



THE WILKIE COLLINS SOCIETY

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NEWSLETTER

WINTER 2003

MARCH CONFERENCE CANCELLED

For a variety of administrative reasons, the conference planned for 6 March 2004 has had to be cancelled. We hope this hasn't caused any inconvenience but in its place we can announce an even more exciting meeting....

P. D. JAMES – A JOINT MEETING OF THE WCS AND THE THACKERAY SOCIETY

Our new Patron and eminent author, P. D. James, has kindly agreed to speak at a joint meeting of the WCS and Thackeray Society on Thursday 27 May 2004. The Thackeray Society is a prestigious literary society associated with the well-known Reform Club in London's Pall Mall. It takes its name from the novelist who was an early member of the Reform and is the Club's literary and historical society, founded more than twenty years ago. Members meet in the Club's spacious library for dinner followed by a serious talk on a literary or historical subject.

The evening will therefore take the form of a formal dinner – black tie for gentlemen – followed by the talk from P. D. James entitled 'Wilkie Collins's Contribution to the Detective Novel.' All members of the WCS are welcome and may bring one guest. The cost of the evening will be £45 including wine and a bookings form will be sent out with the first Newsletter of 2004.

Long standing members may remember the highly successful joint meeting held in October 1989 at the Reform Club to mark the centenary of Wilkie's death. On that occasion we were addressed by both of our earlier Patrons, Sir Kenneth Robinson and Benny Green. The forthcoming dinner will be just as exciting.

WCS JOURNAL

Enclosed with this Newsletter is Volume 6 of *The Wilkie Collins Society Journal* in our usual A5 format. We are as ever grateful to our editors, Graham Law and Lillian Nayder for their continuing endeavours and skill in producing a publication of such a high standard. This year's issue contains essays with novel insights into *Armadale* by Laurence Talairach-Vielmas and *The Law and the Lady* by Patricia Pulham, together with Andrew Mangham's 'Hysterical Fictions' of Mary Elizabeth Braddon. There are also the usual reviews of recent works, this time books by Dr Alexander Grinstein (by Catherine Peters), Carolyn Oulton (by Norman Vance) and the new Broadview edition of *Blind Love* (by Graham Law); in addition Lyn Pykett discusses no less than three different *Companions to the Victorian Novel*.

A RUSSIAN DISSERTATION

Collins has always been extremely popular in Russia and most of his works were translated. Many were serialised and issued remarkably soon after English publication. *The Moonstone* and *The Woman in White* have been constantly republished and modern editions have print runs of several hundred thousand.

WCS member, Kirsten Hüttner, has spent a great deal of time in St Petersburg and is particularly knowledgeable about Collins's reception in Russia during the nineteenth century as well as current work by modern scholars. She has therefore prepared a summary of the recent dissertation thesis by Zlata Antonova of Cherepovets State University. This is entitled 'The Third Period of Creative Work of Wilkie Collins' and gives a different perspective on his later novels. Kirsten's own dissertation thesis, *Wilkie Collins's The Woman in White – Analysis, Reception and Literary Criticism of a Victorian Bestseller*, was published in English by Wissenschaftlicher Verlag Trier (ISBN 3-88476-227-3).

It includes details of the novel's reception in Germany, France and Russia. (Further information on http://home.t-online.de/home/0711334553-0002/wilkie_1.htm, or follow links from the websites of either Paul Lewis or Andrew Gasson).

MEMBERSHIP

The Wilkie Collins Society has a worldwide membership which is fairly stable at just over 130 people. Most members are in the UK but we have Collins enthusiasts in 14 other countries – USA, Japan, Australia, Netherlands, France, Germany, Spain, Belgium, Canada, Czech Republic, Italy, Jersey, Russia, and South Korea. If you have friends or relatives who love Wilkie why not introduce them to the Society for Christmas. The subscription remains unchanged at £10 UK and EU or £18 anywhere else in the world.

Remember that subscriptions are due on 1 January and six members have already paid. If you have not paid for 2004 you should have a separate reminder letter with this Newsletter. If you have paid in the last few days, please ignore it.

BIG READ

BBC Television's 'The Big Read' created a great deal of interest with Wilkie represented in the early stages by *The Woman in White*. To accompany the series, the BBC published *The Big Read Book of Books* (Darling Kindersley, ISBN 1 4053 0405 7 £12.99). Wilkie's contribution (number 77) appears on page 139, introduced with "This thrilling, suspense-filled tale of madness, murder and mistaken identity is a model example of the sensationalist novel, blending horror with psychological realism. A Gothic masterpiece, *The Woman in White* is the best known of Wilkie Collins' work." There is a very brief biographical sketch with four illustrations. One of these purports to be a photograph of Wilkie but it is unlike any of the pictures normally associated with him (see the images on Paul Lewis's website). Perhaps – very appropriately – it's a case of 'mistaken identity' and is in fact another bearded Victorian. Wilkie alas didn't reach the final 21 but congratulations to the eventual winner, *The Lord of the Rings*.

