



THE WILKIE COLLINS SOCIETY

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NEWSLETTER

WINTER 2007

‘NEW DRAGON OF WANTLEY’

With this newsletter is an exciting discovery. Professor Graham Law has identified a new story by Wilkie Collins. Using evidence from the Collected Letters and computer analysis of phrases in the text he has established that ‘The New Dragon of Wantley- a Social Revelation’ published in *The Leader* on 20 December 1851 is by Collins and that “no other conclusion seems possible.” The text of the *story* together with his detailed analysis of the evidence and a new assessment of Collins’s contributions to *The Leader* is enclosed with this newsletter. The Society is very grateful to Graham Law for permission to publish the work here first.

WILKIE DAY BY DAY – A WILKIE COLLINS CHRONOLOGY

There have been many chronologies of Wilkie Collins as part of an introduction to one of his novels, a biography or his letters. But Professor William Baker’s latest Wilkie Collins study is the first book length attempt to chronicle Wilkie’s life day by day. It starts in 1740 with the birth of Wilkie’s paternal grandfather William and ends not, as you might expect with the death of the mother of his children Martha Rudd in 1919, but with the publication of his letters edited by Baker (with Gasson, Law and Lewis) in 2005. For anyone trying to pin down what was Wilkie doing at any particular time it is invaluable – a calendar to accompany Gasson’s A-Z. But there are quibbles with it.

There are numerous previously unknown details. For example on 31 May 1853: ‘Finishes the first volume of *Hide and Seek*, originally called “The Hair Bracelet.”’ But one can search in vain for the source of that fact; and similarly that *Basil* was still called *Laureath* when Wilkie finished the first volume (20 September 1851). The lack of footnotes is the bane of modern biography (Ackroyd’s *Dickens*, Hawksley’s *Katy*) and it’s a great pity that Bill Baker hasn’t given us any in what is essentially a reference work.

There is also some doubt about the large number of the diaried ‘events’ which turn out to be a letter written by Collins or even by Dickens; or entries like this for 14 September 1852: ‘Duke of Wellington dies at the age of 83 at 3:25pm at Walmer Castle. CD walking at Walmer during the afternoon.’ To be sure Collins was staying with Dickens at the time but if we are supposed to think that the death of Wellington is relevant (it was, Collins mentioned it in a letter to Pigott on 16th) or that he went walking with Dickens (also mentioned in that letter) then those facts should be on 14th when they happened not on 16th when Collins ‘writes EP...’ about them. It would be much stronger if events mentioned in letters were set out on the date they happened not the date they were written about.

But it’s very easy to niggle and we shouldn’t detract from the value of a 240 page book which is the first detailed chronology of Wilkie’s life and which has three useful indexes of works, people and places. It deserves to be on every Wilkie enthusiast’s or scholar’s shelf and in every decent university library. William Baker, *A Wilkie Collins Chronology*, Palgrave Macmillan 2007, ISBN-13: 978-1403994813, £38.71 from www.amazon.co.uk

DICKENS’S BICENTENARY LOOMS

2012 is a momentous year. The London Olympics; the new national pension scheme; and the bicentenary of the birth of Charles Dickens. Dickens, a close friend of Wilkie Collins until his death in 1870, was a novelist of such considerable note that preparations for worldwide celebrations of his birth in Portsmouth 200 years ago on 7 February 1812 are already beginning. A website has been set up - www.dickens2012.com – but at the moment that leads to the Dickens Museum website which is co-ordinating the events through a working group chaired by curator Florian Schweitzer. Anyone who is organising an event is invited to email the group’s events co-ordinator Paul Schlicke at p.schlicke@abdn.ac.uk. Best avoid 27 July when the Olympics opens but there is probably no need to worry about 6 April when the pension scheme begins!

DICKENS-COLLINS CORRESPONDENCE

On 4 October, the WCS held its joint meeting with the Friends of the Charles Dickens Museum. Paul Lewis gave a fascinating talk on the correspondence between Dickens and Collins. By analysing in great detail the text of more than 150 surviving letters he was able to ‘recover’ the likely contents of more than 130 reconstructed letters which have not survived.

