



THE WILKIE COLLINS SOCIETY

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NEWSLETTER

WINTER 2012

THE WILKIE COLLINS JOURNAL

As mentioned in previous Newsletters, the former *Wilkie Collins Society Journal* has now become an online publication as *The Wilkie Collins Journal*. We are delighted to report that the first issue is now available at acc.wilkiecollinssociety.org and includes the following five essays:

‘The Decomposing Past and the Challenges to Modernity: Corporeal and Architectural Decay in Wilkie Collins’ by Mariaconcetta Costantini of the University of Chieti-Pescara, Italy.

‘Ugo Foscolo’s ‘Last Letters of Jacopo Ortis’ and Wilkie Collins’s ‘The Woman in White’: A Case for Possible Influence’ by Shifra Hochberg of the Ariel University Center, Israel.

‘Opening up the Secret Theatre of Home: Wilkie Collins’s ‘The Woman in White’ on the Victorian Stage’ by Valerie Pedlar

Wilkie Collins’s Legacies: ‘The Moonstone’ in Boris Akunin’s ‘Murder on the Leviathan’ and ‘Children’s Book’ by Marcia Morris of Georgetown University, USA.

‘There is nothing either of Wilkie or Collins about it’: Naming and Signing in Wilkie Collins’s ‘Memoirs of the Life of William Collins’ and ‘Blind Love’ by Ryan Barnett.

The first issue also contains reviews of *A Companion to Sensation Fiction* by Pamela K. Gilbert (Editor); *Ghost-Seers, Detectives, and Spiritualists: Theories of Vision in Victorian literature and Science* by Srdjan Smajić; and *Science, Sexuality and Sensation Novels: Pleasures of the Senses* by Laurie Garrison.

The WCS would like to record its thanks to the current editor, Andrew Mangham, for all his time and efforts in masterminding the reincarnation of the Journal in its new format; to Verity Hunt for her work on the archives; to Verity Burke for her editorial assistance; to Tatiana Kontou for her work as reviews editor; and to Tim Jennings at '[Really Simple Sites](#)' for his excellent work on the websites for both the WCS and the Journal.

Because of the pressure of other commitments, Andrew Mangham is now stepping down from his editorial role for which in this issue he has been ably assisted by Dr Anne-Marie Beller. For 2013 she will become the new Journal editor. We would also like to welcome Tara MacDonald as the new reviews editor.

PRE-RAPHAELITES AT TATE BRITAIN

Showing until 13 January is 'The Pre-Raphaelites: Victorian Avant-Garde' at Tate Britain. The exhibition includes work from many of Collins's friends and acquaintances including Millais, Holman Hunt, Augustus Egg, D. G. Rosetti and Thomas Woolner. Although never formally a member of the movement, Wilkie's brother Charles is represented by two paintings. *Convent Thoughts* was exhibited at the Royal Academy in 1851. *May in the Regent's Park* was painted in the same year and shows the view from 17 Hanover Terrace where Charles, Wilkie and their mother, Harriet, lived from 1850-56.

Another probable Collins connection is 'The Awakening Conscience' (1853-54) by William Holman Hunt. The subject is that of a young gentleman visiting his mistress in the house where he has installed her. "As they play and sing at the piano, the woman's conscience is awakened to memories of her childish innocence and she rises from her lover's lap." The appearance of the interior, which is painted in minute and symbolic detail, is generally considered to be based on Wilkie's 1852 description in *Basil* of the Sherwin drawing room at North Villa, Hollyoak Square to the north of Regent's Park.

