



THE WILKIE COLLINS SOCIETY

PATRONS Faith Clarke, Baroness James of Holland Park (P. D. James)

Chairman Andrew Gasson, 21 Huson Close, London NW3 3JW

Membership Paul Lewis, 4 Ernest Gardens, Chiswick, London W4 3QU

NEWSLETTER

SUMMER 2012

COLLINS SPORT AND EXERCISE

With the Olympics and a summer of sport still in our minds, Andrew Gasson has put together a selection of Wilkie's thoughts on exercise and sports. These are taken from both his fiction and his letters, with thanks to WCS members who made some helpful suggestions in response to our recent email.

ALL THE YEAR ROUND

We are also including a follow-up publication to *All The Year Round Non-fiction by Wilkie Collins (I)* issued by the WCS in 2011. This is the result of additional research by Paul Lewis and includes three further Collins articles.

WILKIE AND THE CARDINAL

A new anecdote about Wilkie Collins and a Cardinal has come to light in *The Cornhill Magazine*. Written in 1899 by someone who signed herself M.H. the story forms just one paragraph in a series of often unconnected anecdotes under the title 'Links with the Past'.

"I cannot leave this subject without recalling an anecdote Wilkie Collins once told me. At the time when the excitement against the Papal aggression was at its height, a Catholic friend offered to take him to one of Cardinal Wiseman's receptions. Wilkie Collins accepted eagerly, and a few days later found himself ascending the stairs of the Cardinal's modest house in York Place. He soon noticed that the men in front of him, as they arrived near their host, bent their knee and kissed his episcopal ring. As a good Protestant Wilkie Collins could

not do likewise; ‘so it ended in our shaking hands and having a most pleasant talk after the crowd had passed.’ The remark which most struck him was when the Cardinal said that the best thing which could happen for his cause would be some fanatical attack upon himself. ‘If any one were to fire a shot at me, I know the innate justice of the English character too well not to feel certain that there would be so great a revulsion of feeling that all this agitation would cease, and my cause would be won.’” (*The Cornhill Magazine*, New Series vol. VII, November 1899, p. 628).

The event clearly took place in the early 1850s. In November 1850 Wiseman was appointed Cardinal and sent to England as the first Archbishop of Westminster when the Roman Catholic hierarchy was re-established in England. There were demonstrations, newspaper editorials and political action against what many Protestants saw as ‘Papal aggression’ – an attempt to re-establish the Catholic Church in England as the main religion. Wiseman died in London in 1865.

It is not clear when the anecdote was told to M.H. though it seems to have been some years later when Collins was famous. Her identity remains unknown but the context of the story indicates she was herself a Catholic.

Wilkie saw the Pope in 1853 on a trip to Rome and showed similar politeness without deference. He wrote to his brother Charles on 13 November 1853

“As I was walking along the street which leads from the Ponte S. Angelo to St Peter’s, two dragoons dashed past me, clearing the road at full gallop, two carriages came after, with cardinals inside – and next came a state coach with the Pope himself. Every creature near me fell on his or her knees. I stood up, of course, but pulled off my hat. The Pope (I suppose, seeing me the only erect figure out of a group of 30 or 40 people), looked straight at me as he passed – and bowed as he saw me with my hat in my hand.”

ARMADALE

Of all his novels, Wilkie stated in two letters that *Armadale* was his own favourite. On 17 May 1885 he wrote to a fan, apparently called Wilkie Collins Barr, ‘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.’ He repeated this view in an interview in *Cassell’s Saturday Journal* in 1887 and the same year he wrote to a Miss Burt ‘The kind manner in which you write of “Armadale” cheers and encourages me. To you I may make the confession that I have always considered this novel to be the best that I have written.’ (25 June 1887).

So it is encouraging that *Armada* still impresses. Journalist Olga Wojtas wrote to WCS secretary Paul Lewis in August

‘You recommended *Armada*, which I’ve just finished, and I think it’s superb! I’m really sorry to have come to the end. The characters are absolutely unforgettable, and the plotting is immaculate. Thank you so much for suggesting it – I’m going around like a revivalist preacher telling everyone to read it.’

