

THE WILKIE COLLINS SOCIETY

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NEWSLETTER

SUMMER 2009

A NEW WILKIE WALK - SUNDAY 13 SEPTEMBER

One hundred years ago this November these words were first published and took the reading public by storm.

'I had now arrived at that particular point of my walk where four roads met – the road to Hampstead, along which I had returned; the road to Finchley; the road to West End; and the road back to London. I had mechanically turned in this latter direction, and was strolling along the lonely high-road – idly wondering, I remember, what the Cumberland young ladies would look like – when, in one moment, every drop of blood in my body was brought to a stop by the touch of a hand laid lightly and suddenly on my shoulder from behind me.

I turned on the instant, with my fingers tightening round the handle of my stick.

There, in the middle of the broad, bright high-road – there, as if it had that moment sprung out of the earth or dropped from the heaven – stood the figure of a solitary Woman, dressed from head to foot in white garments, her face bent in grave inquiry on mine, her hand pointing to the dark cloud over London, as I faced her.

I was far too seriously startled by the suddenness with which this extraordinary apparition stood before me, in the dead of night and in that lonely place, to ask what she wanted. The strange woman spoke first.

"Is that the road to London?" she said.'
(All The Year Round vol.II p.101, 26 November 1859)

To celebrate this centenary the Society, helped by member Julian Foster, is planning a walk to recreate at least part of the journey of Walter Hartright from Hampstead Heath to London and it will certainly include "that particular point" where Walter first encounters the woman in white, Anne Catherick.

We are planning it for the afternoon of Sunday 13 September. At present the arrangements are to meet at 2.00 pm by Finchley Road underground station to leave promptly at 2.15 pm. If you are interested in joining us, please email Paul Lewis (paul@paullewis.co.uk). This will give us an idea of numbers and also allow us to let you know at short notice if there are any changes.

EMAIL ADDRESSES FOR MEMBERS

We have had a good response from members so that a comprehensive list of email addresses can be compiled. In this way we can alert you to forthcoming items of Collins interest for which there is insufficient time to prepare a Newsletter. Almost half of all members are on the list. If you did not get an email on 8 June about the radio adaptation of *Armadale* then you are not on the list. If would like to be included on it please confirm your email address to paul@paullewis.co.uk. The list will not be passed on to anyone else and will not be used for anything but sending out information related to Wilkie Collins to members of the society.

ARMADALE

Of all his novels, Wilkie's own favourite was *Armadale*. On 25 June 1888 he wrote to an admirer "To <u>you</u> I may make the confession that I have always considered this novel to be the best that I have written." Fifteen months before he was quoted as telling a reporter "It is by far the best thing I have ever written, and in my own opinion, no other book of mine can compare with it" (*Cassell's Saturday Journal*, 5 March 1887, pp. 355–6). Two years before that he was quoted as writing to another admirer "I am especially pleased to hear that you like "Armadale" – for, if I may venture to pronounce an opinion. I think "Armadale" the best book that I have written. (*New York Times* 29 June 1885 p.3).

But *Armadale* has never taken hold with dramatists and film-makers although there was a German adaptation for television several years ago. So it was a very pleasant surprise to hear what is believed to be its first radio dramatisation on BBC Radio 4 in June. Reading aloud the near 300,000 words of *Armadale* aloud would take more than 27 hours. So collapsing this complex story into three one hour episodes is a major task. When Collins dramatised it for the stage in 1875 he called it *Miss Gwilt!* and made the heroine and villain Lydia Gwilt the central character. Dramatiser Robin Brooks employed the same method, using her as the narrator of the whole story, despite the difficulty caused by her death at the end. This well acted, atmospheric and generally faithful adaptation captures the evil seductiveness of Collins's favourite villain and leading lady.

It ran on Radio 4 on Sundays from 7 to 21 June at 3pm with repeats at 9pm on the following Saturdays. It is not yet known if the BBC will publish this version on CD.

