



THE WILKIE COLLINS SOCIETY

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NEWSLETTER

SPRING 2011

WILLIAM MALPAS CLARKE (1922-2011)

With great sadness we have to report the death of William Clarke. Married to Faith Dawson, Wilkie Collins's great-granddaughter, he is best known to WCS members for his 1988 ground breaking biography *The Secret Life of Wilkie Collins*. 'Bill' Clarke pioneered the use of family history and financial records in literary scholarship. He used them and his family connection to cast light on Collins's complicated private life. Although some of the details had previously been known, they remained largely unwritten until in a model of clarity he put them together to produce *The Secret Life*. This presented the facts and gave us for the first time photographic portraits of Caroline Graves and Martha Rudd. *The Secret Life* is still invariably used as the best source of personal detail on Collins.

William Clarke was also more widely acclaimed as an astute and influential financial journalist. He began his career on the *Manchester Guardian*, later becoming City Editor of *The Times*. He held a number of important financial appointments and subsequently contributed several books on the City. More recently he wrote *The Lost Fortune of the Tsars* and *The Hidden Treasures of the Romanovs*. It was once said that "William Clarke is to the City of London what Boswell was to Dr. Johnson." It would be no exaggeration now to substitute 'Collins' for 'City of London'.

A more detailed obituary was published in *The Independent* of 30 April 2011 and can be found online. The funeral took place on Friday 6 May at St Alfege's Church, Greenwich, and the WCS was represented by Andrew Gasson.

THE RED VIAL

One of the most exciting Collins events for a while was the revival of his 1858 play, *The Red Vial* by the Department of Drama and Theatre Arts of Birmingham University. Unlike various modern adaptations of Collins's works, this production used a script taken from the original manuscript. There is no published version of the text and according to the *Index of English Literary Manuscripts* two copies of the ms survive, one in the British Library (Add. MS 52976D) "Draft, 46 leaves, submitted to the Lord Chamberlain's Office; licensed 2 October 1858; the other a signed draft dated 11 October 1858 which had been sold at auction in 1891 after Collins's death. As far as is known there has therefore been no performance of *The Red Vial* for the last 153 years.

Although the original production ran for four weeks at the Olympic Theatre from 11 October 1858 the play was not wholly successful. Pascoe's *Dramatic List* for 1879 notes: "...in a melodrama by Mr. Wilkie Collins, entitled 'The Red Vial,' Mrs Stirling sustained the part of *Madame Bergmann*. This play was of the most repulsive kind, and is alluded to in contemporary criticism as "the most brilliant failure of the day." Mrs Stirling's acting was its one redeeming feature." The lead part of Hans Grimm was played by Frederick Robson. During his lifetime, Collins resisted requests to revive the play. For example, he wrote to the playwright, J. Stirling Coyne, on 6 May 1859:

"I am much obliged to you for your note on the subject of The Red Vial, which I have just received. Considering the reception which this play met with in London, under all the advantages of being interpreted by an admirable company, under the immediate supervision of the author, I must honestly confess that I am unwilling to trust it to the chances of provincial representation by a company of whom I have no knowledge and over whose rehearsals I can exercise no control. On this ground, therefore - though I feel sincerely indebted to you for offering me the opportunity of producing again the play on the stage - I must beg you to excuse me if I abstain from availing myself of the proposal which your note contains."

The plot was later expanded by Collins for his 1879 novel *Jezebels Daughter* although paradoxically the script of *The Red Vial* gives the opposite impression of being condensed from a larger work.

This new production ran from 10-12 February and was directed by Dr Caroline Radcliffe. Apparently all other aspects of the play such as lighting music and set design were the responsibility of the students of the Drama and Arts Department. Overall they created a very successful and exciting production. The set was minimalist but effective; the lighting and music created exactly the right atmosphere; the acting was competent with excellent performances from Willow Costello-Smith as Widow Bergman and in particular Luke Harris as Hans Grimm. There were two brilliant scenes - one where the poison is administered shown with dramatic back lighting; and the other showing the drunken revelry in the Frankfurt Deadhouse. Photographs of the production can be seen at https://www.wilkie-collins.info/play_redvial_2011.htm

Congratulations to Birmingham for having the originality to stage something other than *The Woman in White* or *The Moonstone*. Wilkie would have been pleased.

MISS GWILT - A PUBLISHED VERSION

Collins's own adaptation of *Armadale*, *Miss Gwilt*, has now been published by the British Library Historical Reprints series in the Poetry & Drama section. The otherwise unobtainable text was digitised from the original by Microsoft.

