



THE WILKIE COLLINS SOCIETY

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NEWSLETTER

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There are two main themes for this Newsletter, *The Woman in White* and the 150th anniversary of its first publication and the relationship between Collins and Dickens in the light of several recent publications. 26 November 1859 is the issue of *All the Year Round* in which *A Tale of Two Cities*, Dickens first story for the recently created periodical, concluded and was immediately followed by the opening instalment of *The Woman in White* by Wilkie Collins, his friend and collaborator. Between the two stories Dickens had announced “And it is our hope and aim, while we work hard at every other department of our journal, to produce, in this one, some sustained works of imagination that may become a part of English Literature.” *The Woman in White*, never out of print since its first publication, has amply fulfilled this aspiration.

TALKING ABOUT DETECTIVE FICTION

But first we must begin with a short history of the British detective fiction by our distinguished Patron, P. D. James. From the Foreword we learn that this followed a request in 2006 from the Bodleian Library’s Publishing Department. *Talking about Detective Fiction* is a splendid little book, doing exactly what it says on the cover, in eight chapters from the beginnings, by way of Sherlock Holmes, the Golden Age, hard boiled detectives, formidable women authors of the *genre* and ending with a glimpse of tomorrow. Each chapter begins with an

amusing cartoon and the book concludes with a short Bibliography and Suggested Reading. (ISBN 978-1-85124-309-9, £12.99).

Wilkie Collins receives due mention in the opening chapter where *The Moonstone* is singled out for particular praise. “No other single novel of its type more clearly adumbrates what were to become the main characteristics of the genre.”

THE WOMAN IN WHITE WEEK BY WEEK

To celebrate the 150th anniversary of the publication of *The Woman in White* in Charles Dickens’s periodical *All The Year Round*, WCS member Paul Lewis has begun the mammoth undertaking of republishing the story in its original 40 parts ,week by week, as the Victorians read it.

Each week a pdf of the text of the original will be emailed to subscribers. More than 225 people are receiving the emails including more than 70 WCS members who are on our email list. If you are not already on the WCS email list send Paul your details now and he will add you to the recipients. If you have any friends who would be interested feel free to let them know. There is no charge – all you have to do is to send an email with the subject *The Woman in White* to paul@paullewis.co.uk. New subscribers will get previous parts to date.

The first part was dated 26 November 1859 but in fact was available three days earlier on 23 November. And our first part was sent out on the 150th anniversary of that day together with a copy of the original illustrations in *Harper’s Weekly*, which published the story simultaneously in New York. Future parts will be sent out each Monday until 22 August 2010.

If you do not have access to email, the Society regrets it cannot post printed copies each week but we enclose the first one for your interest. More information at www.womaninwhite.co.uk and you can follow Wilkie's and Dickens's day to day lives 150 years ago – and mine while doing this project – at www.twitter.com/thewomaninwhite.

The story is newly e-texted from the original by James Rusk of Texas and this pure original version is not available anywhere else. Our thanks once again go to James for his sterling work.

THE WOMAN IN WHITE AT THE THEATRE

Perhaps because of *The Woman in White* anniversary or probably just by coincidence, various theatres seem to have decided to stage productions of Collins's ever popular novel. Earlier this year, Christendom College in Virginia, USA, presented it as their spring play from 3-5 April. Closer to home, the Stockport Plaza ran a production from 24-31 October. More recently, the Sevenoaks Players followed suit with a version of the play at the Stag Theatre in their home town from 11 to 14 November.

WOMAN IN WHITE ON FLICKR

Another appearance of *The Woman in White* is on the photographic website, Flickr. Here you will find two 'Interpretations for *The Woman in White* by Wilkie Collins' on <http://www.flickr.com/photos/28819258@N05/> illustrating the text "There, as if it had sprung that moment out of the earth stood the solitary figure of a woman dressed from head to foot in white." Another artistic approach is found with a cut-out white figure on a book at <http://www.flickr.com/photos/ouissi/3338862910/>