WCS BIG READ

We had very few responses to Brian Huss's idea of nominating our best and worst Wilkie novels. He started it off in the Spring Newsletter with *The Dead Secret*, *Poor Miss Finch*, *Jezebel's Daughter* and *No Thoroughfare* as his favourites. He nominated *The Fallen Leaves* as the worst. The instruction to exclude the big four was completely ignored and the eventual result is *Armadale* as the favourite. *The Moonstone*, however, did get one vote as his worst novel – 'boring' was the word used!

Armadale was Wilkie's own favourite, even though he specifically asked that his tombstone record him as 'The Author of The Woman in White and other Works of Fiction'. An interview in 1887 quotes Wilkie as saying of *Armadale* "It is by far the best thing I have ever written, and in my own opinion, no other book of mine can compare with it." (*Cassell's Saturday Journal* 5 March 1887) and a new letter has now been identified in which Wilkie writes of *Armadale* "I have always considered this novel to be the best that I have written." It is certainly the longest. And with five separate characters called Allan Armadale certainly the most complex!

HESKET NEWMARKET

Wilkie visited Hesketh Newmarket in Cumberland with Charles Dickens on 7 September 1857 at the start of their walking tour which became 'The Lazy Tour of Two Idle Apprentices' in *Household Words* 3-31 October 1857. Earlier this year we mentioned in the Spring Newsletter that The Old Crown public house was under threat. A follow up news item on the BBC Today Programme on 13 September revealed that The Crown had now been saved from sale to a large brewery by a co-operative of mainly local people who intend to maintain its present character as a small but traditional pub.

NEW BOOKS

Peter Haining is following up *The Best Supernatural Stories of Wilkie Collins* (Robert Hale, London 1990) and is editing *Sensation Stories: Tales of Mystery and Suspense*. This volume collects ten of Wilkie's earlier stories and will be published by Peter Owen in the Spring of 2004 (ISBN 0720612209) – further details at www.peterowen.com.

Eavesdropping in the Novel from Austen to Proust by Ann Gaylin looks at 'eavesdropping' as a flexible genre of writing in Austen, Balzac, Collins, Dickens and Proust. Apart from the analysis of Collins, Balzac was one of Collins's 'three kings of fiction' (along with Walter Scott and Fenimore Cooper). Dickens, of course, was Wilkie's close friend and collaborator over many years. Cambridge University Press 2003 (ISBN 0521815851).

The Double in the Fiction of R.L. Stevenson, Wilkie Collins and Daphne du Maurier is by Kings College London scholar Nathalie Abi-Ezzi. It is said to analyse the double as a way of examining the imprisoned female character and how she frees herself. Published by Peter Lang, Oxford 2003 (ISBN 3906769682).

PhD SCHOLARS

Wilkie Collins Society member Cedric Courtois is working on his PhD thesis on Wilkie Collins and would like to make contact with any other members who are actively studying Wilkie as part of academic activity. He can be contacted at cedric_courtois@yahoo.co.uk.

FOREIGN BORN CHARACTERS IN WILKIE

James Rusk has extracted this list of significant characters in Wilkie's novels who were born outside the UK. If anyone wants to extend or develop this theme further please let us know!

The Dead Secret Uncle Joseph Buschmann (German)

The Fallen Leaves Rufus Dingwell (American) and Leblond Theophile (French)

"I Say No!" Francine de Sor (West Indian)

Jezebel's Daughter Herr Engelmann, Herr Keller, and Fritz Keller (all German) and

Mandame Fontaine (French?)

No Name Mrs. Lecount (French)

Poor Miss Finch Madame Pratulungo (French) and Herr Grosse (German)

The Woman in White Count Fosco and Professor Pesca (both Italian)

In two cases a major villain of the novel is foreign-born (Fosco and Lecount), and in one case the foreign-born character narrates the entire novel (Madame Pratolungo).

WILKIE'S VOICE?

Many people have wondered if there is an extant sound recording of Wilkie Collins speaking. Sound recording dates back to 1887, two years before Wilkie died, so it is possible. But work done on the forthcoming edition of Wilkie's letters shows that he refused the offer to record his voice.

