



THE WILKIE COLLINS SOCIETY

PATRONS Faith Clarke, Baroness James of Holland Park (P. D. James)

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

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

NEWSLETTER

SUMMER 2006

E-TEXT NEWS

A project at the University of Buckingham aims to e-text the whole of Dickens's periodicals *Household Words* and *All The Year Round* by the 200th anniversary of Dickens's birth in February 2012. That will mean the original periodical texts of some of Wilkie's major fiction will be available for the first time in e-text form. *The Dead Secret*, *The Woman in White*, *No Name*, and *The Moonstone* first appeared there in their original form as did the shorter works *Sister Rose*, *A Rogue's Life*, and *The Yellow Mask*. There were also numerous short stories and essays. The editor of the project is Dr John Drew. You can find out more or become a supporter or friend of the project at <https://www.djo.org.uk/>

Independent of Buckingham's work, Paul Lewis has now e-texted all Wilkie's 40 non-fiction contributions to *Household Words*. This is the first time that half of these have been available. The other half were collected by Wilkie in *My Miscellanies* (1863) but they were edited and abbreviated and this is the first time since the 1850s that these original versions have been published. The Wilkie Collins Society published three of these pieces that were not in *My Miscellanies* in the spring. This continues its ongoing series of reprints of Collins's short pieces which have never previously been republished. Enclosed with this Newsletter is the second part which contains three more essays from *Household Words*.

Before he worked on *Household Words* Wilkie wrote for the socialist weekly, *The Leader*. Although many of his contributions have been identified, there is no complete bibliography of them. Identification work will become easier when the whole newspaper is available in e-text form. Sponsored by the Arts and Humanities Research Council and with the co-operation of the British Library, a team at King's College London is e-texting six nineteenth century periodicals including *The Leader*. The team hopes to have images of the pages by the end of this year and a fully searchable text version by the end of next year. Check up on progress at <https://ncse.ac.uk/index.html>

James Rusk, who has single-handedly e-texted so much of Wilkie's work, has moved the texts to a new site. The new address is www.digitalpixels.org/jr/wc. All the available or known e-texts of Collins's works are accessible through www.wilkiecollins.com

COLLINS IN APPLETON'S JOURNAL

Although no full biography of Wilkie Collins was published in English until well into the 20th century, a number of short biographical sketches did appear in journals during his lifetime. Enclosed with this Newsletter is one of these. It was written by the American journalist George Makepeace Towle who visited Wilkie in June 1868 and for whom Wilkie later wrote a 'Memoir' to assist with this piece. It was published in *Appleton's Journal of Popular Literature, Science, and Art* on 3 September 1870 and has never been republished.

T. W. SPEIGHT AND THE MOONSTONE

An interesting Victorian author is Thomas Wilkinson Speight. He was a prolific writer who seems to have used Collins for inspiration on more than one occasion.

William Tinsley published his *Under Lock and Key* in 1869, the year after *The Moonstone*. Immediately after the title-page appears the following disclaimer: "In justice 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."

We can speculate on 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*. 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. The book contains 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*. We will probably never know what T. W. Speight did or did not borrow from Wilkie, but the main plot is very different from *The Moonstone* and the story is entertaining in its own right.

Another readable story by Speight, published rather later in 1906, is *The Grey Monk*. It has a very well constructed story with a disinherited son returned from the dead, a foundling girl who finally discovers her real family and the ghost of

the Grey Monk. Mixed into the intriguing plot is a rogue and a villain called Verinder – a name to bring back recollections of *The Moonstone*,

A DRAMATIC VERSION OF *THE WOMAN IN WHITE*

We mentioned in the last Newsletter the Constance Cox adaptation of *The Woman in White* mentioned by the theatrical publishers, Samuel French, in their series of Acting Editions. This suggested a minor mystery since the publication was first issued in 2005 but the dramatist died in 1998. Amanda Smith, the Editorial Director of Samuel French has written to say that “the play was first ‘published’ as a manuscript copy for hire by Evans Plays Ltd in 1967. Samuel French acquired the Evans playlist some thirty years ago and with it this version of *The Woman in White*. It was performed from time to time, using manuscript copies, but the title has proved quite popular in recent years hence our decision to exercise our option to publish it as an Acting Edition – giving the 2005 copyright line.” The play is available for £7.50 from the Samuel French bookshop at 52 Fitzroy Street, London W1T 5JR (020 7255 4300; www.samuel french-london.co.uk; (ISBN 0 573 11578 8)

