



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

SPRING 2009

‘VOLPURNO’ AND A PRIZE FROM THE WCS

The most exciting recent news is the discovery of a previously unrecorded short story by Wilkie Collins. This precedes ‘The Last Stage Coachman’ which has hitherto been the earliest known work by Collins, appearing in Douglas Jerrold’s *Illuminated Magazine* in August 1843. Credit for the rediscovery of ‘Volpurno – or the Student’ goes to Daniel Hack, Associate Professor in the Department of English at the University of Michigan, during the autumn of 2008. Readers of *The Times Literary Supplement* may have seen its first republication in the issue of 2 January 2009 together with an introduction by Hack. The WCS is now issuing the story as a separate publication with a different introduction by Paul Lewis.

‘Volpurno’ was originally published in New York on 8 July 1843 in *The Albion, or British, Colonial, and Foreign Weekly* and in the same month in two other broadsheets – in Philadelphia in the *Pennsylvania Inquirer and National Gazette* on 20 July and again in New York in *The New Mirror of Literature, Amusement, and Instruction* on 29 July.

The story is taken from prior publication in England - probably in May or June 1843 -although the original source has yet to be identified. The Wilkie Collins Society would like to offer a prize of 3 years free subscription to the WCS to the

first person who can locate the original UK publication of ‘Volpurno’. So if you’re researching in the British Library or anywhere else in the world, keep your eyes open.

THE COLLECTED LETTERS OF WILKIE COLLINS

With this Newsletter we are also enclosing the latest ‘The Collected Letters of Wilkie Collins: Addenda and Corrigenda (4)’. This was originally scheduled to appear in December 2008 but in the absence of last year’s *Journal* it was felt worthwhile issuing it as a separate publication. There are forty new letters derived from auction or dealers’ catalogues, libraries and collections which had previously been overlooked, some which have recently come to light from various other sources, plus a small number held over from A&C (3) for more detailed annotation. There is now a published total of 3112 letters and the editors have already identified new additions which will be published at the end of the year.

WILKIE COLLINS AND MUTUALLY ASSURED DESTRUCTION

According to Wikipedia at wikipedia.org/wiki/Nuclear_deterrence Collins possibly started the notion of Mutually Assured Destruction:

‘Perhaps the earliest reference to the concept comes from the English author Wilkie Collins, writing at the time of the Franco-Prussian war in 1870: "I begin to believe in only one civilising influence—the discovery one of these days of a destructive agent so terrible that War shall mean annihilation and men's fears will force them to keep the peace".’

This quotation in fact comes from a letter Collins wrote to his German translator, Emil Lehmann, on 7 August 1870 and the full paragraph is:

“I am, like the rest of my countrymen, heartily on the German side in the War. But what is to be said of the progress of humanity? Here are the nations still ready to slaughter each other, at the command of one miserable wretch whose interest it is to set them fighting! Is this the nineteenth century? or the ninth? Are we before the time of Christ or after? I begin to believe in only one civilising influence - the discovery one of these days, of a destructive agent so terrible that War shall mean annihilation, and men's fears shall force them to keep the peace.”

Collins clearly liked the theme since he returned to it not in the novel which begins at the time of the Franco-German War, *The New Magdalen* (1873) but in two later works.

In *Jezebel's Daughter*(1880) Chapter XV. Number III. 1811 Collins describes the mysterious Hungarian:

‘What his history is, nobody knows. The people at the medical school call him the most extraordinary experimental chemist living. His ideas astonish the Professors themselves. The students have named him 'The new Paracelsus.' "I ventured to ask him, one day, if he believed he could make gold. He looked at me with his frightful grin, and said, 'Yes, and diamonds too, with time and money to help me.' He not only believes in The Philosopher's Stone; he says he is on the trace of some explosive compound so terrifically destructive in its effect, that it will make war impossible. He declares that he will annihilate time and space by means of electricity; and that he will develop steam as a motive power, until travelers can rush over the whole habitable globe at the rate of a mile in a minute.’

The second use of this notion comes in *Heart and Science* (1883) Chapter XII, when discussing the evil Dr Benjulia:

‘A large white blind, drawn under the skylight, and hiding the whole room from view. Somehow, the doctor discovered him - and the man was instantly dismissed. Of course there are reports which explain the mystery of the doctor and his laboratory. One report says that he is trying to find a way of turning common metals into gold. Another declares that he is inventing some explosive compound, so horribly destructive that it will put an end to war.’

These excerpts suggest that Collins has perhaps trumped H. G. Wells in predicting the future.

