



THE WILKIE COLLINS SOCIETY

PATRONS Faith Clarke, Baroness James of Holland Park

Chairman Andrew Gasson, 3 Merton House, 36 Belsize Park, London, NW3 4EA

Membership Paul Lewis, 4 Ernest Gardens, Chiswick, London W4 3QU

NEWSLETTER

WINTER 2002

OUR NEW PATRON

We are delighted to announce that the Wilkie Collins Society has a new patron in the distinguished form of Baroness James of Holland Park who now joins our other long-standing patron, Faith Clarke, great-granddaughter of Wilkie Collins.

Baroness James is better known to us all as P. D. James, the creator of detective policeman Adam Dalgliesh. Born in Oxford in 1920, her family moved to Cambridge when she was eleven and with holidays taken at Lowestoft, East Anglia has become a frequent setting for her novels. For several years P. D. James worked first for the National Health Service and then with the Civil Service where she secured a senior promotion to the criminal policy department at the Home Office. In this position she was responsible for appointing forensic scientists and advising ministers on juvenile crime, also issues which reappear in her novels.

P.D. James' first book, *Cover Her Face*, was published in 1962 and followed by several other successful novels. Her enduring fame was established with the 1977 *Death of an Expert Witness* and she began writing full-time in 1979. Since then, the books and television adaptations have thrilled us all and both she and her characters have become household names.

P. D. James was awarded the OBE in 1983 and created a Life Peer in 1991. She chaired the Booker Prize panel in 1987 and since 1997 has

been President of the Society of Authors – of which Wilkie was an enthusiastic founder member in 1884 but only a vice-president. Throughout her writing career, there have also been numerous awards which include *Shroud for a Nightingale* (1971), Silver Dagger Award (Crime Writers Association) and Best Novel Award (Mystery Writers of America); *An Unsuitable Job for a Woman* (1973) Best Novel Award (MWA); *The Black Tower* (1975) Silver Dagger Award (CWA); *A Taste for Death* (1986) Best novel Award (MWA); Diamond Dagger Award (CWA 1987); *The Children of Men* (1992) Deo Gloria Award for a science fiction story; and more recently the Grandmaster Award (MWA 1999).

Wilkie would have been delighted to know he had as a patron such an illustrious successor in the art of crime fiction as Baroness James. Like the rest of us, he would also eagerly await her next novel.

MURDER, MYSTERY AND WILKIE

We had the pleasure of hearing P. D. James in person when she told the Royal Society of Medicine on 2 October that “Sergeant Cuff was the earliest and certainly the most successful” of detectives in crime fiction. Speaking at a meeting of the RSM’s History of Medicine section on ‘Murder and mystery: medical science and the crime novel’ she praised *The Moonstone* as Collins’s “single if remarkable [detective] novel” which pioneered the technique of keeping the reader guessing who was guilty, moving the target from one character to another. She also told her audience of around 100 people that “a novel that lacks scientific credibility loses its power” and said Collins was the first to realise this. “Wilkie Collins had a deep respect for medical and scientific fact” and took “meticulous steps in his research”.

WCS JOURNAL

Enclosed with this Newsletter is Volume 5 of *The Wilkie Collins Society Journal* in our usual A5 format. We are once again grateful to our editors, Graham Law and Lillian Nayder for their great efforts and skill in producing such a worthwhile publication. This year’s issue will be particularly useful to students of Collins with a detailed analysis of Charles Dickens’s letters to Wilkie Collins by Paul Lewis; Graham Law’s

inventory and discussion of the Chatto & Windus archive at Reading University; a further essay on *Lady Audley* by Claire Hughes; and Casey Cothran's essay on the British and American versions of *Black and White* by Collins and Fechter. In addition we have the usual range of book reviews.

MEMBERSHIP

Membership subscriptions for 2003 are due on 1 January and if they have not already been sent should now be forwarded to Membership Secretary, Paul Lewis, at the above address. For this year we are holding the subscription at £10 for UK and Europe and £18 for the rest of the world. Please remember that payments from abroad must be made in Pounds Sterling to avoid the high cost of converting overseas funds.

The Wilkie Collins Society has a worldwide membership that this year reached a new record level of 136 people. Although most members are in the UK, we have Wilkie enthusiasts in 14 other countries – USA, Japan, Australia, Netherlands, France, Germany, Spain, Canada, Czech Republic, Italy, Jersey, Russia, and South Korea. If you know any friends or relatives who love Wilkie why not introduce them to the Society for Christmas?

***THE WOMAN IN WHITE* – AN EARLY FILM VERSION**

The ever alert Katherine Haynes has spotted that London's National Film Theatre is showing the 1929 Herbert Wilcox version of *The Woman in White* on Monday 20 January at 6.20 pm and Wednesday 22 January at 8.40 pm. This was the last of several silent versions which dated from as early as 1912. The following are the NFT programme notes:

“Herbert Wilcox's prime strategy was to make prestige productions, using well-known plays or novels with stellar attractions from the US. What novel had a better track record for attracting financiers than Wilkie Collins' perennially popular gothic mystery novel? And what American Star could better bring in the crowds than Blanch Sweet? Promised in marriage to the despicable Sir Percival Glyde (Cecil Humphreys), beautiful young heiress Laura Fairlie (Sweet) stumbles into a diabolical

fraud cooked up by Sir Percy and the even more odious Count Fosco (Frank Perfit). For many years thought to be a lost film, this is the first time this will have been seen since its original release.” (Bryony Dixon).