ARMADALE (1866), WILKIE COLLINS - PSYCHIATRISTS IN 19TH-CENTURY FICTION

Wilkie's own favourite novel also features in 'Armadale (1866), Wilkie Collins - Psychiatrists in 19th-century fiction', an essay by Fiona Subotsky published in the British Journal of Psychiatry (2009) 194, 445. "Lunatic asylums appear in other novels of Wilkie Collins, notably in The Woman in White and Jezebel's Daughter, but their medical attendants are not significant for the stories. The villainous Dr Le Doux of Armadale makes up for this. He is represented as not only foreign (suspicious in itself) but unqualified; he has previously practised under another name as an abortionist. Collins can thus distance himself from medical criticism."

Fiona Subotsky has also written in the same series on Sheridan Le Fanu, Charles Reade and Charles Lever as well as an article on R. L. Stevenson's *The Strange Case of Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde*.

DROOD BY DAN SIMMONS - ANDREW GASSON'S OPINION

Drood is a very long (nearly 800 pages) and rather horrid novel purporting to be a manuscript by Wilkie Collins, sealed for 125 years, telling the story of his supposed mutually antagonistic relationship with Dickens. It begins on 9 June 1865 – the date of the Staplehurst railway crash in which Dickens was caught up whilst travelling with Ellen Ternen and where he meets the eponymous Drood – and ends, apart from a final chapter, with the death of the Dickens.

Drood, himself, emerges as a cross between a mesmerising phantom and murderous master criminal.

The enormous amount of research that Dan Simmons has undertaken in preparing his story is not only the cause of the excessive length but also the source of its own undoing. The fictional Wilkie accuses Dickens of "having characters wander off into incidental occurrences and unimportant side-plots having nothing to do with the overriding idea..." With *Drood* it is the superabundance of facts which gets in the way of the story. In the main, the details are correct but, at the risk of nit-picking, there are many small errors such as the description of Wilkie's house in 90 Gloucester Place (there was no servants' staircase and Wilkie did his writing in the large L-shaped study on the first not ground floor).

Irrespective of the above, the 'sound' of Wilkie's voice is totally wrong and self-evidently he would not have written using modern Americanisms. He would not have consumed constantly such vast quantities of laudanum and nor is it easy to accept this version of Wilkie's doppelganger and other phantoms. Those who have read Collins's letters cannot conceive of his both plotting and carrying out murder. There is another unpleasant scene where he kills a puppy just to see the effects of quicklime on its corpse, hardly the actions of the animal lover who wrote in *The Woman in White* "The misery of a weak, helpless, dumb creature is surely one of the saddest of all the mournful sights which this world can show."

The descriptions of Caroline Graves and Martha Rudd are no less incredible and at the very end of the book when Wilkie has written his final note to Frank Beard, barely legible as he draws his last breath, "I am dying, old friend" the reader is expected to believe that he would be finishing off and tidying up his huge manuscript.

Overall, *Drood* is the most speculative, unpleasant, overlong biographical account of Wilkie Collins, Charles Dickens and their friends and family you are likely to encounter. Read it if you are an enthusiast with strong wrists.

DROOD – ANOTHER VIEW FROM PAUL LEWIS

Andrew is of course right that *Drood* adopts an entirely false 'voice' and character for Wilkie and indeed for the other people in his life such as his lifelong companion Caroline and his mother Harriet. Nevertheless I have to admit enjoying it once I had got over the shock of seeing these false notes, which eventually I came to ignore, though my copy has many notes in the margins ending in exclamation marks. Simmons is not a Victorian student still less a fan

of Collins or Dickens. But he did very well from a standing start in his thorough research which seemed to include some fairly obscure items. He also almost succeeded in fitting the unlikely events in the book into the lacunae that inevitably exist in our knowledge of the lives of people who have been dead for more than a century and whom we only know from their letters and the anecdotes of friends. And although the casual killing of the dog and the plans to commit murder rankle, I actually thought the revelation of his actual final victim was very clever. Overall I found it remarkably readable and well told. But then, I brought myself up on science fiction.

A DROOD POLL

So here you have two opposing views. It would be interesting to know what the WCS membership think of it. What is your opinion? Did you like it or hate it? Let us know, preferably by email to Andrew Gasson at apogee@apgee.co.uk and we'll publish the results in the next Newsletter.

