Richardson as Mr Fairlie and Alan Badel, in his last role, as Count Fosco. The production was originally broadcast in five episodes and runs for 4½ to 5 hours. The WCS is hoping to give members the opportunity to see the complete adaptation, probably one Sunday in the spring of 2001. We will choose a central London location and the timing is likely to be from afternoon to early evening with a break for refreshment. Those interested should contact Andrew Gasson at the above address or by email at [apogee@gasson.demon.co.uk](mailto:apogee@gasson.demon.co.uk).

### **COLLINS AND CRICKET**

It is not really known what Wilkie’s views were on cricket although he would probably have disapproved considering his opinion on athleticism in *Man and Wife* and his comment in *Say No* (1884) “The worst curse of human life is the detestable necessity of taking exercise.” With the help of Paul Lewis, we have unearthed a few quotes. In *The Dead Secret* Wilkie refers to Doctor Chennery as “the best bowler in the Long Beckley cricket-club.” In *Man and Wife* he describes in Chapter 16 how “The usual “Sports” were to take place--such as running, jumping, “putting” the hammer, throwing cricket-balls, and the like.” Chapter 43 asks “What does the new generation know? It knows how to row, how to shoot, how to play at cricket, and how to bat” followed in Chapter 45 with “The solemnity takes its rise in an indomitable national passion for hardening the arms and legs, by throwing hammers and cricket-balls. . . . Any person

who presumes to see any physical evil involved in these exercises to the men who practice them, or any moral obstruction in the exhibition itself to those civilizing influences on which the true greatness of all nations depends, is a person without a biceps, who is simply incomprehensible.” Finally, in *A Rogue’s Life* Frank Softly, the narrator, describes how he “was sent to one of the most fashionable and famous of the great public schools....and learned to play at cricket.”

It was interesting, therefore, to discover two good friends of Wilkie in a well know cricketing painting. The picture in question is by G. H. Barrable & R. Ponsonby Staples and shows the 1887 match between England and Australia set against the old pavilion at Lords. The key personages in the painting are the Prince and Princess of Wales with a disdainful Lillie Langtrety looking the other way. But also with the spectators are the American actress Mary Anderson, a renowned beauty of the time whose memoirs include correspondence with Wilkie with his intention to write a play specially for her; and seated separately Augustin Daly, the American impresario. Daly staged Collins’s plays for the New York theatre and brought his touring company to England on five occasions. It was to Augustin Daly that Collins gave the unpublished manuscript of *Ioláni* – perhaps during this particular visit to London. The painting is exhibited in the Museum at Lords cricket ground and is reproduced in the 1987 *Double Century a History of MCC and Cricket* by Tony Lewis.

## **COLLINS AND THE AMERICAN THEATRE**

Most references to the production of Collins’s plays in the US revolve around Augustin Daly, who apart from theatre management was a noted dramatist, translator and critic. His activities seem to have been confined to New York where he staged *No Name* in 1871 and *The New Magdalen* in 1873. Now another American director and actor has come to light in the person of David Belasco (1859-1931 ). He staged a joint dramatisation with James H. Le Roy of *The New Magdalen* on 14 July 1873 at Shiels Opera House in San Francisco and followed this with a production of *Man and Wife* between 18 August and 18 October.

## SOME ADDITIONAL NOTES FROM PAUL LEWIS

### REVIEWS

*The Dons and Mr Dickens* is the fourth pastiche by William J. Palmer based on what he calls the ‘secret journals of Wilkie Collins’. The book is written in the first person by ‘Wilkie’ and the story is a well enough told yarn about an attempt to assassinate the Prime Minister. Sadly, this book pays even less regard to the true facts of Wilkie’s life than its predecessors. The problems start with the cover which features a poor picture of Wilkie that is in fact mirror-reversed and end with the last pages which find Wilkie embracing a warm family Christmas - as we know, Wilkie hated Christmas. There are mistakes on almost every page. Unlike Wilkie, Palmer couldn’t even check the calendar, calling November 30<sup>th</sup> 1853 a Saturday (it was a Wednesday) and then bizarrely getting it right by fixing December 10<sup>th</sup> to be a Saturday too! But perhaps a small error when you recall that Dickens and Collins together with Augustus Egg were in fact together in Europe from October 10<sup>th</sup> 1853 to December 11<sup>th</sup>. Among the solecisms - bicycles (not yet invented), cameras (much more familiar than he says), flash powder (not used except in Hollywood films); public houses closing at 3 p.m. (not introduced until 1914); Wilkie and Dickens drinking pints of beer; trains leaving Victoria to travel direct to Oxford (and with a brougham strapped to a freight car); Wilkie being an Oxford alumni; and Ellen Ternan too old. The mistakes come faster than the thrills as you turn the pages. And these are just the new errors - the old ones about Wilkie’s paramour Meg, an ex-prostitute, and Palmer’s persistent belief that Collins was a sort of doltish companion to the genius Dickens, grate on the nerves like a bad signature tune. Palmer is clearly enjoying himself – giving the name ‘Morse’ to an Oxford policeman and placing Mycroft Holmes as a real character in the plot – more than this reader at any rate did. *The Dons and Mr Dickens* by William J. Palmer, St Martin’s Minotaur, New York 2000. You have been warned!

