



## ***THE WILKIE COLLINS SOCIETY***

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### **NEWSLETTER**

**SUMMER 2008**

#### **NEW BOOKS**

Wilkie Collins scholarship continues to thrive. Two more full length books on Collins have been published this year - both by members of the Wilkie Collins Society.

First for review is the interesting work by Professor Graham Law and Andrew Maunder. *Wilkie Collins: A Literary Life* is biography but it is divided by theme rather than chronology. Individual chapters look at Wilkie as a journalist and as a missionary, in relation to London, women and the theatre, his education and the circles in which he moved. And of course, given Law's involvement, two useful chapters look at his work in the context of the changing Victorian literary marketplace. Drawing extensively on the latest scholarship, including of course on Law's continuing work on Wilkie's letters, the book combines biography and literary analysis. There are a couple of points to take issue with. Caroline Graves ran a marine store - a second-hand shop - not a tobacconist's shop- after her husband's death (p. 84) and it is surely an undetected typo on p. 30 which reads "the radical weekly *The Leader*, then owned by his friend Edmund Yates" – it should read Edward Pigott. Students of Law and Maunder will not find it hard to separate the contributions each makes – though there are some parts where, as in the collaboration of Collins and Dickens, the influence of each is intermingled. The book, which should be in every collection of Collins studies, is published by Palgrave Macmillan ISBN 978-1-4039-4896-0.

Mariaconcetta Costantini's book *Venturing into Unknown Waters* has a painting of a shipwreck by Turner on its cover. And the book examines how Collins navigated the perilous and tricky waters of the changing moral climate in the Victorian era. Part I finds navigation metaphors throughout Collins's work and in particular looks at his stories in which the sea plays a key role – from the short story *Mad Monkton* to the longest novel *Armada*. Part II is on more familiar territory as Costantini examines Wilkie Collins and 'otherness' which she calls 'alterity' – a word I confess this native English speaker had to look up. Race, refugees, and disability are examined. Drawing on current scholarship, techniques and language ('diagetic' was another word that had me reaching for the dictionary) Costantini offers interesting insights into what Collins was really writing about. *Venturing into Unknown Waters: Wilkie Collins and the Challenge of Modernity* is published by Edizioni Tracce, Pescara 2008 ISBN 978-88-7433-500-8.

The only Russian member of the WCS, Zlata Antonova, has published her 2006 thesis on Collins. *The Life and Work of Wilkie Collins* is in Russian and its three sections look at childhood and youth and the early work 1843-1860; the Golden Ten Years (1861-1870); and the third period and his 'second manner' of writing 1871-1889. Contact paul@paullewis.co.uk if you read Russian and would like a copy.

There have been twelve full length books about Wilkie's life and work published already this century. A complete list of the 22 biographies and the 16 book length studies of Wilkie Collins and his work can be found at [www.wilkiecollins.com](http://www.wilkiecollins.com) menu item 5.

### ***THE FROZEN DEEP***

The main foundation for the story of *The Frozen Deep* was the doomed Franklin Expedition of 1845 to discover the North-West Passage. There is, however, another possible influence on Collins's version of the story in the person of the noted American Arctic explorer Elisha Kent Kane (1820-1857). Kane served in 1850 as medical officer on the first Grinnell expedition searching for the lost Franklin party. He subsequently organised and led the second Grinnell expedition of 1853-1855 and like Franklin before him was forced to abandon ship and retreat over the ice. Unlike Franklin, he eventually reached the comparative safety of Greenland. This second voyage was narrated by Kane in *Arctic Explorations* (1856) shortly before his early death on 16 February 1857. Kane visited England to report personally to Lady Franklin the results of his searches. He had become a celebrated and internationally recognised figure and was the subject of numerous obituaries and tributes.

Collins's tale of heroism and rescue, originally written as a play with the help of Dickens in 1857, was revised for the Boston part of his reading tour in 1874 and further extended for book publication later the same year. The play includes clairvoyance and spiritualism in the person of the old nurse, Esther, whilst in the book version it is Frank Aldersley's fiancée, Clara, who is invested with second sight.