PSYCHOPHARMOCOLOGY AND THE MOONSTONE

In the last Newsletter we mentioned that Collins might have invented the concept of Mutually Assured Destruction. Now it seems that there may be a case in *The Moonstone* for his having used psychopharmocology years in advance of the scientists. There is an abstract on the web of 'Psychopharmacology and the mystery of The Moonstone', a paper by Shepard Siegal in *American Psychologist* (vol 40 (5), May 1985, 580-581). This contends that "Collins's detective novel, *The Moonstone*, is remarkable not only for the exploitation of psychological principles but also the recognition of these principles before their discovery by psychologists. Drug dissociation (reported by psychologists in the 1930s) is central to the novel. It is suggested that Collins was a reader of Victorian physiological and phrenological literature, a laudanum addict, and given to introspective analyses of his experiences with opium."

Collins was well acquainted with the controversial John Elliotson who in 1863 tried, unsuccessfully, to use hypnotism as a substitute for laudanum to control the pain of his rheumatic gout. Ezra Jennings in *The Moonstone* (1868) calls Elliotson 'one of the greatest of English physiologists' and uses a case history in Elliotson's *Human Physiology* as his inspiration for the attempt to find the missing diamond by administering a second dose of opium to Franklin Blake.

COLLINS, PHRENOLOGY AND PHYSIOGNOMY

Mention has been made in an earlier Newsletter of assessments of Wilkie's (also available at http://www.wilkiecharacter from his handwriting collins.info/wilkie collins writing.htm). A recent discovery records another assessment in a book on the arts of phrenology and physiognomy How to Read Character: Hand-book of physiology, phrenology and physiognomy, illustrated with a descriptive chart by Samuel Roberts Wells (New York, 1871). The book gives numerous examples and small illustrations of nineteenth century figures, including Collins on pages 124 and 125. "If intellect be the leading development, the forehead and whole anterior compartment of the cranium ... will be deep and broad, as in fig. 167 [a line drawing of Wilkie Collins]. Here the posterior compartment or Region of Propensity is short and narrow, and the Superior or Spiritual Region (seat of the Moral Sentiments) only moderately developed. If your subject have a forehead like this, you will infer that he is both an observer and a thinker of more than ordinary capacity." Collins is described in a footnote as "An English novelist and miscellaneous writer, noted for his skill in the management of the plot in his fictions. "After Dark," "The Dead Secret," and "The Woman in White" are among his most popular works." The full text can be found online with the two pages relevant to Wilkie Collins at http://www.archive.org/stream/howtoreadcharact00fowluoft#page/124/mode/2up.

COLLINS, DICKENS AND THE DUTCH QUEEN

Long standing Dutch member, Pierre Tissot van Patot, has been researching a little known meeting of Wilkie Collins and Charles Dickens with Queen Sophie of The Netherlands which took place in 1870. Pierre writes:

The Dutch Queen Sophie (1818 – 1877), wife of King Willem III (1817 – 1890), visited England from 23 February to 29 March 1870. She met a few times with Queen Victoria and the Prince and Princess of Wales and on Monday 28 March she attended a dinner at the house of Mr John Lothrop Motley (1814 – 1879). Mr Motley was then the US Minister of State (April 1869 – December 1870). He was an historian who had written several well known books on the Dutch History of the 16th and 17th Century. During the dinner Queen Sophie met Wilkie Collins and Charles Dickens. The dinner was also attended by the Dutch and Austrian Ministers of State, and British Members of Parliament. The meeting was recorded in several Dutch newspapers and further details can be found in the *Times* of Tuesday 29 March 1870 (p. 12, col. C).

"In the evening the Queen honoured his Excellency the Minister of the United States and Mrs. Motley with her company at dinner at the American Legation in Arlington Street. Her Majesty was attended by the Baroness de Pabst de Bingerden." Amongst the guests who "had the honour to be present" were

Wilkie Collins and Charles Dickens." Collins had written to Mary Motley on 22 March 1870 "Mr Wilkie Collins accepts with much pleasure the honour of dining with the Minister of the United States and Mrs Lothrop Motley on Monday 28th March at ¼ to 8 'oclock." (WCSJ, 2005, vol. 8, p. 49).

