



THE WILKIE COLLINS SOCIETY

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NEWSLETTER

SUMMER 2010

MORE *WOMAN IN WHITE*

The Woman in White in its 150th anniversary year is still occupying our attention. Accompanying this Newsletter are two essays relating to Wilkie's most famous novel.

Paul Lewis has now finished his week by week e-text publication of the original text of the serial as it appeared in forty parts from 26 November 1859 to 25 August 1860. The parts can be downloaded from www.womaninwhite.co.uk and the whole collection of 40 parts is also available there as a single PDF. The site also contains PDFs of the original illustrations from *Harper's Weekly* by John McLenan and a growing catalogue of background material about the book and its publication.

The original text has never been available in electronic form before and the e-text has been carefully collated to give an accurate transcription of Wilkie's words as originally published. The text includes the errors of the original.

A year ago the Society retraced Walter Hartright's walk and his meeting with Anne Catherick on the road from Hampstead to London. Paul Lewis's account of that walk with much original material and analysis is enclosed with this newsletter. The route of Walter's walk is now available on an annotated Google map. Follow the walk, check out key events on it, and use Google Streetview to take the walk yourself! The link is on www.womaninwhite.co.uk in the background section.

We also enclose Andrew Gasson's '*The Woman in White – a Chronological Study*' which was originally published in Volume II of the First Series of the society's *Journal* in 1982. The current version has been considerably updated with new material and evidence of the novel's publishing history and tries once and for all to dispel the myth that the US edition preceded the English book version in three volumes. It didn't!

HISTORY TODAY

The Woman in White featured in a well illustrated article in the August issue of *History Today* (volume 60, no. 8). Sarah Wise in 'A Novel for Hysterical Times' looks at events that possibly influenced Collins's novel. She first mentions the story ascribed to John Everett Millais when he was walking home with Wilkie and Charles Collins and they met a real life woman dressed in flowing white robes. The next section describes the case taken from Maurice Mejan's *Recueil des Cause Célèbres* in which Marie Douhault was locked away in a lunatic asylum. This is generally regarded as the main source for *The Woman in White*. Not otherwise available, the lengthy summary provides full details of the complicated case.

The final possible influence given in the article is the story of Constance Cumming, an elderly widow, whose daughters had her consigned to various asylums in order to obtain control of her property. The article describes how this case was part of the 1850s 'lunacy panic' and quotes from *The Lancet* 'No case could illustrate more forcibly or more painfully than Mrs Cumming's the wrongs and the cruelties that may be perpetrated under the name of the law; no case could demonstrate more urgently the necessity for vigorous and radical reform in the law that could permit such atrocities to be permitted.'

The article can be purchased online at www.historytoday.com/sarah-white/woman-white-novel-hysterical-times although this version does not contain the illustrations.

THE MUGHAL PRINCE

Following on the Nottidge case mentioned in the Spring Newsletter, WCS member Chris Adye spotted another possible influence for *The Woman in White* in a *Guardian - Observer* review of 1 August for *The Inordinately Strange Life of Dyce Sombre: Victorian Anglo Indian MP and Chancery 'Lunatic'* by Michael Fisher. Dyce Sombre was a wealthy Indian prince who married an English viscount's daughter. She had him declared insane, locked up in a lunatic asylum and then took control of his fortune. As the reviewer put it, 'A tragic but extraordinary life that once inspired fiction by Jules Verne, Sir Walter Scott and Sir Arthur Conan Doyle, as well as bearing an intriguing resemblance to the main plotline of Wilkie Collins's *The Woman in White*.' The full review with a portrait can found at the *Guardian* online and the book is published by Hurst & Co at £18.99.