“Everything was oppressively new. The brilliantly-varnished door cracked with a report like a pistol when it was opened; the paper on the walls, with its gaudy pattern of birds, trellis-work, and flowers, in gold, red, and green on a white ground, looked hardly dry yet; the showy window-curtains of white and sky-blue, and the still showier carpet of red and yellow, seemed as if they had come out of the shop yesterday; the round rosewood table was in a painfully high state of polish; the morocco-bound picture books that lay on it, looked as if they had never been moved or opened since they had been bought; not one leaf even of the music on the piano was dogs-eared or worn. Never was a richly furnished room more thoroughly comfortless than this - the eye ached at looking round it. There was no repose anywhere. The print of the Queen, hanging lonely on the wall, in its heavy gilt frame, with a large crown at the top, glared on you: the paper, the curtains, the carpet glared on you: the books, the wax-flowers in glass-cases, the chairs in flaring chintz-covers, the china plates on the door, the blue and pink glass vases and cups ranged on the chimney-piece, the over-ornamented chiffoniers with Tonbridge toys and long-necked smelling bottles on their upper shelves - all glared on you. There was no look of shadow, shelter, secrecy, or retirement in any one nook or corner of those four gaudy walls. All surrounding objects seemed startlingly near to the eye; much nearer than they really were. The room would have given a nervous man the headache, before he had been in it a quarter of an hour.”

A full description of the picture is given by the Tate’s catalogue entry at www.tate.org.uk/art/artworks/hunt-the-awakening-conscience-t02075/text-catalogue-entry

There is also a four minute video analysis of the painting by Dr Beth Harris and Dr Steven Zucker on youtube at www.youtube.com/watch?v=9gnM72T4DTE

‘THE GHOST’S TOUCH’

This year’s Halloween production at the Greenwich Theatre on 4 November was ‘The Ghost’s Touch.’ The adaptation of Wilkie’s story was by John Goodrum of the Rumpus Theatre Company which in 2010 had also turned to Collins with a version of ‘The Dead Hand’. The plot of this production was

loosely based on Collins's supernatural tale published with the original title in 1885 and reprinted as 'Mrs Zant and the Ghost' in *Little Novels* (1887).

The story begins when Mr Rayburn, a widower, and his young daughter, Lucy, meet Mrs Zant in Kensington Gardens while she is experiencing a vision of her dead husband. The actual cast on stage consisted only of Nicholas Gilbrook as Rayburn and Amanda Howard as Mrs Zant. The remainder of the cast was 'played' by recorded voices. In a way it gave an extra dimension to the production and added to the supernatural atmosphere but it also gave the impression of reducing production costs by eliminating most of the actors. The plot then diverged from the Collins original and ultimately became very confusing. In the end it was completely unclear as to which character was haunting which.

COLLINS FAMILY PAINTINGS

Three portraits of Wilkie, nine paintings by his brother Charles, and up to eighty by their father William Collins R.A. are now available online in a database of 210,000 oil paintings owned by the nation.

The Charles Allston Collins pictures include his well know works *Convent Thoughts* (Ashmolean), *May in the Regent's Park* (Tate London), and *The Pedlar* (Manchester City Galleries) as well as two much less well known canvasses both called *The Stream* (Southwark Art Collection). His portraits of William Collins (Nottingham City) and Wilkie himself (Fitzwilliam) are there too. Two other portraits of Wilkie – by Millais and Rudolf Lehmann – are also on the database.

Although a few of the 80 paintings by William Collins are 'attributed to' or 'in the style of this is the fullest online collection of his work anywhere. The database, which includes an image and location for each of the paintings, was prepared by the Public Catalogue Foundation and is hosted by the BBC www.bbc.co.uk/arts/yourpaintings.

THE WOMAN IN WHITE - THE GAMES VERSION

For those who would like a computer game based on Collins's well known novel, Avanquest Software have issued *Woman in White* in their Victorian

Mysteries series. “Walter Hartright, a poor drawing teacher, finds himself in the middle of an inexplicable mystery. Somehow his future is intertwined with an elusive woman who harbours a dreadful secret. A secret so damaging her life is in danger!” Not quite Wilkie but excellent graphics and most of the original characters make an appearance. Available from the Avantage website at £10.20 but it often appears on eBay for a good deal less.

A NEW (OLD) DESCRIPTION OF COLLINS

Most of the descriptions of Wilkie with which we are most familiar are those by writers in England such as Harry Quilter, Hall Caine and Edmund Yates. A less well known description is given in William H. Rideing’s 1912 *Many Celebrities and a Few Others: a Bundle of Reminiscences*. Rideing (1853-1918) was an Englishman who lived in America and worked in on the staff of the Boston weekly family paper, *The Youth’s Companion*, from the early 1880s. Rideing visited Collins in Gloucester Place and was in correspondence with him during 1886.

