



THE WILKIE COLLINS SOCIETY

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NEWSLETTER

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THE JOURNAL

The editors of the *Journal of the Wilkie Collins Society* (Graham Law and Lillian Nayder) have informed us that for a variety of reasons there will not be the expected Volume 10 to be issued for 2008. It is hoped that the *Journal* will resume its normal annual publication during 2009. The annual supplement to *The Collected Letters* of Wilkie Collins will also be published in 2009.

As a reminder, if any members have suitable academic articles for inclusion in the *Journal*, they are invited to submit them to Graham Law at glaw@waseda.jp. In the same way, the Newsletter is always pleased to receive any contributions which can be of a much more informal or speculative nature. These could either be included as a paragraph in the Newsletter or if of greater length could be issued as a stand alone article.

WILKIE COLLINS QUIZZES

If you think you know your Wilkie Collins test yourself on a quiz at FunTrivia. There is no charge to join and you can remain anonymous. The FunTrivia website hosts some 85,000 quizzes in over 12,000 categories. Three of these relate to Wilkie. One, called rather grandly 'The Life and Works of Wilkie Collins' presents ten questions at <http://tinyurl.com/3tg3zw>. The other two are on *The Woman in White* and *The Moonstone*. The questions on *The Moonstone* are rather more difficult than those for the other two. Those who wish to test

their own knowledge of Wilkie Collins can find the questions at <http://www.funtrivia.com/quizzes>. No prizes but good luck.

P. D. JAMES AND *THE PRIVATE PATIENT*

Our distinguished Patron, Baroness James, has recently published her sixteenth crime novel. Most of these feature her police detective, Commander Adam Dalgliesh. A review in *The Times* of 10 September 2008 commented “In the 46 years since Dalgliesh first appeared in print, he has solved murders by penetrating the complexities of human psychology, and illuminated enduring ethical dilemmas..... In negotiating his way through the pathways of human destructiveness, Dalgliesh is also a guide to our times. Lady James is a perceptive chronicler of the changing landscape of London; the flux of urban development and the housing market; the corrosive culture of sink estates; the ruthless politics of the professions; and even the use of the internet for hedonistic purposes.” All in all, the reviewer suggests “The work of Baroness James of Holland Park has elevated English detective fiction far beyond the diverting puzzles typical of the genre novelists of an earlier generation.” But we gather she still admires Wilkie Collins.

The Private Patient is set in a private clinic in Dorset where an investigative journalist arrives for treatment by a distinguished surgeon but comes to an untimely end. The novel is published by Faber and Faber and is available in hardback at £18.99, ISBN 978-0-571-24244-3.

ALLIANCE OF LITERARY SOCIETIES

A note from Linda Curry, the secretary of Alliance of Literary Societies, informs us that “the Winston Churchill Memorial Trust offers opportunities for British citizens to travel overseas to undertake study projects related to their trade, profession or particular interest. These fellowships are open to applicants of any age and from all walks of life, irrespective of academic or professional qualifications. Further details are available from the website at www.wcmt.org.uk.

Members are also encouraged to visit the Alliance website <http://www.sndc.demon.co.uk/> which gives a comprehensive listing of virtually every literary society in the UK, together with useful links, details of literary competitions and dates for various literary festivals.

RAMSGATE

Wilkie and Ramsgate received a mention in the *Times* Online for 30 August 2008 in an article by Clive Aslet on ‘England’s Best Homes’.

“Queen Victoria enjoyed childhood holidays beside the Ramsgate sands, but the truth must out: she also contracted typhoid. Drains were to be a Victorian preoccupation. And there were other things about Ramsgate that may have elicited a grimace. It was occupied by the unrecognised “wife” of one of her rackets uncles. Opium addicts such as Samuel Taylor Coleridge and Wilkie Collins added to the raffish tone.”

Collins regularly visited Ramsgate with Caroline Graves from the early 1870s. Along with his doctor, Frank Beard, he was convinced that the sea breezes were good for his health and gave relief from the oppressive London heat in summer. He regularly stayed at 14 Nelson Crescent and was sometimes joined by his ‘morganatic family’ – Martha Rudd and his children – who stayed in the equally impressive terrace at 27 Wellington Crescent. To observe the proprieties, Wilkie visited them here as Mr William Dawson.

DICKENS, FORSTER AND COLLINS

Sotheby’s literature sale of 17 December featured in lot 40 a superb, extra-illustrated copy of Forster’s *The Life of Charles Dickens*, published by Chapman and Hall in three volumes, 1872–74.