THE OVERTURE TO THE FROZEN DEEP

As mentioned in the Summer Newsletter, Andrew Gasson gave a talk: to the St John’s Wood Society on ‘Wilkie in the Wood’ on 30 October. The talk was mainly biographical but linked in Collins’s connections to the area, which was always within walking distance of his various homes in Marylebone, and references in his stories. (some of these details are now on the website at www.wilkie-collins.info).

The evening was notable, however, for a performance of the overture to *The Frozen Deep*. By a fortunate combination of circumstances, a score of the overture had been located, there was a piano in the hall of the St John's Wood Church and, most important, there was a musician (Vyvian Bronk) in the audience who gave an unrehearsed but virtuoso performance. The overture was originally written by Francesco Berger (1834-1933) for the 1857 amateur production of *The Frozen Deep* at Dickens's Tavistock House. There is no mention in Berger's autobiography of whether his overture was also used for the professional production of the play at the Olympic in 1866 so it is possible that this was the first public performance for 150 years.

MILLAIS EXHIBITION

The works of John Everett Millais seem to be just as popular as ever with the current exhibition at the Tate Britain Gallery which continues until 13 January 2008. There was a previous exhibition of Millais's portraits at the National Portrait Gallery in 1999 and Paul Goldman's *Beyond Decoration: the Illustrations of John Everett Millais* was reviewed in the Summer 2005 Newsletter. The current exhibition divides the works into Pre-Raphaelitism, Romance and Modern Genre, Aestheticism, The Grand Tradition, Fancy Pictures, Portraits, and The Late Landscapes. The famous portrait of Wilkie dating from 1850 is, of course, on show as well as the sketch of Charles Collins. There are also several references to Wilkie and Charles in the comprehensive catalogue which accompanies the exhibition (ISBN 978-185437-667-1, Tate Publishing).

EWANRIGG HALL AND MARYPORT

The Maryport Guide to Cumbria (<https://www.visitcumbria.com/car/hesket-newmarket/>) records the visit of Collins and Dickens during their visit to Cumberland almost exactly 150 years ago in September 1857. Maryport is situated south of Allonby, where they stayed at the Ship Inn, on the north west coast of England overlooking the Solway Firth with views of Scotland. This trip formed the basis for *The Lazy Tour of Two Idle Apprentices* subsequently published in *Household Words* from 3-31 October 1857.

Even more interesting is the suggestion that the nearby Ewanrigg Hall was used in *The Woman in White* as the setting for Limmeridge House. Closely following the Collins-Dickens route in 'The Lazy Tour', Walter Hartright writes "My travelling instructions directed me to go to Carlisle, and then to diverge by a branch railway which ran in the direction of the coast. When I rose the next morning and drew up my blind, the sea opened before me joyously under the broad August sunlight, and the distant coast of Scotland fringed the horizon with its lines of melting blue." Ewanrigg Hall was the home of the Christian family and Fletcher Christian of *Mutiny on the Bounty* fame was born there in 1764. The house was demolished in 1903 but there is a photograph on Matthew Beckett's excellent Lost Heritage website at lh.matthewbeckett.com/houses/lh_cumbria_ewanrigghall_gallery.html.

THE WOMAN IN WHITE ON STAGE

Valerie Pedlar of the Open University, who wrote for the WCS *The Mystery of The Woman in White in Leicester*, sent out with the spring 2006 Newsletter, has for some while been researching the various stage versions of *The Woman in White* and shares the following information:

When Wilkie Collins's novel was published in 1860 as a serial in Dickens's journal *All the Year Round* it caused a sensation, so it is not surprising that theatrical managers were quick to see its potential for the stage. In the nineteenth century the only way for an author to retain theatrical rights over his or her novel was immediately to re-write it as a play. And this is just what Bram Stoker did with *Dracula*. Collins, however, did not do this, and consequently, to his fury, many adaptations were made which didn't earn him a penny-piece.