I call at Gloucester Place to see Wilkie Collins in his little house, a cheerful, rotund, business-like man of a height disproportionate to his ample girth. Already advanced in years, he had the briskness of middle age and the freshness of youth in his complexion. His luxuriant beard was like spun silver, and had he worn a long mediaeval cloak and peered out of it below its cowl, he would have made the traditional Faust as that character appears before Mephistopheles transforms him. Notwithstanding his matter-of-fact speech with its occasional cockneyisms of phrase and pronunciation; notwithstanding his well-tailored and modern apparel, as modish as that of any city man; there was a suggestion of the pictorial necromancer about him, which grew as one listened to him, and instead of prints, of which he was a connoisseur, against the walls, one almost expected to find the apparatus of an alchemist.

He was writing for us a few stories based on circumstantial evidence, and he frankly exhibited to me the books of remarkable trials which he was using as material... The trials are accessible to all, but the attempts to transmute them, as Wilkie Collins did, into little dramas enacted by

human beings in natural surroundings, are sure to be futile... [It] depends after all on the possession and exercise of that creative imagination which the books do not supply.

The stories in question, published in *The Youth's Companion*, were 'Victims of Circumstances Discovered in Records of Old Trials': 'A Sad Death and Brave Life' (Vol. 59, 19 August 1866); 'Farmer Fairweather' (Vol. 59, 16 December 1886); and 'The Hidden Cash' (Vol. 60, 20 April 1887). The first two stories were republished in *Boys Own Paper* 23 October 1886 and 26 February 1887). All three were republished by the WCS in June 2002 with a detailed history and introduction by Graham Law.

SUBVERSION AND SYMPATHY

Due to be published early in 2013 is *Subversion and Sympathy: Gender, Law, and the British Novel*, edited by two professors of law, Martha C. Nussbaum and Alison L. Lacroix. (Oxford University Press, New York, ISBN 978 0199812042). The book consists of papers presented at a conference of the University of Chicago Law School. There are four main parts, 'Marriage and Sex'; 'Law, Social Norms, and Women's Agency'; 'Property, Commerce, Travel'; and 'Readers and Interpretation'.

There is not a huge Collins content but the front cover features the Millais illustration to the Sampson Low 1864 edition of *No Name*. This shows Magdalen poised at an open window with a vial of poison, counting the passing ships to decide whether or not she should commit suicide. The novel is described with a very good plot summary in Chapter 7 on 'The Stain of Illegitimacy: Gender, Law, and the Trollopian Subversion'. Nussbaum cites *No Name* as "one of the era's most extensive critiques of the irrationality of inheritance law in relation to illegimates", a description which would no doubt have pleased Wilkie no end. The section concludes with "Collins makes Magdalen's story the occasion for a critical examination of society's stock portrait of the illegitimate woman. He plays a double game, soliciting a frisson of horror even while he shows Magdalen to be superior to the boring folks around her. Nonetheless, despite his evident enthusiasm for his uncanny heroine, he gives his Victorian audience what convention demands: energy punished, docility restored."

Other brief references to Collins occur later in the book, mainly in connection with the sensation novel. Nicola Lacey, a Professor of criminal law, points out in Chapter 8, 'Gender, Agency and Women's Criminality in the Novels of Anthony Trollope', that Madame Max is "the first female literary English detective (*Phineas Redux* 1874), by way of beating Wilkie Collins's Valeria Brinton of *The Law and the Lady* (1875) to the title by just one year." But perhaps Professor Lacey hadn't read Collins short story 'The Diary of Anne Rodway' published in *Household Words* in July 1856.