THE WOMAN IN WHITE IN THE DUTCH THEATRE

Pierre has been equally thorough and industrious in researching *The Woman in White*. The first Dutch translation of the novel by W.J. Mensing was published in 1861 (December 1860) by P. N. van Kampen in Amsterdam; later republished in 1874 by the Gebroeders Belinfante as the first book in their cheap Wilkie Collins series. No further editions were published in the 19th century. *The Woman in White* was well known in the Netherlands but not a great financial success.

In England there had been stage productions of the novel before the adaptation by Wilkie Collins himself. In the Netherlands, English plays were not generally very popular. Even the plays of William Shakespeare were translated from a French version. None of the English adaptations of *The Woman in White* was used in The Netherlands but in 1867 the German actress and playwright Charlotte Birch-Pfeiffer wrote her own version as *Die Frau in Weiss*. Charlotte Birch-Pfeiffer was one of the most successful German playwrights of her time but she was forgotten 30 years after her death in 1868. She wrote more then 80 plays and several of the successful ones were performed in the Netherlands for many years. The public liked her plays but the critics found them too melodramatic and old fashioned.

Die Frau in Weiss was first performed in Berlin on 28 October 1867. In Amsterdam the German version was performed only on 24 November 1867. Fraulein Niemann-Seebach, who played a major role, was performing that winter in Amsterdam. The first Dutch performance of the play, De Vrouw in het Wit took place on 5 February1868 in the Stads-Schouwburg in Amsterdam. They also enacted the play over the next few years, performing it at yearly fairs in other cities. There were also extended tours every summer.

In 1870, *De Vrouw in het Wit* was performed by the Koninklijke Tooneelisten from the Koninklijke Schouwburgr (Royal Theater) in Den Haag. They received a yearly grant of 10,000 NLG from the Dutch King. The Koninklijke Toonelisten played *De vrouw in het Wit* only in Den Haag, Delft and Rotterdam.

When the play was revived in the 1887, the starring role was played by Theo Frenkel-Bouwmeester who became the most famous actress of her time. Theo

Frenkel-Bouwmeester also played a star role in a revival of the Dutch version of *The New Magdalen*. The Dutch translation was never officially published and has not been located. The translator, C.J.Roobol, was famous and his other translations were close to the original.

DICKENS AND THE WOMAN IN WHITE PARTY

Dickens Project researcher Jon Varese asks why Dickens was not at the party Wilkie threw to celebrate the completion of *The Woman in White*. The celebratory banquet with a chef from Genoa was at Collins's house 12 Harley Street on Thursday 9 August 1860. On 3 August he wrote to his friend Edward Ward:

"We dine here at ½ past 6, on Thursday the 9th, to drink success to the book in England, Germany, America (United States) and Canada in all which places it will be published this month. Will you come? – No evening dress – everything in the rough – Hunt and Egg are coming and Walker – and perhaps Gregory and Lehmann and H. Bullar. Cast respectability to the winds and write me a line to say you will come!"

Frederick Lehmann accepted shortly after and Collins replied to him on 6 August "Delighted to hear you are coming." and promised to discuss "on Thursday" when he might go away with him. A few days after the party on 14 August Collins wrote to Charles Ward:

"I wish you had dined here on the 9th. The Genoese cook really did wonders. I never eat a more perfect dinner in Paris."

So is it significant that Dickens – who edited *All The Year Round* which had serialised the story and was Wilkie's closest friend – was not invited to the celebratory party? There was clearly no rift between them. In fact Dickens and Collins had their own dinner to celebrate the end of the work at the *All the Year Round* office on 31 July. And on 7 August Wilkie wrote to Dickens accepting a renewed two year engagement on *All The Year Round* for seven guineas a week plus one eighth of the profits. And then on 11 August Collins went down to spend three days with Dickens at his Kent home Gadshill, an invitation which had been sent before 6 August.

We also know that Dickens had been staying in London in early August and returned to Gadshill the day before the party. He did not like socialising at that time feeling many friends judged him for leaving his wife. And there is another reason why he would not be seen out partying. His own brother Alfred had died on 27 July and the funeral was on 3 August. Victorians were very strict about

mourning at that time. So it is not surprising that Dickens did not attend Wilkie's party to celebrate the final work on *The Woman in White*.