The first of these was put on at the Surrey Theatre, London, almost as soon as the last instalment had come out. The Surrey was well known for its melodramas, and J. R. Ware's dramatisation of *The Woman in White* didn't disappoint. Several other versions were put on at theatres in London, the provinces, Europe and even Australia before Collins wrote his own adaptation in 1871.

His play was put on at the Olympic Theatre (alas no longer in London) and was a great success. It is strikingly different not only from all previous versions, but also from his own novel. Most noticeably he dispenses with the famous meeting between Walter Hartright and the woman in white at the start of the book, though the basic plot remains the same.

Constance Cox's play, which first appeared at Aldershot in 1952, is one of at least six adaptations written in the twentieth century, and is faithful to the original. More recently there have been film and television versions, as well as Andrew Lloyd Webber's musical, which alter the plot to chime in with modern preoccupations. It is nearly 150 years since the novel was first written, but *The Woman in White* continues to entertain audiences and readers alike.

RECENT PRODUCTIONS OF THE WOMAN IN WHITE ON STAGE

The Woman in White has **hit** the stage in two productions of the adaptation by Constance Cox during October. The Sidmouth Amateur Dramatic Society staged its production at the Manor Pavilion Theatre; and two weeks later the Marlowe Players staged a professional production at the Derby Playhouse Studio Theatre. There is a photograph at <https://www.marlowe-players.co.uk/past-productions/the-woman-in-white>.

Members are reminded that the Constance Cox version is now published by Samuel French in its series of Acting Editions (ISBN 0 573 11578 8) and is available for £7.50 from their own bookshop at 52 Fitzroy Street, London W1T 5JR (020 7255 4300; www.samuel french-london.co.uk).

NOT SO RECENT PRODUCTIONS OF *THE WOMAN IN WHITE*

The New York Times recently reprinted from its archives the review of *The Woman in White* from 16 December 1873. It begins “Last evening Mr. Wybert Reeve, an actor of some note in England, made his debut before an American audience, at the Broadway Theatre. The play chosen for this occasion was Wilkie Collins’ own version of “The Woman in White,” a dramatization which was claimed to preserve more than the salient points of the novel in fact, moving on the actuating and pervading spirit in which the author penned his exhaustively thrilling narrative.” Wybert Reeve had originally played Fosco in the Olympic Theatre production and on provincial tour in England. The play ran for two weeks on Broadway during Collins’s reading tour of America. The full review is nearly 3,000 words and can be found by searching for Wybert Reeve in the 1851-1980 section of the *New York Times* archive page.

A much lengthier discourse about Collins’s version of the play is ‘Scandalous Sensations: The Woman in White on the Victorian Stage’ by Maria Bachman. This can now be found at www.thefreelibrary.com/Scandalous+sensations:+The+Woman+in+White+on+the+Victorian+stage-aO146390067

***THE WOMAN IN WHITE* -A RESTORED VERSION OF AN OLD FILM**

One of the earliest known film versions of *The Woman in White*, dating from July 1917 has recently been released on DVD as part of a three-disc set by the non-profit Thanouser Company Film Preservation. The original film consisted of five reels of 4,627 feet and lasted 1 hour 8 minutes. It was directed by Ernest C. Warde with the scenario by Lloyd F. Lonergan and photographed by William M. Zollinger. The cast included Florence LaBadie (double role as Laura Fairlie and Ann Catherick), Richard R. Neill (Sir Pervival Glyde), Gertrude Dallas (Marian Halcombe), Arthur Bauer (Count Fosco), Wayne Arey (Walter Hartright), J.H. Gilmour, Claude Cooper. A Pathé Gold Rooster Play released through the Pathé Exchange. The film was reissued by Chandler Pictures as *The Unfortunate Marriage* in about 1920.