WILKIE COLLINS IN GLOUCESTER PLACE

Collins lived at 90 Gloucester Place from September 1867 till February 1888. There are several details and some photographs at http://www.wilkie-collins.info/home_gloucester.htm. The archivist of both the Portman and Howard de Walden Estates, Richard Bowden, has been delving into the files and has been able to add a few extra points of information. Collins's home for so many years was renumbered from 90 to 65 in 1936. The Property reached the end of its original 99 year lease in 1888 – this, together with building leases for the whole of the block now numbered 37-75, had been granted to a William

Vale – who one can assume was the builder of the whole of this block - in 1789. The new lease for number 90 (65) went to a John Leonard for 25 years from Lady Day 1888. Looking at the dates leads one to think that this was the change which provoked Wilkie Collins's move to 82 Wimpole Street, although at the end of 1887, with the lease on Gloucester Place running out, Collins complained to the actress, Mary Anderson, 'my landlord, the enormously rich Lord [Portman] asked me such exorbitant terms for allowing me to continue to be his tenant that I confronted the horror of moving in my old age.'

Does anyone have an explanation of why all other commemorative plaques are circular whilst Wilkie's is square?

COLLINS DICKENS AND DETECTIVE WHICHER

The Christmas Eve edition of 'Thinking Allowed' on BBC Radio 4 had an interesting discussion on the role of Detective Whicher in the Road Hill House murders, and the influence of that crime on both Collins and Dickens. With the author of *The suspicions of Mr Whicher* Kate Summerscale, Louise Westmarland who lectures in criminology at the Open University, and Dick Hobbs, Professor of Sociology at the LSE. You can hear it at www.bbc.co.uk/radio4/factual/thinkingallowed/thinkingallowed_20081224.shtml

WILKIE COLLINS – THE VICTORIA LIST FAVOURITE

A poll among academics who subscribe to the online Victoria List asked for recommendations of a Victorian novel to change the mind of someone who hates Victorian novels. Wilkie Collins was the overwhelming favourite with *The Woman in White*, *The Moonstone* and *No Name* getting votes. Runners up were Rider Haggard's *She*, Bram Stoker's *Dracula* and *Lady Audley's Secret* by Mary Elizabeth Braddon. Find out more about the Victoria list and how to join at <http://victorianresearch.org/discussion.html>

THE EARLIEST TRANSLATION OF MISS OR MRS?

The earliest French translation of Wilkie's Christmas story *Miss or Mrs?* has come to light under the rather more Gallic title of 'Baisers Furtifs' (Secret

Kisses). It was published on 15 January 1872 in the *Revue des Deux Mondes* although with no indication of who translated it. That makes it the earliest known foreign translation. *Miss or Mrs?* was originally published in *The Graphic Christmas Number* dated 25 December 1871 but in fact issued on 13 December 1871 in London. Collins reported that 200,000 copies of *The Graphic* were sold. *Harper's Weekly* in New York carried it in three parts from 30 December 1871 to 13 January 1872. It was also published in Canada by Hunter Rose in one volume in 1872 and a German translation *Fräulein oder Frau?* was published by Günter in the same year in Leipzig. Tauchnitz published an English language version for sale on the continent on 13 June 1872. *Miss or Mrs?* was republished in London by Bentley as a one volume book *Miss or Mrs? and Other Stories in Outline* in 1873.

THE OTHER TWIN

Unlike most theses which remain hidden on academic library shelves, *Alison Clarke* has taken the unusual step of making available her doctoral thesis *The Other Twin: A Study of the Plays of Wilkie Collins*. As she writes on her website, having spent many years studying them, she provides “the story of his many plays, most of them successfully produced on the London stage an in depth study of the plays, the sources they come from, the collaborations involved, and in the context of their time, along with a fully researched overview of theatre in the Victorian Age.” She continues “When I began my thesis, many of the plays were only available at various libraries around the world, mostly inaccessible to the average keen Wilkie Collins fan. I spent many hours in the British Library reading the plays, either in book form, or in hand-written manuscript form. Happy hours, but time-consuming nonetheless.”

These days, fortunately, etexts are available from James Rusk's site www.digitalpixels.org/jr/wc/ with some background information and illustrations at www.wilkie-collins.info/plays_wilkie_collins. In addition, various modern reprints can be bought on internet book sites such as www.abebooks.com.

Those, however, wishing to obtain a copy of Alison Clarke's work can purchase it for the modest sum of £6.99 from her website www.wilkiesplays.co.uk.

ARMADALE AT THE MILWAUKEE REPERTORY THEATER

As mentioned in last year's spring Newsletter, Wilkie's own favourite of his novels, *Armada*, was staged for the first time in more than 100 years by the Milwaukee Repertory Theatre with a new adaptation by Jeffrey Hatcher. Unfortunately this was rather remote for most WC members to attend but brief snatches with a flavour of the production can now be seen on the Kosmix website at [books.kosmix.com/topic/Armada_\(novel\)](http://books.kosmix.com/topic/Armada_(novel)).