For further information contact the National Film Theatre, South Bank, London SE1 8XT, Box Office: 020 7928 3232. www.bfi.org.uk/nft. Non-members of the NFT may book after Friday 20 December.

BOOKS

In the Summer newsletter we previewed a new edition of Wilkie’s short story *Who Killed Zebedee?* from the newly formed Hesperus Press. It finally came out on 16 September and was well worth the wait. The edition is well produced, nice to look at and easy to read with a good introduction by Martin Jarvis and a short biography of Wilkie. *Zebedee* was first published as a Christmas story in 1880 in the New York *Spirit of the Times* and was republished as ‘Mr Policeman and the Cook’ in *Little Novels* 1887. Also in the book is *John Jago’s Ghost* (1873) which is based on a story Wilkie came across on his trip to the USA in 1873-74 and is sometimes called either ‘The Dead Alive’ or ‘The Morwick Farm Mystery’. ISBN 1843910195

Hesperus has also published *The Haunted House* – the 1859 Christmas number of *Household Words*. It contains Wilkie’s ‘The Ghost in the Cupboard Room’ which was later reprinted as ‘Blow up with the Brig!’, as well as two ghost stories and an introduction by Dickens and four more stories by authors including Elizabeth Gaskell and George Augustus Sala. It is introduced by Peter Ackroyd and has short biographies of the six writers. ISBN 1843910217.

At £5.99 each these books are wonderful stocking fillers for Wilkie fans. More on www.hesperus.com

Wildside Press, based in Pennsylvania in the USA promises a new edition in February of *The Evil Genius* edited by Amy Sterling Casil, a Californian science fiction writer. ISBN 1592249612. The company has told the WCS that it intends “to reissue all of the texts eventually”. The book is at the printers and can be ordered through Amazon.

The Summer 2002 number of *The Dickensian* notes that there is a new edition of *The Lazy Tour of Two Idle Apprentices* by Dickens and Collins. This has been published by the Christchurch, New Zealand, branch of the Dickens Fellowship which also re-issued *No Thoroughfare*, *The Haunted House*, *The Lamplighter* and *The Lamplighter's Story*. Further details are available from P. O. Box 21-392, Otautahi, New Zealand 8030.

The Lazy Tour also receives a mention in a paragraph about walking in the latest issue of *Mr Dick's Kite*, Alan Watt's enjoyable little newsletter sent to members of the Dickens's Fellowship. Wilkie and Charles Collins are also mentioned in connection with the Exhibition about Katie Dickens – Dickens's daughter who was married to Charles – at the Dickens House Museum which ran from last July.

THE DICKENS MAGAZINE

Grayswood Press are publishing the Second Series of *The Dickens Magazine* which this time concentrates on *Hard Times*, the author's biting and satirical novel. The series consists of six issues and explores the social, economic and literary background as well as considering Dickens's influence on his contemporaries and successors. The editorial team consists of Alan Watts, Thelma Grove, Tony Williams and David Parker. Further details from the publishers at Rockfield, Ash Tree Close, Grayswood, Surrey GU27 2DS (tel. 01428 656665).

MUSICAL WOMAN IN WHITE?

Andrew Lloyd Webber, composer and writer of such hits as *Phantom of the Opera*, *Evita*, *Jesus Christ Superstar*, *Cats*, and *Starlight Express* is reported to be working on a musical version of *The Woman in White*. However, at the opening of a new production of *Cats* he is reported as saying that it is proving difficult to adapt the material for a musical, complaining "It is like an operation." And *The Sunday Times* reports him as saying "I'm kicking about somewhat just now, annoyed that I haven't found a story that I feel I can do what I do best to. I've got so many tunes sitting around at the moment And it is so irritating."

In his own time, Wilkie, in common with other nineteenth century figures, had his works celebrated by pieces of popular music. At least three of these related to Collins's hugely popular story and included: *The Woman in White Waltz* by C. H. R. Marriott and sold at 4s.; *The Woman in White* with words by J. E. Carpenter and music by C. W. Glover at 2s. 6d; and *The Fosco Galop* by G. Richardson at 4s.

WILKIE'S WALK

A short programme on BBC Radio 4 on 21 November reconstructed Wilkie's walk in August 1859 in Broadstairs, Kent, when he was writing *The Woman in White*. Collins later claimed he was inspired by the sight of the North Foreland Lighthouse – “as stiff and as weird as my white woman” – to give the book its title. He wrote to tell Wills, the sub-editor of Dickens's *All The Year Round*, who was desperately waiting for the title to set the type for the first episode of the story. Dickens wrote back at once to say “I have not the slightest doubt that The Woman in White is the name of names, and very title of very titles.” The walk was conducted by Richard Francis accompanied by Wilkie Collins Society member and writer on Victorian literature Matthew Sweet whose edition of *The Woman in White* is being reissued by Penguin in February (ISBN 0141439610).