### LITERARY CRITICISM

*The Fiction of Geopolitics* by Christopher GoGwilt, Stanford University Press 2000. I didn’t expect to enjoy the chapter on Wilkie in *The Fiction of Geopolitics* and *The Moonstone*, but I did. I found it a very persuasive argument that there is a strong thread of comment on Britain’s dependence on the colonies for their wealth and power



“behind every English estate there is likely to be, screened from view, a colonial plantation... In *The Moonstone*, screened from the Verinder’s estate by a ‘plantation of firs’, are the Shivering Sands, the novel’s primal scene of sensational mystery, whose topographical deformity is metonymically linked to Rosanna [Spearman]’s vision of ‘hundreds of suffocating people.’”

GoGwilt links the story to a painting by Sir David Wilkie (Wilkie’s godfather) of the aftermath of the capture of Seringapatam and discusses the Moonstone itself as a surrogate for Rachel Verinder’s virginity.

## ART NOTES

One of William Collins’s major works of art came up for auction at Sotheby’s in London on November 30<sup>th</sup>. *Skittle Players* was painted in 1832 and was one of Wilkie’s favourite works by his father. In *Memoirs of the Life of William Collins* (1848) Wilkie devotes four pages to a detailed description of this “strikingly original composition of eight principal, and eight second and third rate figures; a disposition of light and shade, harmonious and scientific; and a tone of colour, brilliant, various and true.” (vol II p. 4)

It was sold to a Mr George Young in 1844 for 400 guineas (£420). Wilkie complained to his agent A. P. Watt that it was then resold in 1875 for 2,400 guineas and was “received with rounds of applause, on its appearance in the auction room.” He believed that the artist or his descendants should benefit from this gain in value – part of his campaign for copyright law. Such a law now applies in several European countries as the ‘droit de suite’ but was rejected earlier this year by the British government. How would Wilkie have felt to know that this picture fetched £82,000 (more than £95,000 with buyer’s premium and VAT) at its sale in the year 2000?

Charles Collins’s art is featured in a piece by Robert Raven in *The Dickensian* (Summer 2000, pp.118-126). He examines – deconstructs might be a better word – the sketches which Charles did for illustrations of *Edwin Drood* (they were never used) to give clues to Dickens’s plot intentions. The analysis depends on Charles having access to Dickens’s thoughts before he wrote the parts he finished before his death.

## WEB NOTES

An image of *Skittle Players* and a transcript of Wilkie's comments about it from *Memoirs* are on my website [www.wilkiecollins.com](http://www.wilkiecollins.com). Follow menu item 6 - Wilkie's Family. Other new items on the Wilkie Collins website are images of some early editions of some of his books and the illustrations in them (menu item 1) and a growing archive of more than 40 images of Wilkie drawn mainly from contemporary sources including photographs, cartoons, and paintings (menu item 2).

I have recently been enjoying very much <https://www.umass.edu/AdelphiTheatreCalendar> which provides a full day-by-day list of performances at the Adelphi theatre in London from 1806-1900 including three of Wilkie's plays - *Black and White* 1868, *No Thoroughfare* 1867 and 1870, and *Rank and Riches* 1882. The site includes cast lists and supporting plays and of course enables the careers of actors and actresses who performed in his plays to be tracked.

<http://www.bemorecreative.com/one/2042.htm> is more remarkable for publishing five quotes from Wilkie - how rare they are - than anything else though its links to search engines may encourage further browsing.

<http://www.stmarylebone.org.uk> has a marvellous early picture of the church where Wilkie was christened on 18 February 1824 together with a history of this fine building finished in 1817.