Armada figured in a slightly odd way in pieces by statistician and ‘uncomplicated Conservative’ Graeme Archer, a *Daily Telegraph* columnist. He says in the newspaper that *Armada* ‘has a plot more convoluted than any economic theory’ and then embarks on a critique of Government policy in which he also calls in aid the title of ‘A Terribly Strange Bed’. In this and another column he reveals that he started reading *Armada* this month on the train to a very wet Brighton but had finished it in a ‘sunny week’. See <http://goo.gl/SL9AG> and <http://goo.gl/jeXbH>

WALTER SCOTT

A new computer analysis of the influences on nineteenth century fiction puts Jane Austen and Walter Scott top of the list. Matthew Jockers of the University of Nebraska developed the software which categorises novels according to the frequencies with which certain words appear and how the words are grouped. The result is a series of fingerprints which characterise the novels. In an overview of his work he says:

“Jane Austen and Walter Scott are at once the least influenced (i.e. most original) of the early writers in the network and, at the same time, the most influential in terms of the longevity, or ‘fitness,’ of their thematic-stylistic signals. The signals introduced by Austen and Scott position them at the beginning of a stylistic-thematic genealogy; they are, in this sense, the literary equivalent of *Homo erectus* or, if you prefer, Adam and Eve.”

Scott’s influence would not have surprised Wilkie Collins. In his pantheon of novelists Walter Scott came top. On 12 July 1883 he wrote to Miss R— ‘It is not easy to tell you which is my “favourite work” – I must own that I have three favourites. They are written by the three Kings of Fiction: Walter Scott. Fennimore Cooper. Balzac. And they are called: *The Antiquary*. *The Deerslayer*. *Le Père Goriot*.’

He used the same phrase in a letter to Paul Hamilton Hayne on 3 May 1884. And on 21 March 1887 he wrote to B. E. Joseph ‘More than thirty years’ study of the art of writing fiction have convinced me that he is, beyond question, the greatest novelist that this country – or any other country – has produced.’ He used a similar phrase four years later to J. A. Stewart ‘ After more than thirty years’ study of the Art, I consider Walter Scott to be the greatest of all novelists, and “The Antiquary” is, as I think, the most perfect of all novels.’ (9 January 1888).

He gives this ‘word of advice’ to would-be author Frank Archer on 23 July 1886: ‘Study Walter Scott. He is, beyond all comparison, the greatest novelist that has ever written. Get, for instance, “The Antiquary” – and read that masterpiece over and over and over again.’

The WCS is in touch with Matthew Jockers to find out more on his findings as they relate to Collins. More at <http://goo.gl/HeDK8>

THE WOMAN IN WHITE

WCS member Richard Lewis has been reading Walter Scott and finds strong influences in his work on *The Woman in White*.

Richard writes: I'm currently reading Walter Scott's 'Guy Mannering' and am struck by startling links between this novel and TWIW. Wilkie greatly admired Sir Walter Scott and was influenced by him, but until reading 'Guy Mannering' I hadn't realized to what extent:

1. The character Brown appears suddenly in front of Julia Mannering as if 'he had started up from the earth' (almost the exact words Wilkie uses to describe the way the Woman in White appears).
2. Brown checks into an hotel under the alias of Dawson to maintain anonymity (the same name Wilkie adopts with Martha Rudd).
3. Scott presents the narrative from the point of view of various characters, an obvious feature of Wilkie's method.
4. One final tenuous but interesting thing, not related specifically to 'Guy Mannering', is that Walter Scott's son-in-law, John Gibson Lockhart, author and editor of 'The Quarterly Review', lived in Ramsgate, which Wilkie of course visited so often.”

We can add to Richard’s comments that Amelius Goldenheart in *The Fallen Leaves* (1879) turns to Scott as ‘The one supreme genius who soars above all other novelists.’