THE NEW MAGDALEN REINCARNATED AS ZIRA IN NEW YORK

The dramatic version of *The New Magdalen* was first produced on 19 May 1873 at the Olympic Theatre by Ada Cavendish who played the part of Mercy Merrick opposite Frank Archer as Julian Gray. The play was a great success, running for four months prior to a provincial tour. On the Continent it was performed in Paris, Rome, Berlin, Vienna and with numerous productions in Holland. In America Collins was present for the opening of Augustin Daly's production at New York's Broadway Theatre (10 November 1873). There were numerous revivals including those at the Charing Cross and National Standard, 1875; the Theatre Royal, Brighton, 1883; the Novelty, London, the Prince's, Bristol and the Royal Lyceum, 1884; the Margate Theatre Royal, 1885; The Oldham Colosseum, 1887; and the Marlborough (Holloway Road), 1906.

Also at the turn of the century there was a rather different version called *Zira: a drama in Four Acts* at the Princess Theatre, New York. It was 'founded upon the same story as WILKIE COLLINS' "The New Magdalen" and ran from 21 September 1905 for 128 performances. The original story was set at the time of the Franco-German war in 1870 whereas the *Zira*, rewritten by J. Hartley Manners and Henry Miller, opens in Capetown during the Boer war. The play was Directed by Henry Miller, starred Margaret Anglin in the title role of 'Hester Trent, afterwards called "Zira", and Fred Thorne as the Bishop of Wapping. *Zira* was subsequently staged at the Majestic Theatre, Boston, and a newspaper review of 14 May 1906 recorded that "Boston people are to be afforded the pleasure of seeing the most talked-of straight dramatic amusement of the present day..."Zira" became famous in a single night, and the beautiful play and the beautiful player proved a Broadway sensation. The New York reviewers actually credited Miss Anglin with the finest piece of emotional acting seen in years."

The New Magdalen: a Dramatic Story in a Prologue and Three Acts was 'Published by the Author' in 1873 (1 Vol, 158 pp, buff paper wrappers). There was also a version by A. D. Ames (no 112), Clyde, Ohio 1882. Thanks to the ever industrious James Rusk, an etext of Collins's original version can be found at www.digitalpixels.org/jr/wc/newmagplay.html.

WILKIE ON LINE BY TRISTANIA CURRIE

Tristania Currie has commenced a series of online articles about the works of Wilkie Collins. As an introduction to the project, she writes:

As a freelance writer, both in print and on the web, and longstanding devotee of the works of Wilkie Collins, I am delighted to have this opportunity to tell you about a project that I am working on. I first read 'The Woman in White' as an undergraduate studying English at Queen Mary College, University of London and was hooked immediately by the lively, atmospheric writing, the pageturning plot and the strong characters, particularly Marion Halcombe and Count Fosco. My interest in Wilkie Collins and his contemporaries grew to such an extent that as soon as I graduated I became a postgraduate student at the University of Keele, reading for an MA in Victorian Studies. It was here that I was privileged to be studying under the tutelage of John Bowen and Anthea Trodd, both distinguished Victorian Studies Scholars.

My interest in the literature and culture of the period has guided me down many new and exciting pathways. I am currently engaged in writing a series of linked articles on the works of Wilkie Collins for a magazine site titled *Suite101.com*. The intended outcome of this project is to have available, on this site, a series of reviews outlining the plot, characters, settings and main themes of Collins' works. The articles are aimed mainly at readers who are new to Wilkie Collins or who have read 'The Woman in White' and 'The Moonstone', enjoyed them and want to read more but are now wondering where to turn next and would like to have an idea of what his other novels are about. They are not intended to be scholarly critical evaluations, rather introductions that will render Collins works accessible to a wide range of potential readers.

The series of articles will be published over the coming weeks and months. By copying and pasting http://www.suite101.com/profile.cfm/scheherazade73 into your browser you will access my profile page from which you can follow the links to the Wilkie Collins articles.

JAMES PAYN – A COLLINS MENTION IN THE STRAND MAGAZINE

James Payn (1830-1898) was a prolific novelist, editor and journalist and as such was friendly with most of the literary men of his time, including Charles Dickens to whom he dedicated *Mirk Abbey* (1866) and Wilkie Collins of whom he was a great admirer and to whom he dedicated *Gwendoline's Harvest* in 1870.