Miss Gwilt: A Drama in Five Acts was never published but 'Printed for performance at the Theatre only' in 1875. The revised plot had Lydia Gwilt as a more sympathetic character and Dr Downward as the main villain. It was first performed at the Alexandra Theatre, Liverpool, 9 December 1875 and opened in London at the Globe Theatre on 15 April 1876. The part of Mr Darch was played by A. W. Pinero and the title role by Ada Cavendish.

DICKENS IN THE MUSIC HALL

The latest issue of *The Dickensian* (Winter 2010, No. 482, Vol. 106 Part 3) features the second part of Alan Sutcliffe's comprehensive account of Dickens in the Music Hall. The first part was published in the Summer 2010 issue and the current contribution is "... an attempt to provide a record of the British Music-hall entertainment derived from Dickens's writings, including information of the turns performed and the performers, together with a selection of contemporary comment." The first part was published in the Summer 2010 issue (No. 481, Vol. 106 Part 2) and dealt with the topic up to 1896. This

second part deals with such entertainments between 1896 and 1914. Although there are no specific Collins references in this part, we are presented throughout with an impressive wealth of detail.

THE WOMAN IN WHITE IN THE MUSIC HALL

The Woman in White featured in popular entertainment in the 1860s with music scores such as ‘The Woman in White Waltz’ and ‘The Fosco Gallop’. Following the publication of *Poor Miss Finch* in 1872 Wilkie’s stories were given a double plug in the music halls. The front cover to a comic version of sheet music entitled ‘The Woman in White’ shows an open copy of *Poor Miss Finch* lying on the floor beside a seated woman dressed in white with a bright blue face. This is a direct reference to the novel where Oscar Dubourg takes silver nitrate for epilepsy and his skin turns blue as a consequence. The music was written and composed by Walter Burnot (d. 1905) and “Sung with great success by E. A. Hart.” The complete words are as follows:

I.

We met at a ball, oh handsome and tall,
Was Mary Ann, Sarah Ann, Polly Ann Wright.
She’d white satin shoes, her eyes they were blue,
And the whole of her costume of muslin was white;
But when I think of her terrible fate,
It’s awful, it’s awful!
Don’t laugh for a tragedy ‘tis I relate,
Of the fate of the Woman in White.

CHORUS

The Woman in White, the Woman in White,
Was the sight, the delight, and the belle of the night,
Her eyes they were bright, her footfall was light,
And the Woman in White, was - the Woman in White

2.

I treated her twice to strawberry ice,
And nine oyster patties she put out of sight,
She ate jelly and jam, and chicken and ham,
Till her face like her dress was decidedly white;
Her mouth was so small and her appetite large,
‘Twas awful, ‘twas awful!
Some two, ten and six was the moderate charge,
For feeding the Woman in White.

The Woman in White, &c.

3.

Her style was so nice, I laughed at the price,
I expended on Polly Ann Sarah Ann Wright,
I quickly proposed, and the bargain was closed,
That I soon should marry the Woman in White.
But to think of her now brings tears to mine eye,
It's awful, it's awful!
She's a fright, and a sight, and a horrible guy,
No longer the Woman in White.

SPOKEN.

After our marriage she looked as white as a ghost that had been thro' the court and been white-washed, as white as a marble Venus with it's [sic] clothes on, fluttered by excitement, I gave her the first thing to drink I could lay my hand on, or she would have fainted, I thought I gave her cognac, alas it was hair dye, nitrate of silver; she drank, with what effect Wilkie Collins and the next verse alone can tell."

The Woman in White, &c.

4.

The notion is new, but it also is true,
She swallowed her hair dye that horrible night,
Her skin changed it's hue, to an indigo blue,
Which made her at once a terrible fright;
There's a moral to come, in the present I think,
It's awful, it's awful!
But hair dye's a lotion that no one should drink,
As did the fair Woman in White.

The Woman in White, &c.

Written for the music hall by Charles Coote Jr, there was also an 'After Dark Galop'. This however related to Dion Boucicault's successful 1868 play of this name and had no connection with Wilkie's 1856 collection of short stories.

WOMAN IN WHITE ON STAGE

WCS member Di Scotney alerted us to a production of *The Woman in White* coming up at the Cambridge Arts Theatre from Monday 25th to Saturday 30th July. Adapted by Nicola Boyce and starring Colin Baker, Peter Amory and Glyn Grain, the theatre summarises the plot thus: "Love, suspense and danger all combine to create this a haunting mystery of mistaken identities and stolen fortunes, heroism, high drama and volatile passions." More information and booking at www.cambridgeartstheatre.com or call 01223 503333.