John Forster was a friend of Dickens for over thirty years and is often regarded as his official biographer. He became his adviser in both literary and personal affairs and was his co-executor. Forster originally owned an eighth share of *Household Words* and would have met Collins during his early years of journalism and short story writing. They apparently enjoyed a cordial relationship for several years, meeting at Dickens’s home and during amateur theatricals. The rather pompous Forster, however, became increasingly jealous of Wilkie’s exuberant influence over Dickens. Collins for his part felt no animosity and dedicated *Armadale* to Forster in 1866 “in affectionate remembrance of a friendship which is associated with some of the happiest years of my life.” Collins was impressed with the first volume of *The Life of Charles Dickens* thanking Forster in November 1872 for “the most masterly biographical story you have ever told.” The later two volumes, however, ignored Collins and prompted him to describe the book as “The Life of John Forster, with notices of Dickens.” Collins’s frank views on both Dickens’s work and Forster are recorded in an article in *The Pall Mall Gazette* of 20 January 1890: ‘Wilkie Collins about Charles Dickens from a Marked Copy of Forster’s “Dickens”’.

The Sotheby's first edition copy in a beautiful Sangorski & Sutcliffe morocco binding from 1912 has been expanded to six volumes with 738 additional items expertly mounted within its pages. According to the catalogue entry, these consist of "169 autograph letters and notes by Dickens, friends, and fellow writers, 15 clipped signatures, 120 illustrations of Dickens's work by H.K. Browne ("Phiz"), George Cruikshank, Daniel Maclise, John Leech, and Marcus Stone, 327 engraved portraits of Dickens's circle, contemporary and historical personages, and 111 views of locations relating to the writer's life." This unique copy had an estimate of £17,000–20,000 but with buyer's premium actually sold for £34,850.

Included in the volumes are a full page portrait and three letters of Collins to Dickens's and Collins's mutual friend Charles Kent.

ORIGINAL TEXTS ONLINE

An archive of books from libraries around the world offers free downloads of many original texts using images of the pages. You can use it to look at early English and American editions of Wilkie Collins's works, often including illustrations. A search on his name will also produce some reminiscences and pieces about him and his work. They can be downloaded as PDF files or in various other formats for easy reading. But the great advantage over normal e-texts is that you see the original text on the page just as contemporaries would have originally read it. Hours of harmless downloading fun! <http://www.archive.org/details/texts>.

A NEW REMINISCENCE

Many people who met Wilkie Collins wrote an account of the event. A new one has recently come to light. It was written by William Henry Rideing (1853–1918), an English journalist who spent most of his career in the USA. In the 1880s he was working on *The Youth's Companion*, a Boston publication for which Wilkie wrote three stories. The editor Daniel Ford wrote to Wilkie in May 1886 asking if Rideing could call on him when he was in London. Wilkie replied on 1 June "It is needless to add that I shall be delighted to make Mr Rideing's acquaintance on his arrival in London". This short reminiscence is based on the meeting when Wilkie was 62. It was published 28 years later in 1912. Although the physical description of Wilkie is reminiscent of others, the 'luxuriant beard like spun silver' is a particularly fine evocation of his appearance.

‘AGAIN in memory I call at Gloucester Place to see Wilkie Collins in his little house, a cheerful, rotund, business-like man of a height disproportionate to his ample girth. Already advanced in years, he had the briskness of middle age, and the freshness of youth in his complexion. His luxuriant beard was like spun silver, and had he worn a long mediaeval cloak and peered out of it below its cowl, he would have made the traditional Faust as that character appears before Mephistopheles transforms him. Notwithstanding his matter-of-fact speech with its occasional cockneyisms of phrase and pronunciation; notwithstanding his well-tailored and modern apparel, as modish as that of any city man; there was a suggestion of the pictorial necromancer about him, which grew as one listened to him, and instead of the prints, of which he was a connoisseur, against the walls, one almost expected to find the apparatus of an alchemist.

‘He spoke of having visions and extraordinary dreams, not with any apprehension of mental disorder, nor as revealing anything abnormal, but without visible consciousness of the bewilderment he was producing in the listener. I suppose that as he proceeded he must have seen the question in my face, for as he turned to show me a valuable print he had picked up at half a crown in the neighbourhood of Leicester Square, and described with excellent mimicry the transaction between himself and the old woman who sold it, he offered me a brief explanation, “Coffee. I drink too much of it.”

‘He was writing for us a few stories based on circumstantial evidence, and he frankly exhibited to me the books of remarkable trials which he was using as material. Let not any literary aspirant in the imitative age think from this that he can do the same thing; that old trials in sheepskin volumes will relieve him of the labour of invention and imagination; that ready-made plots are to be bought in Chancery Lane or the Strand at a few shillings apiece. Stevenson’s “sedulous ape” is a part often played in the vanity of youth, but it leads to sad eye-openings. Unskilled and inexperienced hands may boil all the ingredients of an epicurean broth without being able to extract from them the savour of the cook’s secret, incommunicable by formula. The trials are accessible to all, but all attempts to transmute them, as Wilkie Collins did, into little dramas enacted by human beings in natural surroundings, are sure to be futile, and the discouraged novice will learn that what seems so easy depends after all on the possession and exercise of that creative imagination which the books do not supply.’