THE WOMAN IN WHITE IN THAILAND

It may be of interest to members to know that there are now learners of English reading 'The Woman in White' all over the world. One of our members, Richard Lewis, produced an adaptation of the novel for Oxford University Press seven years ago as part of their 'Bookworm' series of graded readers for foreign learners of English. This adaptation involved simplifying the vocabulary to an Upper Intermediate level, restructuring the book into three parts and fifteen chapters, having the story told by just two characters, Walter Hartright and Marian Halcombe, and including illustrations. There is also a glossary. To date this version of 'The Woman in White' has sold some 60,000 copies globally. Excitingly, around a year ago a bi-lingual edition for China was produced with running translations of vocabulary into Chinese throughout the book and in recent weeks a beautifully presented bi-lingual edition for Thailand has appeared. There is therefore now the prospect of 'The Woman in White' reaching a huge audience in China and Thailand. How pleased Wilkie would have been, and how equally pleased Richard Lewis is to have played a part in transmitting this great novel to a truly global audience.'

The Thailand edition is translated by the Se-Education Publication Company Limited by arrangement with OUP (ISBN 978-974-212-895-1).

THE BROTHERHOOD

Count Fosco also appeared on *The Guardian* books page for 10 October 2009 where it published another of its '10 of the Best' series. On this occasion, John Mullen listed 'Ten of the Best Secret Societies in Literature'. Top of the list was The Brotherhood, an Italian secret society from which Fosco was on the run in *The Woman in White*. At the end of the book, Fosco's body is found in the Paris mortuary with 'T' for Traditore cut into his arm. Collins's creation is in

good company with representatives from Spectre (Ian Fleming) via The Secret Seven (Enid Blyton) to the Klu Klux Klan (Arthur Conan Doyle).

WILKIE COLLINS IN THE *SEATTLE POST*

The indefatigable traveller and WCS member Pierre Tissot Van Patot from Holland has been continuing his researches, this time in the USA. He has found the following unexpected paragraph in the *Seattle Post-Intelligencer* of 24 September 1889:

“At a dinner, not long ago, Wilkie Collins related instances proving how impossible it was to introduce into a novel descriptions of places wholly imaginary. In one of his works he describes a house which was entirely the offspring of his imagination. A few days after publication, a man called upon him to protest against the introduction of his house into his novel. Strange to say, the pages of the novel contained a perfect description of the man’s property. At another time he used as one of his characters a man who was so exact about his eating that he weighed every morsel which entered his stomach. Mr Collins has in reality never heard of such a man. He was greatly surprised one week after the appearance of his book by the visit of an utter stranger who wished to know by what right Mr. Collins made him ridiculous in print by mentioning one of his peculiarities.”

The first story was originally related by Collins in ‘Reminiscences of a Storyteller’, published by *The Universal Review* the previous year, 1888. The subject of the description was Blackwater Park in *The Woman in White*. The second slightly altered story appeared in the same recollections with Count Fosco as the character in question.

The piece was published the day after Wilkie succumbed to bronchitis but no mention is made of his death.

WILKIE COLLINS'S TROUSERS

Another piece located by Pierre in *The Toronto Globe* refers to Wilkie as a man of fashion. “The “Swells” of New York, it is said, never wear the same trousers two days in succession, and having the “off” pair carefully pressed, always display the crease fold of newness down the front: but patient appliances have placed it within the means of “the sons of toil” to keep their trouser knees from “blistering.” Trousers with the fold of freshness or newness down the front are becoming so general that the “swells” incline to the blister or bagginess, indicating wear. Wilkie Collins, the novelist, is as noticeable for the bagginess of the knees of his trousers as some public men are for their shocking bad hats, and when in America some years ago declared that he did not feel entirely happy until wear had produced this effect. He, however, was something of a Sybarite, and studied comfort rather than style.”

Wilkie was also presented as an accidental fashion icon in Wybert Reeve’s 1906 ‘Recollections of Wilkie Collins’ published in *Chambers’s Journal*.

“One thing greatly amused us. Before leaving England he found himself in want of a rough travelling suit of clothes, and driving through the City, he turned into Moses’ great emporium and bought a cheap shoddy suit. The *New York Herald*, in describing Collins, gave an elaborate account of his person. He was wearing at the time the slop suit, and the description wound up with the statement that Mr Collins was evidently a connoisseur of dress. He had on one of those stylish West End tailor’s suits of fashionable cut by which an Englishman of taste is known.”