It is here that we find an interesting parallel with Elisha Kane. In 1852 he met and fell in love with Margaret Fox, a renowned psychic. She was famous for her 'spirit rapping' and seances although is now considered a totally fraudulent medium. After Kane's death she asserted that she had been his wife. There seems to be no actual evidence of this claim but she published *The Love Life of Dr. Kane* (1866) which contains several of his letters to Margaret Fox. More recent publications are *Raising Kane.-The Making of a Hero, the Marketing of a Celebrity* by Mark Horst Sawin (Elisha Kent Kane Historical Society, 1997, <https://the-elisha-kent-kane-historical-society.square.site/>) and *Exploring Other Worlds: Margaret Fox, Elisha Kent Kane, and the Antebellum Culture of Curiosity* by David Chaplin (University of Massachusetts Press, 2004).

### **LITTLE NELL AND FROZEN DEEP**

BBC Radio 4 repeated the play *Little Nell* on Saturday 23 August. This was broadcast as a tribute to playwright Simon Gray (1936-2008) who died earlier this year. Gray was inspired by *The Invisible Woman*, Claire Tomalin's book about Nelly Ternan and Charles Dickens who met during the tour of *The Frozen Deep* in 1857. The play examines their first meeting as well as the lies told to keep the affair secret. It is the date of a programme for *The Frozen Deep* that alerts Ellen Ternan's son to the fact that she had altered her age by some ten years and sends him to request information from Sir Henry Dickens. The rest of the story is then told in a series of flashbacks.

### **COLLINS AND DICKENS AT DONCASTER**

Following the mention of Doncaster in the last Newsletter, William Clarke, author of *The Secret Life of Wilkie Collins*, sends the following interesting note: 'Your item on Collins's and Dickens's visit to the Doncaster races reminds me of the remarkable outcome of Dickens's bets that day. On the day of the St Ledger, he later recalled, he bought a race card and quickly chose the names of three horses for the first three main races. And, he added, "if you can believe it without your hair standing on end, those three races were won, one after the other, by those three horses."'

## WILKIE COLLINS AND COLUMBO

WCS member Angela Richardson suggests that the lawyer Pedgift senior, in *Armadale*, is an early model for the American television detective Columbo. Like Columbo, Pedgift senior always wins his arguments by a final question which he poses as he is almost out of the door. Here is how Wilkie describes the technique:

‘Mr. Pedgift’s form of diplomatic practice had been the same throughout his life, on every occasion when he found his arts of persuasion required at an interview with another man. He invariably kept his strongest argument, or his boldest proposal, to the last, and invariably remembered it at the door (after previously taking his leave), as if it was a purely accidental consideration which had that instant occurred to him. Jocular friends, acquainted by previous experience with this form of proceeding, had given it the name of “Pedgift’s postscript.” There were few people in Thorpe Ambrose who did not know what it meant when the lawyer suddenly checked his exit at the opened door; came back softly to his chair, with his pinch of snuff suspended between his box and his nose; said, “By-the-by, there’s a point occurs to me;” and settled the question off-hand, after having given it up in despair not a minute before.’“

‘For the second time Allan shook his head. “Is that your final resolution, sir?” “It is, Mr. Pedgift; but I am much obliged to you for your advice, all the same.” Pedgift Senior rose in a state of gentle resignation, and took up his hat “Good-evening, sir,” he said, and made sorrowfully for the door. Allan rose on his side, innocently supposing that the interview was at an end. Persons better acquainted with the diplomatic habits of his legal adviser would have recommended him to keep his seat. The time was ripe for “Pedgift’s postscript,” and the lawyer’s indicative snuff-box was at that moment in one of his hands, as he opened the door with the other. “Good-evening,” said Allan. Pedgift Senior opened the door, stopped, considered, closed the door again, came back mysteriously with his pinch of snuff in suspense between his box and his nose, and repeating his invariable formula, “By-the-by, there’s a point occurs to me,” quietly resumed possession of his empty chair. Allan, wondering, took the seat, in his turn, which he had just left. Lawyer and client looked at each other once more, and the inexhaustible interview began again. (*Armadale* Book the Third Chapter 5)’. The whole of the next chapter is called ‘Pedgift’s Postscript’