In 1887 Thomas Alva Edison set up the Edison Phonograph Company with George E. Gouraud. He had been a colonel in the Civil War and they set about recording famous people of the day. Gouraud came to England and set up home in Beulah, South London. He called it Little Menlo after Edison's original laboratory at Menlo Park, New Jersey but it was generally known as Electric House – many things were done automatically by electricity.

He invited celebrities to Little Menlo to record their voices on the new phonograph. The actor Henry Irving, as well as Browning and Tennyson, recorded their voices. A letter has been discovered by the editors that shows Wilkie was invited to record his voice but he turned the offer down.

This particular letter will be one of nearly 3000 to be published in *The Public Face of Wilkie Collins* by Pickering & Chatto in April 2005.

IN OUR TIME

Melvyn Bragg took the subject of sensation novels for his intelligent weekly programme *In Our Time* on BBC Radio 4 on 6 November 2003. John Mullan of University College London, Professor Lyn Pykett of the University of Wales, Aberystwyth, and Professor Dinah Birch of the University of Liverpool unpicked the rise and importance of the sensation novel through Mrs Henry Wood's *East Lynne*, *Lady Audley's Secret* by Mary Braddon and *The Woman in White* and *The Moonstone*. A great listen which you can still hear on the BBC website <https://www.bbc.co.uk/sounds/play/p005492t>

ART SALES

Two interesting pictures by Wilkie's father, William Collins RA, were recently on sale at auction in London. A really fine and interesting portrait of James Campbell of Hampton Court painted in 1812 and originally sold for 37 guineas to Campbell came up at Christie's on 13 November. It did not, however, make its estimate of £4000-£6000 and was unsold.

An interesting picture from the Collins family trip to Italy during 1836-1838 came up at Christie's two weeks later on 25 November. *Ave Maria – Scene near Tivoli* was painted in 1840. Sold originally to Sir Thomas Baring for 150 guineas, it too failed to reach its estimate of £6000 to £8000 but was sold for £5377 including premium. A bargain.

Both can be seen in the Christie's catalogues at www.christies.com

WILKIE IN THE NEWS

Sunday 30 November was a good day for Wilkie press-watchers. First, Judith Flanders wrote in *The Independent on Sunday* about the Victorian Christmas and the development of seasonal ghost stories. She says that Wilkie “loathed the whole season” though she concedes he did write “a couple of Christmas stories.” Not quite true – he wrote at least twenty, but she correctly quotes his letter to Nina Lehmann (28 December 1877) when he says it is “the most hateful of all English seasons” and calls it “the season of Cant and Christmas”.

Then, in the same newspaper Richard Devonport Hines wrote a long piece about the use of drugs by writers and inevitably Wilkie is cited as someone who “became dependent on opium originally prescribed to treat his physical pains and strained nerves.” Hines quotes a letter to Paul Hamilton Hayne of 28 January 1885 in which Wilkie says of himself “Laudanum – divine laudanum – was his only friend.” Though whether he really was “drugged out of his senses” when he wrote *The Moonstone* is more doubtful.

And Caroline Moore is to be congratulated for her *Sunday Telegraph* piece of the same date for identifying Professor Tizzi – the narrator of ‘The Yellow Mask’ in *After Dark*. She says he was “venerable, comic, pitiable” in her analysis of scholars in literature. Prof Tizzi

is not the name of a Wilkie character that would spring to mind even among his fans.

Liz Hoggard (*The Observer* 2/11/2003) wrote about the female moustache “still a major taboo” and inevitably refers to Marian Halcombe as the “moustachioed heroine” in *The Woman in White*.

WOMAN IN WHITE – THE MUSICAL

Andrew Lloyd Webber’s musical version of *The Woman in White* is due to open in September at the Palace Theatre London, where *Les Miserables* has been showing for nearly 25 years. It will be directed by Sir Trevor Nunn and the cast will be announced in the New Year. The box office opens in February. Andrew Lloyd Webber’s company The Really Useful Group has confirmed that the new musical is “freely adapted” by Charlotte Jones from the book and has a “hauntingly romantic score” by Lloyd Webber. The company says the musical will “bring to the stage a plot of terrifying brilliance. A handsome young man is stranded at a remote railway cutting. Out of the darkness looms a woman, a mysterious figure dressed in white, who burns to tell a chilling secret. Two sisters find themselves snared in a web of betrayal and greed, the victims of a flawless crime. Unprotected in a man’s world, they will need all their resourcefulness and courage to outwit a villain of overpowering charisma and ingenuity. But they can also rely on the guiding hand of love.” A special website www.womaninwhitemusical.com is promised in the near future.

<http://www.andrewlloydwebber.com/shows/the-woman-in-white>

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