CHARLES DICKENS BY MICHAEL SLATER

Just published is *Charles Dickens*, the magnum opus by Michael Slater, emeritus Professor of Victorian Literature at Birkbeck College, University of London. To do justice to this excellent biography would take up the entire Newsletter but here we have in 700 pages, 27 chapters, 80 plates and 61

illustrations in the text everything you ever wanted to know about the life and works of Charles Dickens. Collins is well represented with significant discussion in connection with *The Lighthouse*, *The Frozen Deep*, *The Woman in White* and *The Moonstone* together several mentions of his other works. Details of Dickens's friendship with Collins are scattered throughout the book, easily found with the comprehensive index, beginning with "His growing friendship with Wilkie Collins, twelve years his junior but already very much a professional writer and one whose works he admired, seems to have provided another source of relief and relaxation for Dickens."

Charles Dickens is not only a thoroughly readable biography but a work of great scholarship with full references to 43 pages of notes. *Charles Dickens* will deservedly become the Inimitable's definitive biography.

It is published by Yale University Press at £25 (ISBN 978-0-300-11207-8). The publishers have kindly agreed that members of the WCS can take advantage of the discounted price of £22 including free postage if ordered on the enclosed form.

DROOD

We didn't receive many replies to our *Drood*' poll in the summer Newsletter but we have two contributions from members. Paul Graham writes:

"I have just finished *Drood* and take the Gassonian rather than the Lewisian point of view. You both point out that the tone is wrong - how the author of *Heart and Science* could callously kill a puppy as part of an experiment to discover the corrosive nature of quicklime is beyond me - but the plot itself is far too flimsy and silly to justify the vast amount of background research that must have gone into it. Loose ends are everywhere.

Wilkie's "disposal" of Agnes - fed to the monster stalking the servant's staircase is just absurd. It left the questions of where the girl disappeared to and how she died (if she did) unanswered. It is also unclear who wrote the letter from her naming her soldier boyfriend.

I agree with Paul that the revelation of Wilkie's final victim was clever and unexpected - but this was mainly because it was motiveless. Having taken such pains to get rid of Caroline from his home, and rather revelling in her consequent discomfort, Wilkie then risks the noose to extricate her and get her back in his home again!

Wilkie's murder of Dickens is described - and then revealed to have been only a dream! This is a cheap trick and a con on the reading public. The Other Wilkie and the Scaly Green Woman who haunt Wilkie are presumably meant to be emanations from his laudanum addled brain. Is the whole unpleasant Drood experience a part of this hallucination? Are we meant to believe that it is an extremely elaborate and entirely pointless practical joke played by Dickens and which lasts five years? In particular I found the continual scuttling scarab boloney tedious in the extreme. As an exercise in horror fiction (if that is what it is meant to be) it failed."

Adele Wills, however, presents a more positive view:

"Drood" is a monstrous novel, in all respects, and the liberties it takes with its representation of Collins and Dickens reveals a lack of real sympathy for its subject matter. However, like Paul Lewis, I found the novel strangely compelling and the plot's twists and turns certainly commanded my attention. There are false notes aplenty and the sensationalist style sometimes falters. But what worked for me was the uncertainty around the novel's 'reality', created by the unreliable and opium-addicted narrator. Many scenes are far-fetched and people behave inconsistently and strangely; yet this oddness was also gripping. Coupled with Dickens' own powerful imagination and his interest in mesmerism, the novel did have an internal coherence. Don't read the novel for any sense of an authentic exploration of the creative relationship between Dickens and Collins; but do read it for an unashamedly fantastic and Gothic perspective on the final years of Dickens' life and for an ingenious and imaginative view on Dickens' final unfinished novel."