CURSED DIAMONDS

Chris Adye also noticed a piece in the *Daily Telegraph* of 2 June about the Indian government's request for the return of the Koh i Noor diamond. As Dean Nelson in Delhi wrote 'Wilkie Collins acknowledged its inspiration for his novel *The Moonstone*, the story of a young woman who inherits a sacred diamond and the misery of its curse from a corrupt relative who stole it in India... The diamond has been in British possession since East India Company forces in India defeated the Maharaja of Punjab in 1849 and forced him to hand it over to Queen Victoria as a tribute following the Treaty of Lahore.' Of course, according to Collins the diamond has been safely back in India and set in 'the forehead of the deity ... [and] after the lapse of eight centuries, the Moonstone looks forth once more, over the walls of the sacred city in which its story first began.'

Another cursed gemstone was the Hope Diamond which was the subject of a Channel 4 television documentary on 24 May. Does the programme's synopsis sound familiar?

'According to popular belief the diamond was stolen from a Hindu temple and harbours a deadly curse: and that all who have owned it, or even all those who have touched it, have met with extraordinary tragedy, including Marie Antoinette and King George IV... 'They [the investigators] trace it back to King Louis XVI and his gem-fanatic wife Marie Antoinette, the royal playboy King George IV and great London banking heirs, the Hope family, who gave the diamond its name. These owners would see bloody deaths and unfathomable losses of fortunes. But no one seemingly felt the curse of the Hope more than its final owner, Washington socialite Evalyn Walsh McLean. After the violent death of her family and with her fortune in tatters, hundreds of news headlines blamed her downfall on the "Death Jewel".'

The interesting thing to emerge from the programme was that Pierre Cartier, the renowned jeweller who sold the diamond to McLean, was responsible for inventing the curse – based on Wilkie's *The Moonstone* in order to increase the charisma and value of the stone. The full story was published in *Hope Diamond: The Legendary History of a Cursed Gem* by Richard Kurin in 2008. Kurin can be seen delivering an entertaining lecture on the subject to the Library of Congress on You Tube at www.youtube.com/watch?v=YRjUr2ba9lg.

COOL FROM THE MOONSTONE

Readers of the *Times Literary Supplement* have been writing with examples of the word 'cool' being used in its current sense of stylish and admirable as far back as the 19th century. One such quote is from *The Moonstone* when Franklin Blake suggests a way to win round Rachel Verinder.

"She has been a guest of yours at this house," I answered. "May I venture to suggest—if nothing was said about me beforehand—that I might see her here?"

"Cool!" said Mr. Bruff. With that one word of comment on the reply that I had made to him, he took another turn up and down the room.

"In plain English," he said, "my house is to be turned into a trap to catch Rachel; with a bait to tempt her, in the shape of an invitation from my wife and daughters. If you were anybody else but Franklin Blake, and if this matter was one atom less serious than it really is, I should refuse point-blank. As things are, I firmly believe Rachel will live to thank me for turning traitor to her in my old age. Consider me your accomplice. Rachel shall be asked to spend the day here; and you shall receive due notice of it." (Third Narrative by Franklin Blake, Chapter VI).

THE MOONSTONE IN A FIRST EDITION SALE

Collins is likely to be in very good and very expensive company when a rare copy of the first edition of *The Moonstone* comes up for sale at Sotheby's later in the year. It is one of three thousand first editions all in immaculate original condition and with many signed by the

author. Sotheby's estimate that the entire collection, described as the greatest of its kind, could sell for between £8 and £15 million. *The Moonstone*, probably the most valuable of Wilkie's works, largely because of its status as one of the very first detective novels, could fetch a large five figure sum. Even copies which have been rebound currently fetch more than £5000.

A signed copy of *A Christmas Carol* is expected to fetch up to £200,000. Charles Dickens inscribed the copy on New Year's Day 1844 to William Macready, the actor and close friend. The collection will be sold in a series of sales beginning on 28 October.

P. D. JAMES'S 90TH BIRTHDAY - AND HOW THEY WRITE THEIR BOOKS

We must extend our congratulations to our Patron, P. D. James, who celebrated her 90th birthday on 3 August. To mark the occasion Faber & Faber have brought out a new paperback collection of her crime novels. She has been widely interviewed in the media about her life and works including BBC Radio 7 where they have been repeating *A Taste for Death*. At least two interviews can be found on line. In the *Telegraph* on 21 July at she was asked how does she get into the mind of a killer?