CBEL AND COLLINS ONLINE

The third edition of the *Cambridge Bibliography of English Literature* (Volume 4, 1800-1900) was published in 1999. There is now a limited preview of the 1536 page work at books.google.co.uk/books?id=zc6BnY4UQmIC. The preview does contain most of the section on Collins although you will probably need to use your computer's zoom feature (control +) to read the microdot print.

DICKENS AND TOURISM CONFERENCE

A conference on 'Dickens and Tourism' will take place at the University of Nottingham from 11–14 September 2009. The organisers are looking for papers across a wide range of interests. Proposals are invited from scholars in any relevant discipline on the following main themes:

Victorian tourism, its antecedents and legacy.

Travel writing and guide books of the Victorian period.

Dickens's travel writing: *American Notes*, *Pictures from Italy* and the Journals.

Tourism as it appears in the novels of Dickens and his contemporaries.

Tourism to sites associated with Dickens and his contemporaries.

'Literary' tourism and its association with media-stimulated tourism.

Museums and attractions and their roles in tourism.

Abstracts should not be more than 500 words long, 12 point, 1½-line spaced and be formatted for printing on A4 paper. The deadline for submission of abstracts is Friday 29 May 2009. A final paper of around 4–8,000 words must be submitted by Friday 31st July 2009 for inclusion in the Conference Proceedings. All abstracts and papers should be submitted electronically to

Ann.Lavin@nottingham.ac. Further details will be available via <http://www.nottingham.ac.uk/ttri/>.

100 NOVELS EVERYONE SHOULD READ

The weekend *Telegraph Review* for Saturday 17 January 2009 contained a list of ‘100 Novels everyone should read’, described as ‘A Telegraph selection of the essential fiction library’. *The Moonstone* was listed as number 25, ‘Hailed by T. S. Eliot as “the first, the longest, and the best of modern English detective novels”’, immediately behind James Joyce’s *Ulysses* at number 24. The top three were *Middlemarch*, *Moby Dick* and *Anna Karenina*. There was no inclusion for *The Woman in White* but nor did *War and Peace* make the list as the editors seem to have allowed just one novel per author.

THE WOMAN IN WHITE IN THE INDEPENDENT

For no very obvious reason, *The Independent* for Friday 16 January 2009 reprinted the 1871 *Graphic* theatre review of *The Woman in White* which was originally staged at London’s Olympic Theatre from 9 October that year. The full review can still be found online in the Theatre and Dance section of *The Independent* and begins:

“It is rather late in the day to recommend people to go and see *The Woman in White* at the Olympic Theatre, but those who have not witnessed the piece have a real treat in store for them. Mr Wilkie Collins has adapted the piece with great skill, and, abandoning the usual tenderness for his offspring, which too often characterises the novelist who essays to dramatise his own compositions, he has not hesitated to sacrifice some of the most apparently telling scenes in the novel for the purpose of presenting a clear and artistic play. Then the piece is remarkably well performed.”

EMAIL ADDRESSES FOR MEMBERS

The WCS would like to compile a comprehensive list of email addresses of its members. From time to time events come to our notice and it is generally not feasible to prepare a Newsletter in time to alert members to various items of Collins interest. The TLS publication of ‘*Volpurno*’ is an example which would

proved entirely possible by email. Obviously such a list would remain confidential and will not be passed on to any third party so that you will not be bombarded with unwanted emails. If you are happy to confirm your email address to paul@paullewis.co.uk, we shall include you if an electronic mailing becomes appropriate.

THE ALLIANCE OF LITERARY SOCIETIES

The Literary Weekend and AGM of The Alliance of Literary Societies will be held from 12-14 June 2009 in Dublin. The base for the meeting will be the Best Western Academy Plaza, Findlater Place, Dublin 1 (+353 1 878 0666). Those interested in attending should first contact Julie Shortland, ALS Treasurer, 22 Beeches Road, Kidderminster DY11 5HF or anita.fernandez-young@nottingham.ac.uk.

LEDBURY POETRY FESTIVAL

The annual Ledbury Poetry Festival will be held from 3-12 July. There will be the usual writing workshops, and reading groups together with readings, performances, talks and exhibitions. The judge of this year's poetry competition will be Daljit Nagra. Further details from Church Street, Ledbury, Herefordshire HR8 1DH, 0845 458 1743; www.poetry-festival.com.

Paul Lewis
Andrew Gasson

paul@paullewis.co.uk
apogee@apgee.co.uk

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