THE FIRST COLLECTED EDITION

This year marks the 150th anniversary of the first attempt to produce a uniform edition of Wilkie's works. Sampson Low, who had published the hugely successful three volume edition of *The Woman in White*, secured the right to re-issue six of Wilkie's novels in one volume editions. Low described it as a 'cheap' edition but at 5 shillings each they were still half a week's wages for a servant. Handsomely bound in mauve cloth similar to the three-volume *The Woman in White*, the series began with the Roman tale *Antonina* published in February 1861; this was followed by *The Dead Secret* in March and then the one-volume and revised edition of *The Woman in White* at the very end of April. This book was the first to carry a pasted in portrait of the author which accounted for the extra shilling on the price. Wilkie wrote to his friend Charles Ward on 16 April 1861

"The cheap edition of that eternal Woman In White promises to beat everything we have done yet. We start with 10,000 copies and Low expects to sell 50,000 before we have done! I have had to sit again - for the photographs can't keep up with us. We publish on Chimney-Sweepers' Day, price 6/."

Chimney-sweepers' Day is 1 May when sweeps traditionally paraded the streets and asked for money. The book was first advertised in *The Times* on 26 April as published 'this day'.

Hide and Seek followed in September and then *The Queen of Hearts* and *Basil* in 1862. *No Name* was the last in the series before the rights to publish in that format passed to Smith, Elder.

PHIZ ILLUSTRATES ANTONINA

Hablot Knight Browne - known as Phiz - is best known as the illustrator of Dickens's works. But it has now been established that he was also the artist for the dramatic frontispiece in the one-volume edition of *Antonina* published in 1861 by Sampson Low. The engraving depicts the scene where Goisvintha tries to murder Antonina with a long hunting-knife but is foiled by her brother Hermanric.

It is signed 'R Young' for Robert Young the man who engraved Hablot Browne's work. The identity is confirmed by Low's advert for the book 'with steel engraving by H. K. Browne (Phiz).' Phiz also did the frontispiece for

Charles Collins's book *The Eye-Witness* which brought together pieces Charles wrote for Dickens's periodical *All The Year Round*. *The Eye-Witness* was published by Low in December 1860.

WILKIE'S LIFE 150 YEARS ON

Wilkie Collins Society membership secretary Paul Lewis is using social media to publish a day by day account of the life of Wilkie Collins. His twitter persona @thewomaninwhite tweets Wilkie's life 150 years on. He draws on Wilkie's complete letters, Wilkie's bank account and those of his brother Charles and mother Harriet, letters between members of Wilkie's family, the letters of Charles Dickens and other contemporary material. More than 250 people are currently following the various entries and anyone can read them at www.twitter.com/thewomaninwhite.

THE MOONSTONE ON RADIO 4

Radio 4 broadcast a wonderful adaptation of *The Moonstone* which ran for four weeks from 23 January 2011. Adapted by Doug Lucie with evocative music by David Chilton it contained much of the original language and dialogue; the plot was neatly cut into four 55 minute episodes. If only television adapters could take a lesson from this excellent and simple translation of the first and best detective story for the radio. There are no plans to issue it on CD yet but keep an eye on the classic drama from Radio 4 Extra - recently rebranded from the previous Radio 7 - and found on the internet and digital radios only. <http://www.bbc.co.uk/radio4extra/programmes/genres/drama/current>.

CATHERINE HOGARTH RE-EVALUATED

Wilkie Collins Society member Professor Lillian Nayder has published her biography of the woman she tells us we should not call Charles Dickens's wife. Like many well-educated and intelligent women Catherine Hogarth could have had her own successful career in another age. But in the early 19th century once married to Dickens her job was to produce children - which she did at the rate of almost one a year. Nayder is clear though that their marriage was a long and in many ways a happy one - until Dickens, growing tired of his ageing wife, began his affair with the young actress Nellie Ternan and tried to blame Catherine for the break up of their home. Nayder concentrates on Catherine not Dickens and in a tremendous re-examination of the evidence brings forward the friends and family who continued to support her after Dickens's desertion.

Among those was Wilkie Collins who wrote to her on several occasions and was invited to her home in 1867 when Dickens was in America. He obtained a box for her to see *The Woman in White* in 1871 and supplied a signed photograph for her album in 1862.

This is a highly readable but nevertheless deeply scholarly work. Its tough analysis of Dickens and how badly he treated Catherine and his children - even by standards of the time - has caused controversy in traditional circles. But every reference is pinned down by footnotes and Nayder's analysis using existing and many unpublished sources produces a reappraisal which has proved irresistible to many scholars - see for example <http://bit.ly/1DJgg6>. Published by Cornell University Press *The Other Dickens - A Life of Catherine Hogarth* is about £22 in the UK (ISBN 978-0-8014-4787).