"I think when you create a character you become that character for as long as you are writing about them. So when I am writing about a killer, I am that killer. I am in his mind, which is probably why I don't have sadistic mass murderers as characters. They terrify me as much as anybody and I wouldn't want to be in their minds. And, anyway, most mass murderers are mundane."

The complete interview with Baroness James can still be found at <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/culture/books/authorinterviews/7894385/PD-James-interview-I-have-lived-a-very-happy-and-fulfilled-life.html>.

Then in *Spinetingler Magazine* on 30 March Baroness James is prompted to reveal her technique of plotting and writing.

"A great deal of plotting and planning, a huge amount," she admitted. "The books take as long to plot and plan as they do to write. I usually begin with a setting, which sparks off my imagination. I have a very strong response to what I think of as the spirit of a place. And then come the characters, and only [after these] the details of the plot. It's all written down [beforehand] and all the research is done, and there are lots of charts, with details of the weather. I go back to the setting over and over again and take photographs. But when I begin to write the book it does change: the characters seem to reveal themselves to me in greater detail, and sometimes seem to do rather unexpected things. So I never get exactly the book that I thought I was going to write."

The full interview is available at <http://www.spinetinglermag.com/2010/03/30/p-d-james-interview>.

Wilkie Collins made similar revelations in a piece written for *The Globe* of 26 November 1887, pp. 511-514. This was entitled 'How I Write My Books: Related In a Letter to a Friend' and the *méthode Collins* (as he called it) makes an interesting comparison with the *méthode James*.

"My first proceeding is to get my central idea — the pivot on which the story turns.

The central idea of "The Woman In White" is the idea of a conspiracy in private life, in which circumstances are so handled as to rob a woman of her identity by confounding her with another woman, sufficiently like her in personal appearance to answer the wicked purpose. The destruction of her identity represents a first division of the story; the recovery of her identity marks a second division.

My central idea suggests some of my chief characters. A clever devil must conduct the conspiracy. Male devil? or female devil? The sort of wickedness wanted seems to be a man's wickedness. Perhaps a foreign man. Count Fosco faintly shows himself to me, before I know his name. I let him wait, and begin to think about the two women. They must be both innocent and both interesting. Lady Glyde dawns on me as one of the innocent victims. I try to discover the other — and fail. I try what a walk will do for me — and fail. I devote the evening to a new effort — and fail. Experience tells me to take no more trouble about it, and leave that other woman to come of her own accord. The next morning, before I have been awake in my bed for more than ten minutes, my perverse brains set to work without consulting me. Poor Anne Catherick comes into the room, and says: "Try me".

I have got my idea; I have got three of my characters. What is there to do now? My next proceeding is to begin building up the story.

Here, my favourite three efforts must be encountered. First effort: to begin at the beginning. Second effort: to keep the story always advancing, without paying the smallest attention to the serial division in parts, or to the book publications in volumes. Third effort: to decide on the end. All this is done, as my father used to paint his skies in his famous sea-pieces, at one heat. As yet, I do not enter into details; I merely set up my landmarks. In doing this the main situations of the story present themselves; and, at the same time I see my characters in all sorts of new aspects. These discoveries lead me nearer and nearer to finding the right end. The end being decided on, I go back again to the beginning, and look at it with a new eye, and fail to be satisfied with it. I have yielded to the worst temptation that besets a novelist — the temptation to begin with a striking incident, without counting the cost in the shape of explanations that must, and will follow. These pests of fiction, to reader and writer alike, can only be eradicated in one way. I have already mentioned the way — to begin at the beginning. In the case of "The Woman In White," I get back (as I vainly believe) to the true starting point of the story. I am now at liberty to set the new novel going; having, let me repeat, no more than an outline of story and characters before me, and leaving the details, in each case to the spur of the moment."