## THE LEADER

Wilkie contributed to the radical weekly newspaper *The Leader* from 1851 to 1855. A total of 46 reviews and social comments have been identified, a preliminary and speculative list by Beetz in 1982 and a more definite though

probably not complete tabulation by Graham Law in the introduction to *The New Dragon of Wantley* published by the WCS in November 2007. However, copies of these items have been hard to obtain – few complete runs of *The Leader* survive. There is one in the British Library and another at Manchester Public Library. But now the whole text of *The Leader* is available online and at no charge at [www.ncse.ac.uk](http://www.ncse.ac.uk). The software allows you to leaf through editions of *The Leader* as if through the physical and now very fragile volumes. You can search for key words or jump straight to particular issues and pages. You can download whole issues as pdfs and with a little work the text can be copied and e-texted. A wonderful resource for some of Wilkie's earliest and hardest to find work.

### **AVENUE ROAD – ST JOHN'S WOOD**

Wilkie lived with his family at 20 Avenue Road (now renumbered 39) between 1838 and 1840. From *The Memoirs of William Collins, R. A.* we learn that Wilkie's father was required "...to find a new abode. This was, after some trouble, accomplished by engaging a convenient dwelling in the Avenue Road, Regent's Park - precisely in the quiet situation, on the outskirts of London, which Mr Collins desired to occupy."

The original villa was completely demolished about eighteen months ago but has now been rebuilt. The exterior of the new house is nearly finished and although different from its predecessor and rather larger appears to have been designed in a fairly sympathetic style. At [https://www.wilkie-collins.info/home\\_sjwood.htm](https://www.wilkie-collins.info/home_sjwood.htm) there is a temporary photograph which will be replaced with a full image when the builders' hoarding has been removed.

### **THE REAL BLUE MAN**

One of Wilkie's odder characters is Oscar Dubourg in *Poor Miss Finch*. Oscar receives a blow to the head during what we would call a mugging and the injury causes him to have epileptic fits. The cure he is recommended is to take silver nitrate over a prolonged period. It works on the epilepsy but has the unfortunate side effect of making his skin go blue. Fortunately at that time his beloved is suffering from temporary blindness and cannot see him. So far so Wilkie.

Or rather so Oprah Winfrey. A guest on her show, Paul Karason a 57-year-old former teacher originally from Oregon, drinks colloidal silver and rubs it into his skin to deal with a form of dermatitis. But over the 14 years he has done so his skin has turned so blue he is referred to as Papa Smurff by the locals. Fortunately his girlfriend, Jackie Northup, says she is used to it. You can read

more and see the blue Paul Karason on the internet. It doesn't seem to be a hoax. See [https://binside.typepad.com/binside\\_tv/2008/01/man-who-turned.html](https://binside.typepad.com/binside_tv/2008/01/man-who-turned.html) and <http://abclocal.go.com/kfsn/story?section=news/local&id=5843725>

### **BETTEREDGE'S *ROBINSON CRUSOE***

Melissa Free of the University of Illinois believes she has tracked down the edition of *Robinson Crusoe* which Betteredge quotes from in *The Moonstone*. Betteredge uses *Crusoe* rather like the bible, as he explains:

“You are not to take it, if you please, as the saying of an ignorant man, when I express my opinion that such a book as ROBINSON CRUSOE never was written, and never will be written again. I have tried that book for years – generally in combination with a pipe of tobacco – and I have found it my friend in need in all the necessities of this mortal life. When my spirits are bad – ROBINSON CRUSOE. When I want advice – ROBINSON CRUSOE. In past times when my wife plagued me; in present times when I have had a drop too much – ROBINSON CRUSOE. I have worn out six stout ROBINSON CRUSOES with hard work in my service. On my lady's last birthday she gave me a seventh. I took a drop too much on the strength of it; and ROBINSON CRUSOE put me right again. Price four shillings and sixpence, bound in blue, with a picture into the bargain.”