WILKIE ON SMOKING

WCS member and antiquarian bookseller, Richard Beaton, has recently come across a brief mention of Wilkie Collins in an article called 'Is Smoking Really a Bad Habit?' in the journal *The Young Man* for October 1897. The first half of the article (pro-smoking) by Dr Andrew Wilson ends:

"Whenever anybody counter-blasts to-day against tobacco, I feel as did my old friend Wilkie Collins, when somebody told him that to smoke was a wrong thing. "My dear sir," said the great novelist, "all your objections to tobacco only increase the relish with which I look forward to my next cigar!"

Amusing, and nice to see Collins described in 1897 as a "great novelist".

There are various references in Wilkie's correspondence to cigar smoking or 'fumigation' but nothing to Dr Andrew Wilson who was a regular contributor on science topics in the 1890s to the *Illustrated London News*. Wilkie sums up his views on smoking in a letter to A. Arthur Reade on 10 February 1882

'When I am ill (I am suffering from gout at this moment) tobacco is the best friend that my irritable nerves possess. When I am well - but exhausted for the time by a hard day's work - tobacco revives and composes me. There is my evidence in two words.

When a man allows himself to become a glutton in the matter of smoking tobacco, he suffers for it. And if he becomes a glutton in the matter of eating meat, he just as certainly suffers - in another way. When I read learned attacks on the practice of smoking, I feel indebted to the writer. He adds largely to the relish of my cigar.'

BRIEF LIVES - WILKIE COLLINS

The delayed biography of Wilkie Collins by Melisa Klimaszewski in the Hesperus Press *Brief Lives* series has now been published. In 143 pages it manages to encapsulate most of what we need to know of Wilkie's life and works. There are seven well ordered chapters: From Willie to Wilkie, Roaming and Writing, Sensational Developments, The 1860s: A Decade of Distinction, Theatricalities, A Painful Decline, and Legacies. There are deliberately few references in the text - to assist its easy readability - but there is a brief bibliography of mainly recent texts. The final chapter, Legacies, is particularly interesting. It notes Collins's influence on both 19th and 20th century writers as well as bringing us up to date **with** film and television productions. The only criticism is perhaps the lack of an index but overall this *Brief Life* does what it says on the proverbial tin: it provides an excellent introduction to the complex life of Wilkie Collins whose works "stand as a testament to the lasting and varied legacies of a supreme storyteller." (Hesperus Press, ISBN 978-1-84391-915-5, price £7.99).

THE ANTIQUES ROAD SHOW

Wilkie seems to crop up in the most unlikely places. In the BBC Television Antiques Road Show on 30 January, one of the items for valuation was a sewing machine mounted onto a wooden table. Secreted in the draw were several carte de visites of the original owner's favourite authors and first out was a coloured portrait of Wilkie

FOSCO THE VILLAIN

BBC 2 Television ran a four part series on the English novel, presented by Sebastian Faulks. The last part, broadcast on 26 February, concentrated on villains. Count Fosco was featured as the arch villain of *The Woman in White*. He was in the excellently evil company of such characters as Lovelace from *Clarissa*, Fagin from *Oliver Twist* and in the twentieth century Merrick from *The Jewel in the Crown*. Faulks explored in some depth the psychology of

Fosco, suggesting it isn't only Laura's money he wants: he is also looking for a worthy opponent whom he finds in the character of Marian Halcombe. Justice is generally seen to be done and Fosco, in company with his fellow villains in the programme, comes to a sticky end.

Faulks also noted the great popularity of *The Woman in White* and threw out that Oscar Wilde named his cat Fosco. According to Matthew Sweet in *The Independent on Sunday* of 22 August 2004, Wilde had also chosen Fosco as his undergraduate nickname.

RECOGNITION FOR MARIAN HALCOMBE

Novelist Kate Moss, lamenting the under representation of heroines in Sebastian Faulkes' recent series on BBC2 Television, championed the case for Wilkie Collins and Marian Halcombe in particular on Radio 4's 'Open Book' programme for 13 February.

RAMSGATE RECOGNITION

Wilkie Collins now has a Blue Plaque commemorating his regular visits to Ramsgate. Under the auspices of the Ramsgate Society, local author Jane Wenham-Jones unveiled a blue plaque at 14 Nelson Crescent on Saturday 22 January. "Wilkie Collins" she said "wrote 30 novels in 65 years and I have published five books in 10 years so I think I'm doing OK. But then I have a computer, a Word programme, and copy and paste - he had to do it all by hand." Also adding a few words for the small gathering of enthusiasts were Andrew Gasson, who gave a few details of Wilkie's Ramsgate connections, and event organiser, Frank Batt, who suggested that "Wilkie Collins is to Ramsgate what Dickens is to Broadstairs." A full report and photographs can be found on the 'This is Kent' website and further details of Wilkie at Ramsgate at www.wilkie-collins.info/home_ramsgate.htm.