WILKIE ON DVD

Wilkie fans tend to think that the earlier BBC versions of his work far surpass the much abridged and changed 1996 and 1997 dramatisations of *The Moonstone* and *The Woman in White*. An early version of *The Moonstone* is now available in its original five episodes. First broadcast early in 1972, the dramatisation was by Hugh Leonard with Vivien Heilbron as Rachel Verinder, Robin Ellis as Franklin Blake and John Welsh as Sergeant Cuff. The plot and atmosphere remain faithful to the original story. The DVD is available from www.acornmediauk.com or on 0845 123 2312 price £19.99 plus £3 postage. Some cheaper copies have been appearing on eBay and it also costs less through www.amazon.co.uk.

A much earlier film version of *The Moonstone* from 1934 is also now available on DVD. Starring David Manners and Phyllis Barry and directed by Reginald Barker, the plot is changed almost out of recognition and shortened to just over an hour.

Lovers of early films may also like to track down a DVD of *Crimes at the Dark House* (1940) a terrible melodrama directed by George King loosely based on *The Woman in White* and starring Tod Slaughter and Sylvia Marriott.

The 1998 version of *Basil* starring Christian Slater, Claire Forlani and Jared Leto is also now available on DVD. This version is directed by Radha Bharadwaj and although departing from the plot in some places, captures a good sense of the period. Derek Jacobi is excellent as Basil’s stem Victorian father but the film is let down by some of the other acting. All three are best found through www.amazon.co.uk. Remember that you will need an ‘all-regions’ DVD player for some of the US versions

‘A TERRIBLY STRANGE BED’ ON TV

Another television version of ‘A Terribly Strange Bed’ has been discovered. Dating from the 1950s, probably 1954, it squeezes the plot into 12 minutes. Produced by Dynamic Films of New York it is part of a US television series called ‘On Stage with Monty Woolley’ in which Woolley (1888-1963) starred in short versions of various classics. Woolley first appeared in films in 1936 and his career petered out in made-for-TV specials like this. It is pretty terrible and lacks the style and faithfulness to the plot of the later Orson Welles TV version made in 1973.

BASIL ON RADIO

The BBC broadcast a two episode adaptation of *Basil* on Radio 4 in June. This was a really excellent adaptation, quite faithful to the original, carefully casted and well acted. Although the BBC is not currently selling a recording of this version, classic serials like this pop up frequently on BBC 7 – the digital radio station which specialises in repeats of comedy and drama from Radio 4. Look out for it from time to time at www.bbc.co.uk/bbc7.

BLIND LOVE

The excellent Broadview edition of *Blind Love*, edited by Maria K Bachman and Don Richard Cox is back in print. As with every Broadview edition it contains all the background material you could wish for, including reviews, obituaries (Collins died part way through writing the book), details of the Von Scheurer case on which it was based, and Collins’s plot summary from which Walter Besant finished the novel (from Chapter 49) on Wilkie’s death. Details from www.broadviewpress.com (ISBN 1-55111-447-X).

WILKIE’S COUSIN

New details have emerged of a first cousin of Wilkie – Charles Gray (1835-1883). Charles was the eighth and youngest child of the younger sister of Wilkie’s mother, Catherine Esther Geddes who married John Westcott Gray. Charles Gray travelled to Australia, as did his brother Alexander, and then to South Africa where he settled in Pietermaritzburg. At some point he adopted the stage name of Charles Lascelles. In Pietermaritzburg he pioneered opera and musical comedy and sang himself as a baritone.

ANOTHER WILKIE COLLINS

Long standing WCS member, Katherine Haynes, writes that recently she was talking to an Australian customer in her shop and was pleasantly surprised to discover that his name was Bruce Wilkie Collins. Apparently it is now a tradition for all members of his family to be given the middle name of Wilkie!

Paul Lewis
Andrew Gasson

paul@pauLewis.co.uk
apogee@apgee.co.uk

www.wilkiecollins.com
www.wilkie-collins.info