Quoting from the Thanouser blurb, “*The Woman in White* was adapted from a very well known contemporary novel and was a particularly fine vehicle for the beautiful Florence LaBadie, one of the last of the old stock company still with Thanouser in 1917. She was called “the most important personality at the Thanouser studio” by Thanouser historian David Q. Bowers. Two months after the release of *The Woman in White* she was in an automobile accident and she died in October from her injuries, just a week later than the release of the studio’s final new production. In its last two years of production Thanouser concentrated on multi-reel features of high quality. Lloyd Lonergan’s scenarios were the foundation for the attention to quality, whether with original stories or with adaptations like *The Woman in White*.”

The Woman in White forms part of Volume 9, *Lloyd Lonergan’s Legacy* a tribute to Edwin Thanouser’s brother-in-law Lloyd Lonergan who drew on nearly 20 years experience writing for important newspapers in Chicago and New York City. He

wrote over 800 scenarios for the studio (many with alliterations in their title) as well as heading its story department. This sampling of his creative genius includes *Daddy's Double* (1910), *When the Studio Burned* (1913), *An Elusive Diamond* (1914), *The Marvelous Marathoner* (1915) and *The Woman in White* (1917). The 'Thanhouser Collection, Volumes 7, 8 & 9' is priced at the fairly modest \$24.95 and may be ordered directly from Thanhouser Company Film Preservation, Inc. at 8770 NW Kearney Street, Portland, Oregon 97229 USA or online at www.thanhouser.org. If you like silent film, this version of *The Woman in White* is fairly true to Collins's original and despite its age, extremely watchable.

HENRY NEVILLE

Henry Neville, the famous Victorian actor, features on the Gartside-Neville family website run by Barry Collins (no relation to Wilkie). (Thomas) Henry (Gartside) Neville (1837-1910) played Richard Wardour in the 1866 production of *The Frozen Deep* at the Olympic Theatre; George Vendale in the successful run of *No Thororoughfare* at the Adelphi from December 1868; and Franklin Blake in *The Moonstone* in September 1877, also at the Olympic Theatre. See users.zoominternet.net/~bcollins/preview_189.

AUDIO BOOKS

There are numerous audio book versions, abridged and unabridged, of Wilkie's most popular novels *The Moonstone* and *The Woman in White* but very few of his other stories are available in this medium. Recent additions at very reasonable prices are *The Evil Genius* from Tantor Unabridged Audiobooks (www.tantor.com), *The Frozen Deep* from www.audiohome.co.uk and *A Rogue's Life* from www.baileywickbooks.com in MP3 format. There are sample excerpts on the various websites so check that you can cope with several hours of sometimes totally unsympathetic American accents.

TRAFALGAR TAVERN

According to the Greenwich Guide, Wilkie was one of the diners at the Trafalgar Tavern which dates from 1837. Other distinguished visitors arriving by river apparently were Dickens and Thackeray, attracted by the inn's famous whitebait suppers. These were frequently served with iced champagne which certainly would have been to Wilkie's taste. The area declined in popularity around the end of the nineteenth century and the Trafalgar Tavern had to wait until 1965 to be restored to its former grandeur. <https://greenwich-guide.org.uk/trafalgar>

EAVESDROPPING

Ann Gaylin takes the idea of 'eavesdropping' and turns it into a book finding examples in works from Austen's *Pride and Prejudice* to Proust's *A la recherche du temps perdu*. One chapter is devoted to *The Woman in White* - amusingly called 'The madwoman outside the attic' - and examines how reading and hearing other people's words is at the heart of the novel. Written in the modern language of

literary criticism it is a work about ‘agency’ ‘identity’ ‘transgression’ ‘narrative space’ and ‘gender roles’. Good that Wilkie can still offer so rich a seam to modern scholarship.

Ann Gaylin *Eavesdropping in the Novel from Austen to Proust* Cambridge 2002, reissued in paperback 2007 ISBN 0-521-03890-1 £23.99.