THE LAST DICKENS

Mathew Pearl's *The Last Dickens* covers some of the same ground as *Drood* with a preoccupation for opium and its dens in Victorian London. It is no less well researched but mercifully about half the length and a good deal more readable. It is the story of James Osgood of Boston publishers Fields, Osgood & Co. (later James R. Osgood & Co) and his search for any traces of the unfinished half of the manuscript of *The Mystery of Edwin Drood* following Dickens's untimely death in 1870. Osgood's journey takes him to Gad's Hill, London and the less salubrious parts of the capital's underworld. These adventures are interposed with Dickens's last reading tour of the USA in 1867 and a digression to India to encounter Frank Dickens. The overall theme emerges as opium with a fictional master criminal although we are introduced to the real life characters of John Forster, Georgina Hogarth, George Dolby and Frederic Chapman. We also meet the Harper Brothers who are portrayed in a rather unfavourable light. Although Collins does not appear as a character and receives only one or two brief mentions, the novel is still worthwhile reading for a realistic impression of the places in the nineteenth century. The search for *Edwin Drood* is pure speculation but unlike Simmons's *Drood* is believable and ends with a satisfyingly constructed plot. (ISBN 9781846550843 hardback, £12.99).

***WANTING* by Richard Flanagan**

There seems no getting away from Dickens at present. He features once more, this time with Collins, in Richard Flanagan's new novel *Wanting*. The main characters are Sir John and Lady Franklin and a young aborigine girl called Mathinna whom they adopt but ultimately fail to westernise. Much of the book takes place during Franklin's governorship of Van Dieman's Land (Tasmania) and deals with the brutal history of the treatment of the indigenous population. Franklin's constant desire is to return to sea and resume his quest for

exploration. This becomes the voyage to the Northwest Passage which also results in failure and the demise of the entire expedition. The Tasmanian story is juxtaposed with Dickens's meeting with Lady Franklin, his public support in the pages of *Household Words* to refute the charge of cannibalism by British sailors and the production of *The Frozen Deep*, based of course on the disastrous Franklin expedition. This brings Wilkie into the plot, albeit as something of a bystander, with both the writing and the theatrical productions of the play which in turn leads to Dickens's relationship with Ellen Ternan. *Wanting* is published by Atlantic Books at £14.99 (ISBN 978-1-84887-071-0). Further details are to be found on the Flanagan website at www.richardflanaganwanting.com.au/thebook.aspx.

BLEAK HOUSE FOR SALE

We stay with Dickens to mention the mansion in Broadstairs originally known as Fort House and now called 'Bleak House'. Earlier this year it was put on the market for the modest sum of two million pounds by a local agent (www.terencepainter.co.uk). Quoting the estate agent's blurb:

"Bleak House commands one of the most prominent positions in Broadstairs - high up on the cliffs on the coast of Kent stands this mansion, known far and wide as the seaside residence of the great novelist, Charles Dickens. This Grade II Listed house was built in 1801 and has to be one of the country's most renowned homes as here, in a small study looking straight out across the sea, Charles Dickens wrote the greater part of his most famous novel, *David Copperfield*. The current owners of this amazing property have extensively restored the majority of this vast building, retaining a multitude of grand and quirky features including the lower ground floor museum, with its prison cells, underground inn and old artefacts."

Following the success of *The Woman in White*, Collins rented the house with Caroline Graves from July to October 1862. It provided both a quiet place for working on the serialisation of his next novel, *No Name* (1862), and ample

accommodation for the frequent visitors which included Charles Ward, Frank Beard and Augustus Egg, as well as Henry Bullar and Edward Pigott for the sailing.

THE DANGERS OF CRINOLINE

Book dealer, Jarndyce, well known for its specialisation in Dickens material, had an interesting item on sale in its September 2009 (CLXXXIII) catalogue. Item 493, Sensational Chapbooks number 22, published in 1858 was ‘The Dangers of Crinoline, Steel Hoops, &c. Shown in the Fearful Account of a Lady of Title Nearly Burnt to Death’ This is nicely reminiscent of one of Wilkie’s articles ‘Give Us Room’ originally published in *Household Words*, 13 February 1858 and reprinted in *My Miscellanies* (1856). Here Collins also discusses the dangers of crinoline in the context of overcrowding in parties given in private houses.

WILKIE COLLINS, MEDICINE AND THE GOTHIC

WCS member Dr. Laurence Talairach-Vielmas has written another book on Collins. *Wilkie Collins, Medicine and the Gothic* examines how Wilkie Collins’s interest in medical matters developed through his writing. He claims that the aristocratic villains, victimized maidens and medieval castles of classic Gothic tales were reworked and adapted using medical detail to thrill his Victorian readership. He covers nine novels from *The Woman in White* to *The Legacy of Cain*. (University of Wales Press, 2009, Hardback, ISBN 10-0708322239. Price £75 – but cheaper through Amazon).