In addition, the plot in first part of the short story ‘Mr Cosway and the Landlady’ where the landlady forces her young creditor into marriage was thought to be taken from Lockhart’s *The Life of Sir Walter Scott* (1825). The story was originally published in the *Belgravia Annual* for Christmas 1881 and republished in *Little Novels* (1887).

RAMSGATE HOUSE FOR SALE

14 Nelson Crescent in Ramsgate Kent, where Wilkie Collins stayed with Caroline and her daughter for several summer holidays in the 1870s, is for sale. The five floor, six bedroom home has views over Ramsgate Harbour, a garage, and a small paved garden. One floor is a self-contained basement flat. A plaque was recently installed on its front wall to recognise Wilkie’s connexion with the property. The asking price is £480,000. Full details from Right Move <http://goo.gl/MIB0W>.

MRS ROBINSON’S DISGRACE

Kate Summerscale, who wrote *The Suspicions of Mr Whicher* about the Road murder which lent some details to the plot of *The Moonstone*, has turned her attention to another great Victorian scandal in *Mrs Robinson’s Disgrace*. It tells the tale of Isabella Hamilton Walker whose second husband Henry Robinson tried to divorce her in 1858. Theirs was one of the first cases to be heard by the new Court of Divorce and Matrimonial Causes and its lurid details were splashed across the newspapers.

It is quite possible that Collins was one of the many people who sat in court to hear the case. He begins *The Woman in White* thus:

“the story here presented will be told by more than one pen, as the story of an offence against the laws is told in Court by more than one witness — with the same object, in both cases, to present the truth always in its most direct and most intelligible aspect; and to trace the course of one complete series of events, by making the persons who have been most closely connected with them, at each successive stage, relate their own experience, word for word.”

In the preface to the French edition of the book he says that the court cases he heard that influenced the structure were ‘several years ago’ and ‘did not provide me with either characters or events’. But whether he was in court for the Robinson case or not he undoubtedly read the newspaper accounts and there are several aspects of the case which clearly did influence him.

The case was brought by Henry after he found his wife's diary when she was ill (as Fosco found Marian's diary when she was ill). It contained accounts – or rather hints – of intimacy between Isabella and a younger family friend Edward Lane as well as an unrequited passion for a much younger man who was her daughter's tutor. The hearing progressed in evidence by witnesses, extracts from letters, and the diary read into open court, very much as *The Woman in White* is told.

Summerscale refers to Wilkie's most famous book and also to *Armadale* in which the anti-hero Lydia Gwilt keeps a detailed diary of her crimes. At one point she asks herself "Why do I keep a diary at all? Why did the clever thief the other day... keep the very thing to convict him in the shape of a record of everything he stole...Why? Why? Why I don't care why!... There's a reason nobody can answer – myself included."

Apart from the Collins connexion, the book is a fascinating account of the early days of divorce law and the unequal way it treated men and women. To get a divorce a husband only had to prove his wife's adultery. But a wife had to prove not only her husband's adultery but another offence such as cruelty as well. It emerged that Henry in fact had a mistress and children with her. But ultimately, the court decided that Isabella's diary was a fantasy rather than a truthful account of an affair and the divorce was not granted, though Isabella and her husband lived separately thereafter.

Kate Summerscale, *Mrs Robinson's Disgrace – the Private Diary of a Victorian Lady*, Bloomsbury, London 2012 is available through Amazon and other online suppliers.

NEW DRAMATISATION OF *THE WOMAN IN WHITE*

Chicago's Lifeline Theatre is opening its 30th anniversary season with a new production of *The Woman in White*. Adapted by Robert Kauzlaric and directed by Elise Kauzlaric it stars Maggie Scrantom as Laura and Anne with Nicholas Bailey as Hartright, Christopher M. Walsh as Fosco and James Sparling as Glyde.