THE BIG READ

The BBC is launching a search for Britain's best-loved novel. Everyone will have the opportunity to nominate their favourite and the top ten will then enter an intense run-off with celebrity supporters to find the one book we love best. The format will be similar to the BBC's Great Britain series in which 1.6 million people voted for the 'greatest' Briton – who turned out to be Winston Churchill. The search starts in March and will cover the BBC's television, radio, and online services. So plenty of opportunity to make sure that Wilkie Collins features on the list!

ART NOTES

Wilkie's brother Charles Allston Collins (1828-1873) was a well known artist in his earlier years and a close associate of the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood founded in 1848 by John Everett Millais, William Holman

Hunt. and Dante Gabriel Rosetti. One of Charles's finest pictures, *Berengaria's Alarm*, is back on public display at the Manchester Art Gallery. now reopened in the city centre after a £35 million refurbishment. Painted in 1850, it shows Berengaria, the wife of Richard Coeur de Lion, alarmed at being offered her husband's girdle by an itinerant salesman. She sees it as evidence that he is dead. You can see an image at <https://artuk.org/discover/artworks/berengarias-alarm-for-the-safety-of-her-husband-richard-coeur-de-lion-awakened-by-the-sight-of-his-girdle-offered-for-sale-at-rome-204696>

Two pictures by Wilkie's father, William Collins RA, have been brought out of the basement at Tate Britain in London. *Prawn Fishers* (1829) and *Early Morning in Cromer* (1846) are now on display in the Marine Paintings gallery. *Early Morning* was a favourite of Wilkie and he was outraged when the picture, which was bought for 300 gns (£315) by a Mr Gillott, was sold on his death in 1872 for 3,600 guineas (£3,780) at the auction house of Christie and Manson. Wilkie believed that the heirs of artists should enjoy a share of later gains in the value of their works – a law which is now in force in most of the European Union but not yet in the UK. Both these pictures can be seen in rather poor quality reproductions on the Tate website www.tate.org.uk

More William Collins can be found in 'Love, Labour, and Loss' at the Royal Albert Memorial Museum in Exeter, Devon (01392 665 858) until January 4th. The exhibition looks at the depiction of farm animals in art and one of Collins's most famous works, *The Sale of the Pet Lamb* (1812), is there alongside Damien Hirst's *Prodigal Son* (1994), his famous two embalmed halves of a calf. More on *The Sale of the Pet Lamb* including an image and Wilkie's own description of it at www.wilkiecollins.com menu item 4.

WILKIE CUTTINGS

Many cuttings reflect the popularity of Wilkie Collins – especially *The Woman in White* – as a good read with Christmas approaching. Michael Dirda, the book reviewer for 15 years on *The Washington Post*, devotes a paragraph to “arguably the greatest 19th-century sensation novel” and concludes by saying “If you pick up this long, long novel and shake it, nothing will fall out” (*Washington Post* 10 November 2002). A week earlier Louise Walsh in *The Sunday Times* said that “Long nights call for

Gothic classics and Victorian melodramas” and recommends *The Woman in White* as one such example.

Wilkie featured in a quiz in the *Liverpool Daily Echo* (2 November). No prizes to our members for guessing “Which Wilkie Collins book is said to be the first detective story written in English?”

A news report in *The Times* (16 October) about the Washington sniper looked at the different traditions in detective fiction in the UK and the USA and put Wilkie alongside Agatha Christie for novels where criminals pursue “an external motive, often money or a legacy.”

Wilkie was mentioned in a review of the film of A. S. Byatt’s *Possession* (Matthew Sweet *Independent on Sunday* 13 October) as well as several reviews of Michel Faber’s epic novel set in 1876, *The Crimson Petal and the White*, which has a couple of references to Wilkie Collins in it. *White Mughals* by William Dalrymple was reviewed in the *Sunday Times* (6 October) as “a moving romance that borrows unabashedly from Wilkie Collins”. Caroline Moore in the *Sunday Telegraph* (14 July) called *The House* by Teresa Waugh “high-spirited, enjoyable nonsense – rather like Wilkie Collins crossed with Nancy Mitford”.

A letter from Wilkie to his friend Holman Hunt giving him dietary advice was quoted in *The Independent* on 8 October, the 117th anniversary of its writing.

The London *Time Out* (18 September) claimed that the pub Ye Olde Cheshire Cheese in London’s Fleet Street played “host to regulars of the calibre of Charles Dickens, Thackeray, and Wilkie Collins”. And the Trafalgar Tavern, Park Row, London SE10 also claimed the same trilogy of authors as “regulars” in *The Observer* (1 September). The evidence to support either claim is not known.

PL
APG