THE VICTORIAN APPROACH TO MODERNISM IN THE FICTION OF DOROTHY L. SAYERS

There are many references to Wilkie Collins in a new book by another WCS member Aoife Leahy. *The Victorian Approach to Modernism in the Fiction of*

Dorothy L. Sayers is published by Cambridge Scholars Publishing. Leahy finds numerous links between Sayers and Collins and shows how she draws on Collins's work melding it with many other strands from Victorian fiction. (ISBN (10): 1-4438-0993-4, £34.99 and slightly less through Amazon).

BIRTH RECORDS

New online records have enabled us to find for the first time the baptism of Wilkie's brother Charles Allston Collins. He was born on 25 January 1828 at the house in Pond Street, Hampstead, where the family lived from 1826-1829. He was baptised on 11 April 1828 at the parish church of St John at Hampstead.

The records also contain the image of the original baptism record for Wilkie Collins on 18 February 1824 at Saint Marylebone, Westminster. Here his father is given his full name William John Thomas Collins – the only other times that appears are on William's will and his own baptismal record. The records contain no baptisms for any of Wilkie's three children. Only the youngest, his son William Charles Collins (25 December 1874), has a birth certificate. His two daughters Marian (4 July 1869) and Harriet Constance (14 May 1871) had none. Although registration of births was required from 1836 no sanctions were imposed for those that did not do so until 1874.

WILKIE IN NOVELS

WCS member Jackie Irwin from New South Wales, Australia has pointed out that contemporary author Audrey Niffenegger mentions Wilkie's two most famous works in two of her novels. Jackie writes:

“In *Her Fearful Symmetry* (2009, and her latest book) “Valentina was lying on the pink sofa with a tattered Penguin edition of *The Woman in White*. She found it difficult to concentrate on Count Fosco and Marian with Elspeth fluttering pages only a few feet away.” Elspeth is

Valentina's aunt in ghost form. I believe the reference is mentioned because this book features 2 separate pairs of twins, one of which set has a swap of identities....It is therefore perhaps recalling the Laura Fairlie and Anne Catherick swap.

In *The Time Traveller's Wife* (first published 2004 and recently made into a film) "I'm at Henry's apartment, in Henry's bed, reading *The Moonstone*." Perhaps the link between it and *The Moonstone* might be the fact that drugs are referenced as a means to an end...the end in this book's case being the stopping of the time travelling tendency of the main character in the book to secure him in the present with his wife. Anyway that is my theory. I think the author must be a Wilkie fan."

If anyone else comes across Wilkie references in books please let us know.

CHICAGO PUBLIC RADIO

Chicago Public Radio has made available a lecture by Sara Malton recorded on 4 April 2009 as part of the Fourth Annual Caxton Club/Newberry Library Symposium on the Book. The talk is entitled 'A Capital Past: Forgery, Wilkie Collins and 19th-Century Cultural Memory'. The lecture considers how nineteenth-century authors compared the severe punishment for financial forgery with the relatively limited penalties doled out for crimes against intellectual property. Sara Malton, of St. Mary's University in Halifax, explores this aspect of nineteenth-century culture by concentrating on the life and works of Wilkie Collins. The whole talk can be downloaded from <http://www.chicagopublicradio.org/Content.aspx?audioID=33746>.

COLLINS ON THE RADIO

Two of Wilkie's most popular short stories have recently been broadcast on BBC Radio 7. 'A Terribly Strange Bed' was read in two instalments on 14 and 15 October. It was originally published on 24 April 1852 as Collins's first ever contribution to *Household Words* and later included in his 1856 collection of

short stories, *After Dark*. ‘Who Killed Zebedee? Was a more recent broadcast, also in two instalments, on 23 and 24 November and read by Ronald Pickup. This story was originally written for the US journal, *The Spirit of the Times* for 25 December 1880 and included in the later volume of short stories, *Little Novels* (1887), as ‘Mr Policeman and the Cook’.