FAIRY TALES

Laurence Tailrach-Vielmas is a long-standing member of the Wilkie Collins Society and a past contributor to the *WCS Journal*. Her new book is *Moulding the Female Body in Victorian Fairy Tales and Sensation Novels*. The publisher’s blurb says the book “examines how Victorian fantasies and sensation novels deconstruct and reconstruct femininity”. Wilkie Collins’s novels naturally feature in her examples. There is a 25% discount on the published price of £50 using the flyer enclosed with this newsletter.

SENSATION STORIES - BOOK OFFER

Sensation Stories brings together ten of Wilkie’s short tales from his very first known published work ‘The Last Stage Coach-man’ (1843) through the best known ‘A Terribly Strange Bed’ (1852) and ‘The Dream Woman’ (1855) to his later work ‘The Clergyman’s Confession’ (1875) and ‘Love’s Random Shot’ (1883). Originally published in 2004, this paperback with an introduction by Peter Haining is now available to WCS members for just £5 plus postage thanks to a generous offer from the publisher Peter Owen. See enclosed flyer for contact details.

HARPER’S WEEKLY

Another odd website with a wealth of Wilkie material is www.sonofthesouth.net which is devoted to the US civil war. As part of that interest it contains a full run of *Harper’s Weekly* during the war period 1861-1865 and includes the illustrated serialisation of *No Name* and some images of Wilkie which accompanied it. A search box on the front page will find Wilkie material including adverts for Harper publications of his work.

NEW E-TEXTS

The job of e-texting all Wilkie’s works continues with the release of *No Name* dramatised in four acts by Wilkie in 1870 but never performed in the UK. The hard work was done with his usual thoroughness and attention to detail by James Rusk and the complete play is now available on his website at www.digitalpixels.org/jr/wc/nonameplay.html.

Six of Wilkie’s fifteen plays are now available in e-text form and more will follow in 2008. The full canon of Wilkie’s e-texted work is available at www.wilkiecollins.com.

MARY CHOLMONDELEY

Carolyn Oulton of the University of Canterbury and a WCS member wonders if members would like to contribute to a collection of scholarly articles on the late

Victorian author Mary Cholmondeley. Her first novel - *The Danvers Jewels* (1887) – apparently bears more than a passing resemblance to *The Moonstone* (1868). Abstracts of 300-500 words should be sent to carolyn.oulton@canterbury.ac.uk and SueAnn Schatz ssschatz@lhup.edu.

GOOGLE IT

A growing number of first and early editions of Wilkie's works are available in their original format through <http://books.google.com>. A search on the titles of the books brings up the full text as well as reviews in contemporary periodicals. Put *Mr Wray's Cash-Box* into the search box (taking care with the punctuation) and you will get access to the Bodleian Library's copy of the first edition of 1852 as well as a review in *Bentley's Miscellany* "so pretty and graceful a contribution to the season."

Some books are wholly or partially blocked (in the UK at least) by what seem to be copyright concerns but *After Dark*, *Antonina*, *My Miscellanies*, and the 1861 US edition of *The Woman in White* with the John McLenan illustrations are all there.

VINTAGE CLASSICS

Random House have just published a paperback version of *The Woman in White* in their 'Vintage Classics: books that changed the world' series. As their blurb says, "A hypochondriac uncle, two girls who look identical, a count with a penchant for mesmerism and vanilla bonbons, a lunatic asylum, an evil husband... What more could you want?" (9780099511243, paperback at £5.99).

BIG WILD READ

Anne Snelgrove, Labour MP for Swindon, put *No Name* on her holiday reading list as part of a campaign to get Swindon Library's summer reading challenge The Big Wild Read off to a good start. The idea was to get children reading and for every 150 books read the Woodland Trust planted a tree.

HELP!

The iconic Beatles film of 1965 *Help!* has been re-released in a new digital format restored from the original negative. The bizarre plot was based loosely on the central theme of *The Moonstone* – the recovery of a large rare diamond by its Hindu owners. In this case the jewel is in a ring worn of course by Ringo himself who does not value the stone and wants to give it back. Surreal mayhem follows the Fab Four around. Full price is £21.99 but much cheaper through amazon.co.uk.

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