***THE WOMAN IN WHITE* IN THE FAR EAST**

'The Woman In White' is reaching an ever larger audience in China, thanks to the bilingual English/Chinese edition of WCS member Richard Lewis' adaptation of the novel for learners of English, published by Oxford University Press. A new generation of TWIW enthusiasts is growing in the East, which goes once more to demonstrate not only the timelessness of Wilkie's masterpiece, but the global, cross-cultural appeal of his writing. To add to this,

a bilingual English/Thai edition has also been produced for Thailand. Wilkie would certainly have been gratified to know that his book had been made accessible to so many people in the Far East and that in the 21st century there was still an ever increasing number of fans of TWIW in the world.

For details of Richard's adaptation of TWIW and his other publications, see his web site: www.richardlewisbooks.co.uk

THE MOONSTONE IN CHICAGO

A new adaptation of *The Moonstone* by the Lifeline Theatre Company of Chicago runs from 4 February to 27 March. WCS member, Susan Hanes, has sent the following report.

Chicago's Lifeline Theater production of *The Moonstone* is a cosy, intimate portrayal of Wilkie Collins's 1868 novel. Robert Kauzlaric's adaptation manages to capture the intrigue of Wilkie's story while cleverly exposing the characters' relationships to an audience perhaps unfamiliar with the novel. Although the play runs for almost three hours, it never drags, and we were in thrall throughout. The staging, a spare bi-level Georgian set, allows for frequent scene changes while maintaining a sense of place. A particularly clever depiction is Rosanna's death at the Shivering Sand, when she descends among the waving arms of the other characters, bringing to mind her words that the Sand reminded her of "hundreds of suffocating people under it." The eleven-member ensemble cast seamlessly merges multiple scenes and for some, dual roles. Sean Sinitski is a pleasing Betteredge, drawing appreciative titters whenever he withdraws his beloved *Robinson Crusoe* from a breast pocket. Ann Sonnevile is a cool and lovely Rachel Verinder and Kaitlin Byrd balances both Drucilla Clack and Rosanna Spearman, refraining from overacting either role

Further details and a short video of the production are on the Lifeline website at <https://lifelinetheatre.com/performances/10-11/moonstone/>.

ARMADALE IN THE GUARDIAN

Ever alert WCS member, Chris Adye, noted the following short letter in the pages of the *Guardian* for 24 March 2011. "As the lack of good roles for black actors is in the news (Response, 23 March), may I put in a plea for an adaptation of Wilkie Collins *Armadale*? It's a terrific story and, of the two male leads

(both called Allan Arnadale), the more complex and intelligent one is black. There's a small part for his mum, too, and I'm sure Andrew Davies could beef it up. (Priscilla Bench-Capon)."

THE DICKENS FELLOWSHIP READING GROUP

Joan Dicks, Joint Honorary General Secretary of The Dickens Fellowship informs us that The Charles Dickens Museum is the atmospheric venue for a reading group set up to explore the work of Dickens and his contemporaries. The reading group meets once a week on Thursday afternoons from 2.30-5.00 for reading and discussion led by Dr Jane Gibney of Royal Holloway, University of London. There is a break for tea, provided by the Museum in its new tea room.

It is hoped to attract Dickens enthusiasts as well as welcoming readers who are less familiar with nineteenth-century writers. The house provides a relaxed and welcoming atmosphere for getting to know some of the great writers and at each session there is an opportunity to raise questions about the books being read and to debate ideas with the other members of the Group.

The first twelve-week session began on Thursday, February 17, 2011 and is exploring three Victorian "thrillers". The three books have exciting plots involving abandonment, revenge, bigamy, treachery and murder. Each draws the reader into the psychological and actual conflicts that challenge the characters. They present similar but individual dilemmas concerning society and social status. All three novels are available in Penguin Classics and are *Great Expectations* (Charles Dickens), *The Woman in White* (Wilkie Collins) and *Lady Audley's Secret* (M. E. Braddon). The fee is £10 for each session or £96 for twelve sessions. <https://www.dickensfellowship.org/>

LEDBURY POETRY FESTIVAL

This year's poetry festival is to be held from 1-10 July. In addition to the usual performances, writing workshops and reading groups, there will be the annual competition. Further details from 0845 458 1743 or <https://ledburypoetry.org.uk/>

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