From *Many Celebrities and a Few Others*, New York, 1912 pp 246–247.

More than 90 reminiscences and accounts of Wilkie Collins can be seen at www.wilkiecollins.com, menu item 4.

NEW ACADEMIC STUDIES

Wilkie Collins Society member Claudio di Vaio has published a new book length study of Wilkie Collins. It is written in Italian – though all the quotes from Wilkie’s work are in English! It contains a detailed discussion of *The Woman in White* and its critical reception from 1860 to the present time and looks at interpretations of it by current scholars of gender in sensation novels. The book is called *Wilkie Collins e il Gioco della Coppie – Rappresentazioni dei Ruoli Sessuali in The Woman in White* which Claudio translates as ‘Wilkie Collins and the Marital Game: Representations of Gender Roles in The Woman in White’. Claudio is studying for his PhD at the University of Pescara. He has published numerous articles on the sensation novels of Collins and Braddon and is currently working on the novels of Joseph Sheridan le Fanu.

The book has ISBN 978-88-548-2130-9 and is best ordered from the publisher at www.aracneeditrice.it where it should cost €9.

Victorian Sensation Fiction – a reader’s guide to essential criticism is by Andrew Radford. The book assesses criticism of the sensation novel from the often vituperative nineteenth century reviews, through the growing interest in the genre in the twentieth to today’s scholarly analysis. There is of course much material about Wilkie Collins as well as Elizabeth Braddon and Mrs Henry Wood. Chapters on the rise and rise of sensation fiction, detection, class, feminism, racism, and how our view of it has changed all lead to a conclusion on future directions for research. ISBN 978-0-230-52489-7, it is published by Palgrave Macmillan and is available on Amazon for £13.99.

Brief Lives: Wilkie Collins by Melisa Klimaszewski is a new short biography due out in March 2009 from Hesperus Press. ISBN 978-1843919155 and available on pre-order from Amazon at £5.59.

A hint from South African and Australian newspapers suggests that biographer extraordinary, Peter Ackroyd – who has written the lives of both Dickens and The Thames – is reputed to be working on a biography of Wilkie Collins. No further details are available as we go to press.

TALKING BOOKSHOP

The Talking Bookshop, which is able to supply all of the various Collins titles currently available as audiobooks, has moved from its original home in

Wigmore Street to Baker Street – parallel in fact with Gloucester Place where Wilkie lived from September 1867. The new address is 36 Baker Street, London W1U 3EU (at the corner of Blandford Street); telephone 020 7486 7040.

CSA Word publishes a CD called *Murder most Foul I*, which contains an unabridged version of ‘Who Killed Zebedee?’ read by Derek Jacobi. The story was first issued in *The Spirit of the Times* in 1880 and was published by Wilkie in his book of collected short stories *Little Novels* in 1887 under the title ‘Mr Policeman and the Cook’. The CD also contains stories by Margery Allingham, Robert Barr, and Arthur Conan Doyle. It is also contained in *Murder most Foul...the collection* which includes four more stories – although not by Wilkie – and isn’t much more expensive. The CDs can be ordered on 0208 871 0220 or from the CSA website <http://www.btowstore.com/epages/3828.sf>.

LITERARY COURSES

The Farncombe Estate Centre is once again running a series of literary courses during 2009. These are a mixture of day and weekend courses and cover such topics as fiction, novel and children’s writing, illustrating books, and journalism. Facilities are provided by the Cotswold Conference Centre and full details are available from Farncombe Estate Centre, Broadway, Worcestershire, WR12 7LJ; telephone: 01386 854100; enquiries@FamcombeEstate.co.uk; www.famcombeestates.co.uk.

Broadway, incidentally, was the picturesque Cotswold village to which Wilkie’s renowned actress friend, Mary Anderson, retired when she left the stage in 1899.

CORNHILL REVIVED?

Sex and the City actress Sarah Jessica Parker is to re-launch a version of the *Cornhill* magazine. Parker is a Wilkie fan – she and husband Matthew Broderick called their son James Wilkie in 2002 claiming that Collins was ‘their favourite author’ (WCS Newsletter Spring 2006) – and the *Cornhill* published *Armada* from November 1864 to June 1866. Parker wants to use the magazine to “unveil some of America’s top undiscovered visual artists and writers.”

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