Members can refer to the full text in the WCS publication of July 2007 or see it online at paullewis.co.uk/wilkie/biography/Collins1887.htm

A SWEDISH BIBLIOGRAPHY

The first bibliography of Wilkie Collins titles in Swedish has been prepared by Lars-Erik Nygren. He has identified close on 200 Swedish editions including an 1861 translation of *The Woman in White*, called in Swedish *Den hvitklädda qvinnan*, followed by *No Name* (*Namnlös*) in 1862. Editions of most other books followed, concluding with *Blind Kärlek* in 1889. The 77 page bibliography contains illustrations throughout and is a thoroughly good piece of work, and surprisingly intelligible to non-Swedish speakers. *Wilkie Collins på svenska – en bibliografi* can be obtained from the author price SEK160, £13.50 or €16.50. You can pay by PayPal – contact lars-erik.nygren@comhem.se for details.

THE WOMAN IN WHITE ON DVD

The BBC has issued a DVD of the 1982 television adaptation of *The Woman in White* dramatised by Ray Jenkins and starring Diana Quick (Marian Halcombe), Alan Badel (Fosco), Ian Richardson (Mr Fairlie), Jenny Seagrove (Laura), Deidra Morris (Anne Catherick), John Shrapnel (Glyde) and Daniel Gerroll (Hartright). The five 55 minute episodes were first broadcast on BBC1 14 April to 12 May 1982. Unlike the more recent adaptation the script uses much of Wilkie's original text and all the essentials of the original plot. The DVD can be found most cheaply on amazon.co.uk or direct from bbeshop.com. Unfortunately the BBC has decided to restrict the DVD to regions 2 and 4. Outside Europe and Australasia check it will work in your DVD player before ordering it.

THE WOMAN IN WHITE AS A TALKING BOOK

For those who haven't had time recently to read *The Woman in White* in weekly parts from the Paul Lewis project but like the idea of being read to, Naxos AudioBooks have an unabridged version comprising 22 CDs lasting a total of 28 hours. It is read mainly by Glen McCready and Rachel Bavidge. It is normally £70 but can be obtained as a special offer for the heavily discounted price of £30 from the Audiobookstore, 36 Baker Street, London W1U 3EU; 020 7486 7040; and www.audiobooks.co.uk.

YELLOWBACKS ONLINE AND E-TEXTS

The Times of 17 July 2010 had an interesting piece about Victorian yellowbacks and their digitisation by Emory University Libraries' Manuscript, Archives, and Rare Book Library (MARBL). It has over 1200 examples in its archives and in addition to e-texts, you can see illustrations of the original pictorial boards.

Yellowbacks were cheap editions, usually of fiction, issued from the 1850s to the early twentieth century. They were the paperbacks of their day, generally priced at two shillings and sold at railway bookstalls. According to John Sutherland, they were originally published by Chapman & Hall in conjunction with W. H. Smith whose first of many bookstalls was opened at Euston Station. The binding consisted of strawboard covered with glazed coloured paper, usually yellow, on which appeared an eye-catching illustration.

Ultimately most of Collins's fiction was issued in these pictorial boards, starting with Sampson Low in 1865 for *Antonina*, *The Queen of Hearts* and *The Woman in White*. As Collins's copyrights changed hands, Smith, Elder issued ten titles in this format, Chatto & Windus twenty-nine and Routledge (never Collins's publishers during his lifetime) four. *The Woman in White* is interesting because apart from an edition with the usual yellow cover, Chatto issued a version with white boards to go with the title.

Currently Emory doesn't seem to have any titles by Collins but there are several examples by his contemporaries such as Charles Dickens, Mary Braddon and Walter Besant. Emory can be found at <http://web.library.emory.edu/yellowbacks> with full details of access.

There are several yellowback illustrations at www.wilkie-collins.info but the definitive work on the subject is *Victorian Yellowbacks and Paperbacks, 1849-1905* in nine volumes by Chester W. Topp. Volume III is of particular interest as it contains details for Chatto & Windus which published most of Collins's works as yellowbacks. Various titles are scattered throughout the other volumes.