The blurb reads:

"Trapped in a loveless marriage and threatened by a conspiracy of ruthless men, young heiress Laura Fairlie faces a future of sorrow and misery. Her only hope lies with her true love, the poor artist Walter Hartright, and her sister Marian Halcombe, both of whom will risk everything to protect her."

The play runs from 7 September to 28 October. There are public discussions with the playwright and actors throughout the run. In 2011 the theatre put on a new adaptation of *The Moonstone*, also adapted by Robert Kauzlaric. More at www.lifelinetheatre.com

THE INVISIBLE WOMAN

The film of Claire Tomalin's book about Dickens's mistress the actress Ellen Ternan is currently in post-production and will be released in 2013. As we reported in earlier newsletters Tom Hollander will play Wilkie and Ralph Fiennes, who is directing the film, will play Dickens. The cast list also includes Michelle Fairley – who has appeared in *Harry Potter and the Deathly Hallows* (Mrs Granger) and Sky's fantasy series *Game of Thrones* (Catelyn Stark) – as Caroline Graves. Kirsten Scott Thomas will play Ellen's mother Catherine.

Professor Michael Slater, who published his comprehensive biography of Charles Dickens in 2010, has turned his forensic brain on Dickens and Ellen Ternan. He looks not just at the relationship itself and the evidence for it, but also how the family tried to cover it up, and how after the death of Dickens's last surviving son in 1934, the story, often elaborated, entered the public domain. He also raises the interesting question of whether Wilkie played a part in covering up the presence of Ellen Ternan at Dickens's funeral on 14 June 1870. Wilkie gave Times lead writer William Stebbing the information to write a column about the funeral. It says there were 14 mourners. But further down in the column lists only lists 13 names. Slater suggests Ellen was the missing mourner. (See also Collins to Stebbing 14 June 1870).

Michael Slater, *The Great Charles Dickens Scandal*, Yale 2012, is available through Amazon and other sources.

DICKENS FELLOWSHIP

Longstanding WCS member, Paul Graham has just taken over from Joan Dicks as Joint Hon. Gen. Sec. of the Dickens Fellowship. In preparation for this he has been compiling a programme of events for 2013 – two of which may also be of particular interest to WCS members. They are:

Wednesday 22 May – Lynn Shepherd will talk about her novel *Tom All Alone's* inspired by both *Bleak House* and *The Woman in White* – and characters and incidents from both novels are introduced at the dénouement. The venue is Goodenough College, Mecklenburgh Square, London WC1N.

Wednesday 24 July – John Sutherland will talk on ‘*Great Expectations* and *All the Year Round* – What Did Dickens learn from Wilkie?’. The venue is Lumen United Reform Church, 88 Tavistock Place, London, WC1N.

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Paul and the Dickens Fellowship have kindly agreed that any WCS member will be welcome to attend.

FRIENDS OF KENSAL GREEN CEMETERY

WCS members may be interested in forthcoming lectures of the Friends of Kensal Green Cemetery. Meetings will take place at 6.30 for 7.00pm in the Dissenters’ Chapel, best approached using the Ladbroke Grove entrance.

On 25 September FOKGC guide, Robert Stephenson will talk on ‘The Gruesome History of Body Snatching’ where he will explore the lengths to which ‘resurrectionists’ went to supply bodies to schools of anatomy and medical researchers.

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On Thursday 1 November Signe Hoffos, also a FOKGC guide, will talk on ‘Dickens’ Connections at Kensal Green’ where she will look at associations with the life and work of Charles Dickens, including family, friends, illustrators, publishers and even models for his characters.

WILKIE IN RUSSIA

Our much travelled Dutch member Pierre Tissot van Patot writes that he was very surprised to discover how many books by Collins are printed in Riga, the capital of Latvia, including one edition dated 1892. He was able to purchase modern copies of *The Moonstone* both there and in Tallin, the capital of Estonia, in the Baltic languages dated 1975 when both countries were still nominally part of Russia. Wilkie was always very popular in Russia, almost all of his works were translated and print runs of his main novels ran into the hundred thousands.

Paul Lewis
Andrew Gasson

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

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