By 1867 Payn was already an informal dinner guest at Collins's house in Gloucester Place. They were kindred souls in some respects since at school they were both bullied and known as story tellers and in later life both suffered from gout. Collins advised Payn on literary matters, especially those concerning publication in the United States and Canada. Collins wrote in March 1869 "I have found Harpers very liberal, and thoroughly straightforward

people – and I hope you may have the same experience of them." They published *Bred in the Bone* in *Harper's Weekly* but complained of Payn's notoriously indecipherable hand writing. To Hunter Rose in Toronto, Collins wrote in February 1875 "Only the other day, Payn was cordially thanking me for introducing him to you. So you see it is a case of "love on both sides." A better fellow than P. never took pen in hand. I reckon him among my special friends."

While Collins was battling during 1869 with the Dutch firm of Belinfante Brothers over royalties for their publishing *Man and Wife*, he collaborated with Payn on an unsigned article entitled 'A National Wrong'. This piece commented on and reprinted Collins's correspondence with the firm. It was published by Payn in his capacity of editor of *Chambers's Journal* on 12 February 1870 and recently reprinted by the WCS (Gasson, Law and Lewis, WCS, July 2004).

Payn made two brief references to Collins in *Some Literary Recollections* (1885); and in *Notes from the News* (1890) one of the reprinted essays described how science had caught up with an idea in *No Thoroughfare*. Another reference was recently found in *The Strand Magazine* under the heading 'The Compleat Novelist' where Payn is now advising others on the art of story telling.

"At all events, whether the ending is good or bad, it ought to be concealed. There are some readers indeed who are so unprincipled as to look at (what used to be) the third volume first, just as children cannot keep their hands from the dessert when the soup is on the table; but this conduct is contemptible. Wilkie Collins thought it criminal. I shall never forget his distress of mind when, in the vanity of youth, I boasted to him that I had guessed the secret of "The Moonstone" at an earlier date than he had intended."

BRIEF LIVES

Wilkie Collins will soon appear in the series 'Brief Lives' from Hesperus Press due to be published in later this year (ISBN 9781843919155, £6.99). The author of this short biography of 112 pages is Melisa Klimaszewski and the introductory blurb runs as follows: "A close friend and collaborator of Charles Dickens, Collins secured his own fame with sensational novels that feature intricate legal plots, mistaken identities, and complex crimes. Boldly challenging the mores of Victorian society by maintaining two families and shunning the institution of marriage, Collins was also one of the most unconventional public figures of his day. His life story, succinctly told in this elegant biography, promises to instruct and to entertain."

WILKIE COLLINS - ESSAYS

Wilkie Collins – Interdisciplinary Essays, edited by Andrew Mangham, was first published in 2007. Cambridge Scholars Publishing has now issued a second edition in paperback and with a new preface and a new foreword by Jenny Bourne Taylor. The book is £14.99 from www.c-s-p.org.

WILKIE COLLINS AND THE WIRE

Fans of *The Wire*, the prizewinning police drama set in Baltimore which is being shown on BBC2, may be amused to know of a Wilkie Collins connection. The show was created and written by Baltimore journalist David Simon who spent a year with the police to get the background to the story. His previous series *Homicide: Life on the Street* features an overweight drug baron who hates violence called Wilkie Collins. He was played by actor Robert F Chew who reprised a similar character – Joseph (Proposition Joe) Stewart – in *The Wire*.

WCS member Mark Bennett of the University of Glamorgan says "I am sure the use of the Collins name is knowing; David Simon must be a fan". And he sees "a sliver of influence" in the way the series constructs "the city through the multiple and interacting perspectives of different groups in the tradition of Collins's multiple narrators."

CHURCHILL SCHOLARSHIPS

The Winston Churchill Memorial Trust is once again offering Travelling Fellowships to UK citizens to travel overseas to undertake study projects related to their profession, trade or particular interest. Applications in a variety of categories should be received by 6 October 2009. Further details are available on the Trust's website at www.wcmt.org.uk or from 15 Queen's Gate Terrace, London, SW7 5PR.

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