Finally, the following web-site, <http://www.webincunabula.com/html/english/books/c/co/noname.htm> has a nice electronic version of the 1873 Harper's Library Edition of *No Name* together with the illustrations.

And a reminder that there is an active internet Wilkie Collins reading group. We are currently reading *The Dead Secret*. The email discussions can be quite lively and new members are always welcome. Find out more from Susan Dara at [susandara@aol.com](mailto:susandara@aol.com).

## WILKIE IN THE PRESS

A piece about silent films in the *Los Angeles Times* (27 July) led me on a search for a 1917 silent film version of *The Woman in White*. Originally

called, according to the newspaper, *The Unfortunate Marriage* it is now listed at <http://imdb.com> as *The Woman in White*. The Library of Congress appears to own a copy of the 68 minute film which was shown in L.A. that night.

In *The Daily Telegraph* two days later Christopher Howse called for a dramatisation of *The Law and Lady* sponsored by disability rights organisations for its portrayal of the powerful but legless Miserrimus Dexter and his cousin Ariel whom he describes as having ‘learning difficulties’. A nice idea.

Matthew Sweet tells us (*Independent on Sunday* 29/10/00) that “nobody has successfully adapted Wilkie Collins for the screen.” And three weeks later he discusses female facial hair (and hairiness generally) recalling “Wilkie Collins received several letters from men who wished to make marriage proposals to his heroine, Marian Halcombe, a woman possessed of ‘dark down on her upper lips [which] was almost a moustache”.

Travel writers often invoke Wilkie’s ghost. Oliver Burkeman (*The Guardian* 30/9/00) wrote of Cumbria “The strange dark beauty of the cloud-shrouded crags and fells of northern Cumbria has had a bad press ever since Charles Dickens and Wilkie Collins made a disastrous trip up Carrock Fell in 1871 (Dickens moaned about the views and Collins sprained-his ankle and sulked for the rest of the trip).” And a long piece about Saltash by Martin Hesp in *The Western Morning News* (9/10/00) includes this tantalising quote “the writer Wilkie Collins also took a ferry to Saltash and ended up in a tavern, ‘Filled with shrimpers, sailors, fishermen and watermen, all looming large through a fog of tobacco, and all chirping merrily over their cups’”. If you can identify this quote, e-mail me at [paul@paullewis.co.uk](mailto:paul@paullewis.co.uk) The first one pulled out of the hat will get a free subscription for 2001.

Wilkie’s drug habit is resurrected in *The Birmingham Post* (4/11/00) with a lengthy quote from *An Empire of Plants* by Toby and Will Musgrave. “Two writers of fiction famously addicted to opium were [Coleridge] and Wilkie Collins... There is strong evidence that Wilkie Collins lived in almost constant pain as a result of a serious rheumatic condition and that laudanum offered him relief, particularly of sleep, that he needed in order to function.”

*The Guardian* (15 September) rated *The Woman in White* the 23<sup>rd</sup> best classic written before 1900 and Russell Hoban (*The Daily Telegraph* 28/10/00) took it on holiday with him – along with Henry James’s *Portrait of a Lady*, Gogol’s collected tales and a John Grisham novel.

Finally there is the usual crop of reviews of new novels where Wilkie’s name crops up as the gold standard. “He has clearly immersed himself in the wilder works of Sheridan Le Fanu and Wilkie Collins” (*The Daily Telegraph* 26/8/00) ; “The literary echoes raised are those of Charles Dickens and Wilkie Collins” (*Daily Mail* 1/9/00); “Even Wilkie Collins would have admired the clever plot of this mystery” (*The Scotsman* 3/10/00); “The fearless Sally Lockhart, an orphaned Victorian girl who rides like a Cossack and survives plots worthy of Wilkie Collins” (*Sunday Times* 8/10/00).

Both *The Times* and the *Irish Press* remembered the anniversary of Wilkie’s death on 23<sup>rd</sup> September.

### LOCATING THE VICTORIANS

In Summer 2001 the Science Museum, the Victoria & Albert Museum and the Natural History Museum in London are hosting what they describe as “a great Victorian festival” to celebrate the 150<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Great Exhibition and the 100<sup>th</sup> of the death of Queen Victoria. There will be major exhibitions and an international conference from 12-15 July to “interpret the 19<sup>th</sup> century for the benefit of the 21<sup>st</sup>” The Society is currently considering whether to have a stand there. More from the website <http://www.sciencemuseum.org.uk/researchers/victorians/>

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