Free identifies the edition as that published by Macmillan in 1866 as Collins was writing the story. She says it fits in both with the description, the quotes and with at least two of the page numbers cited by Betteredge.

Only a two volume 1790 edition of the book is recorded in Collins's library on his death (Baker 2002 p. 99) though the catalogue would be unlikely to list separately a more recent edition.

### **JEWELS FROM *THE MOONSTONE***

*The Moonstone* begins with the looting of the jewels removed from Seringapatam in 1799 from the legendary treasury of Tipu Sultan. Some of these jewels are now on display in the redesigned William and Judith Bollinger Jewellery Gallery at the Victoria & Albert Museum in London which opened in May. The jewels were given to Major-General George Harris for his part in the battle and although most were sold the emeralds remained in the family and were reset in the early 1870s.

In *The Woman in White*, Mr Fairlie's jewels are based on the collection of Collins's and Dickens's friend Chauncy Hare Townshend (1798–1868). These are on permanent display at the Wisbech and Fenland Museum and by coincidence the bequest was dated 1868, the year *The Moonstone* was published (see [http://www.wisbechmuseum.org.uk/virtualtour\\_townshendroom.htm](http://www.wisbechmuseum.org.uk/virtualtour_townshendroom.htm)).

### **FOSCO STOLEN**

An unashamed steal of Count Fosco from *The Woman in White* is to be found in *Pavel & I* by Dan Vyleta. This murky thriller set in Berlin just after World War II features the menacing Colonel Fosko. A mink-wearing epicurean, the corpulent Fosko is a corrupt British Officer who controls a lawless section of Berlin. Even though English is not German born Vyleta's first language, reviewers have described the book as 'haunting', 'literary', 'enthraling' and 'Grahame Green meets Charles Dickens'.

### **DORIS BARTLEY'S DRESS**

A dress recently came up for sale that once belonged to Doris Elizabeth Bartley, the eldest daughter of Harriet Graves and Henry Powell Bartley. Harriet was the daughter of Caroline Graves and married Bartley, Wilkie's solicitor, in 1878. Doris was born in 1879 and was Wilkie's god-daughter. Under the name Doris Beresford she acted in musical comedies at the Gaiety Theatre and the red silk dress was probably one she wore on stage. It was sold by Auctionatrium as part of the estate of Mary Brown of Portobello in March. It can be seen at [www.auctionatrium.com/portobello\\_mary.html](http://www.auctionatrium.com/portobello_mary.html) labelled simply as 'tum of the century theatrical costume'. The price it fetched is unknown.

### **THE ORIGINAL COLLINS BIBLIOGRAPHY**

The first full length bibliography of Collins was *Wilkie Collins and Charles Reade. First Edition, described with notes* by Morris L. Parrish with the assistance of Elizabeth V. Miller. This was originally published in London in 1940 as a limited edition of 400 copies. It was reprinted as a facsimile edition during 1968 by Burt Franklin of New York as part of its Bibliography and Reference Series. It turns up occasionally on ebay but copies can also be had from book dealer Scott Brindred who specialises in bibliography (17 Greenbanks, Lyminge, Kent CT18 8HG, 01303 862258).

### **SNOOKS**

There was recent publicity about Reigh Mills Boss, reported as kidnapped by her own divorced father, Clark Rockefeller, during a custody visit in Boston.

The seven-year-old girl's nickname, interestingly enough, was Snooks which by a nice coincidence was the name of the Collins family cat in the 1840s. Wilkie always liked animals and in August 1844 he wrote to his mother about a little domestic incident: "I lectured her [Susan, the family servant] the other day upon inhumanity. In her zeal for science, or for her kitchen, (I don't know which) she attempted to re-introduce by the kitten's nose that which the innocent animal had just previously expelled as worthless from an opposite and inferior portion of its body. Charlie tried rage upon the subject with the cook. I tried philosophy with the housemaid. He failed. I succeeded – Purified is the nose of Snooks." There is one other reference to our feline friend when writing from France, once again to Harriet, three years later in August 1847: "I received your letters with great satisfaction. The news about my excellent "Snooks" was perfectly gratifying."

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