E-TEXTS

E-texts of nearly all of Collins's works can be found on www.wilkiecollins.com and www.digitalpixels.org/jr/wc/ by James Rusk. Another source of e-books is <http://www.mobileread.com/forums> to which *The Woman in White* has just been uploaded.

This new digital edition of has been produced by Alex Bell in Canada using a publicly available e-text and illustrated with 40 of the *Harper's Weekly* engravings. You will need to download Adobe Digital Editions to read it on a computer.

Another new website lists e-texts of Wilkie's work including some in Finnish at <http://manybooks.net/authors/collinsw.html>

Miss Gwilt – Wilkie's own adaptation of *Armadale* for the stage – will soon be added to the collection of e-texted plays. James Rusk is the indomitable e-texter. The play was first performed at the Alexandra Theatre, Liverpool, on 9 December 1875, then at the Globe in London from 15 April 1876. The e-text will be available later this month through wilkiecollins.com menu item 1.

With the 200th anniversary of Dickens's birth barely eighteen months away (7 February 2012), the Dickens Journals Online project at the University of Buckingham is making good progress. It aims to have its database of all 43 volumes of *Household Words* and *All The Year Round* - as well as the little known *Household Narrative of Current Events* – online in time for the 200th anniversary. That will bring a large amount of Collins material into the public domain – not just the original texts of fiction which include *The Dead Secret*, *A Rogue's Life*, *The Yellow Mask*, *Sister Rose*, *The Diary of Anne Rodway*, *No Name* and *The Moonstone* (*The Woman in White* is of course now already done!). There will also be a great deal of non-fiction and the Christmas numbers which Wilkie wrote jointly with Dickens. It will be good to have the original unamended texts of these works online. Sadly we are not

completely sure which pieces in *All The Year Round* Wilkie wrote, though previous bibliographies certainly include some he did not write and exclude some which he did. There are of course vast proof-reading tasks involved with such a project and the current first draft suffers from the usual errors of computer generated e-texts. You can read the images and e-texts at the betasite www.djo.org.uk. The system to let you join in with the proof-reading task will be there by the end of September for at least six months. To do this you will need:
Username: WCS.member Password: DJO!2012.

DICKENS IN THE MUSIC HALL

In the Summer issue of *The Dickensian* (No. 481, Vol. 106, Part 2), WCS member Alan Sutcliffe has contributed Part 1 of his major study of ‘Dickens in the Music Hall.’ Most of the meticulously researched essay relates specifically to stage adaptations of Dickens’s works but there is due mention of *No Thoroughfare*.

‘The play, *No Thoroughfare* by Dickens and Wilkie Collins ran at the Adelphi Theatre from 26 December 1867 to 20 June 1868. At Deacon’s in March 1868 Fred Albert sang ‘of different ways in which men go, in which they find *No Thoroughfare*.’ In February 1868 Robert Fraser sang *Joey Ladle* and *The Boys at Mugby* at the New Star Music Hall, Liverpool, and in May sang the former, at least, at the Philharmonic.’”

BEAUTIFUL FOR EVER

Beautiful For Ever by historian Helen Rappaport is an account of Madame Rachel of Bond Street – a cosmetician and blackmailer who lived in the mid- 19th century. Madame Rachel – who was much in the news in the 1850s and 1860s – is supposed to be the source for Maria Oldershaw, Wilkie’s creation in *Armada* who was the foster mother and collaborator of the anti-heroine Lydia Gwilt. The book is written in a compelling style and relies entirely on original and fully researched material. Rappaport has produced a thorough and readable study of vanity and its exploitation. ISBN 978-1-902421-52-0; *Beautiful For Ever* is £12.99 – or £9.09 or less through Amazon.

DROOD - THE FILM

Drood – the pastiche written by Dan Simmons in the name of Wilkie Collins (see Newsletter Summer and Winter 2009) – could be made into a film. Universal Pictures bought the rights before the book was published and industry rumours suggest a version may be planned, directed by Guillermo Del Toro – who is currently working with Peter Jackson on the *Lord of the Rings* follow-up (or should that be prequel) *The Hobbit*. We’ll see.

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