MYSTERY MASTERPIECE - *THE MOONSTONE*

If you’d like an entertainment which is somewhere between good old fashioned Cluedo and an onscreen computer game, then ‘Mystery Masterpiece: The Moonstone’ is worth investigating. The introduction reads “An ancient and priceless piece of jewellery, the Moonstone, has been stolen, and it’s up to you to track it down! Investigate every person who was in the mansion at the time of the crime to solve the mystery and catch the crook, in this Hidden Object game! Explore every room of the mansion to find valuable clues in Mystery Masterpiece – The Moonstone, and return the jewel to its rightful owner.” There are nine suspects, eight of whom come straight from the novel and Raj Gupta who represents the Indians. Excellent graphics and moody accompanying music if you like. The game costs \$6.99 or you can download a version which allows you to play for free for one hour. The file size, however, is very large at 145 Mb and takes a long, long time to download. Full details at <http://www.bigfishgames.com/download-games/5809/mystery-masterpiece-the-moonstone/index.html>.

WILKIE COLLINS ON FACEBOOK

Wilkie apparently has a new French based fan site located on Facebook under the heading of ‘Entertainment & Arts - Books & Literature’. It describes itself as ‘Un groupe pour les fans francophones de Wilkie Collins! Wilkie is our master! Honorons sa mémoire :-)’. At present there are 61 people signed up who confess to being ‘Proud members of Wilkie Collins Addicts’ and you can

see the various messages in a good mixture of languages on www.facebook.com/group.php?v=wall&viewas=0&gid=41579931333.

THE WILKIE COLLINS MINI CHALLENGE

Another unusual website is the Wilkie Collins Mini-Challenge. The challenge itself is to read or watch two works by Wilkie Collins between 1 October 2009 and 1 December 2010 – not a problem for WCS members. You can sign up for the challenge or leave comments and links to reviews. There are a several other related topics. (minichallenges.blogspot.com/2009/09/wilkie-collins-mini-challenge.html).

OTHER WILKIE COLLINS

Recently auctioned on ebay was the *Report of the Cruise of the U.S. Revenue Cutter Bear and the Overland Expedition for the Relief of the Whalers in the Arctic Ocean, from November 27,1897 to September 13,1898*. The interesting thing about this particular copy was the tipped in visiting card of a previous owner, Captain John Wilkie Collins, Engineer in chief of the U.S. Cutter Service.

Also to be had on the web are American Indian replica knives from www.nativewayonline.com. The Administrative Contact is listed as one Wilkie Collins which reminds us of *Hide and Seek* and the outlandish Mat Marksman who was scalped by Indians.

SHADYOLD LADY

The curiously named website www.shadyoldlady.com is a comprehensive guide to London “helping to bring her intimate knowledge of London to the masses.” There are numerous sections with popular entries ranging from the Gunpowder Plot via Hercule Poirot’s house to Charles Dickens’s first love. Others include themes, tours, architecture, graves and a lengthy literary list in which Collins’s home at 90 Gloucester Place is duly recorded. There are brief details of

Wilkie's life and works and the page is complete with the virtual blue plaque which all subjects receive.

LONDON EXPLORERS GROUP

Following our September *Woman in White* walk, Andy Duncan reminds us of his own walking group:

“LEG – short for London Explorers Group – is a London walking group providing opportunities for Londoners to explore their city, learn about its history and heritage and find out about what's going on in the city today in terms of development, regeneration and infrastructure renewal. LEG runs at least one walk a month – repeated twice during the week and twice at weekends – exploring a different part of the capital. These walks are just turn up, last about two hours, take place whatever the weather and cost £10 (£8 with a LEG card). LEG also organises occasional specialist walks, for example on architecture and geology. These walks also last about two hours, take place whatever the weather and cost £10, but they usually need to be booked. The regular monthly walks are led by Dr Andy Duncan, founder of LEG and author of *Walking London*, *Secret London* and other well-established London guides. The specialist walks are usually led by experts in their field. To join LEG, all you need to do is sign up for the mailing list by sending your email address (or postal address if you are not online) – to LEG at info@leglondon.co.uk, 19 Boileau Road, London SW13 9BJ, tel: 07958 656 888. The current LEG programme is online at www.leglondon.co.uk.”

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