A DICKENS MISCELLANY

The Charles Dickens Museum at 48 Doughty Street where the Inimitable lived from 1837 to 1839 has now re-opened after a complete three million pound refurbishment for the bicentenary. There is not, in fact, much Wilkie on display amongst the amazing Dickensiana consisting of books, letters, pictures, playbills, furniture and other memorabilia. The house, now in wonderful condition, does however give a realistic idea of contemporary living in the mid nineteenth century and well worth a visit for any Collins enthusiast.

Oxford University Press has now published *The Selected Letters of Charles Dickens*, edited by Jenny Hartley (ISBN 978-0-19-959141-1), which for nearly 500 pages at £20 seems an absolute bargain. Each of the twelve volumes of the definitive Pilgrim edition of the letters now sells for around £200 although Collins researchers would probably manage with volume seven onwards. Further information is available on the OUP website.

Simon Callow, who is apparently a fan of Collins as well as Dickens, has now written *Charles Dickens and the Great Theatre of the World*, published by Harper Press at £8.99 (ISBN 978-0007445301). As the advertising blurb says, "Acclaimed actor and writer Simon Callow captures the essence of Charles Dickens in a sparkling biography that explores the central importance of the theatre to the life of the greatest storyteller in the English language." Further details at <https://harpercollins.co.uk/products/charles-dickens-and-the-great-theatre-of-the-world-simon-callow>.

There is also a new, illustrated edition of Forster's *The Life of Charles Dickens*, edited by Holley Furneaux (Sterling Publishing, ISBN 978-1402772856, £30). But don't expect much Wilkie content as Forster's original took pains to ignore him as much as possible.

DICKENS JOURNALS ONLINE

Hazel Mackenzie and Ben Winyard have completed indexing *Household Words* and *All The Year Round* for the Dickens Journals Online project. As reported in previous newsletters, it has images and transcripts of every issue of both periodicals to which Wilkie contributed for many years. The indexing allows the contents to be comprehensively searched by title, author and subject. All Wilkie's contributions to *Household Words* are easy to find. Authorship in *All The Year Round* is less certain but his major works *The Woman in White*, *No Name* and *The Moonstone* are there together with several shorter pieces, some of which are not by Wilkie such as 'Boxing Day' (probably by Charles Collins).

DJO makes one new attribution to Wilkie 'Good Qualities of Gout' (*All The Year Round* vol. I, 28 May 1859 pp. 102-105). Although the subject matter is clearly one close to Wilkie's heart, there is no definite evidence that he suffered from gout in the 1850s. He first mentions it by name in a letter to Charles Ward on 15 January 1863. The style of this piece does not seem like Wilkie – and is completely different from the piece which is by him that follows entitled 'The Royal Academy in Bed'. Although in that he refers to being confined to his bed by illness there is no evidence that he was in fact ill at that time. Now that the body of work is complete and indexed the WCS looks forward to working with the DJO project on attributions to both Wilkie and Charles.

This free online resource is also invaluable for anyone who wants to read in their original form Wilkie's early periodical work, three of his major novels, numerous short stories and works written in collaboration with Dickens www.djo.org.uk.

THE INVISIBLE WOMAN

The film based on Claire Tomalin's book about Dickens's mistress Ellen Ternan is currently in post-production and is due to be released in 2013. It stars

Ralph Fiennes as Dickens, Felicity Jones as Ellen, and Tom Hollander as Wilkie himself. Parts of it were filmed at Harrow School. There are more details at <https://www.imdb.com/title/tt1700845> and <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/av/entertainment-arts-25910009>

PORTHGENNA AND *THE DEAD SECRET*

A new adaptation of *The Dead Secret* intended for the medium of film has recently been written by Yahna Katrina Tucker. Quoting from the publisher's comments,

“Literary critics have recently begun to rediscover the value of Wilkie Collins’s highly popular sensation novels of the 1850s and ’60s as art and social commentary and to recognize their influence on today’s mystery and suspense writers. However, more attention and credit is due to Collins’s early works, such as *The Dead Secret* published serially in 1857, which tells the story of the painfully timid Sarah Leeson, a lady’s maid who is burdened by her mistress with a terrible secret that threatens to drive Sarah mad ... Today a film version of his work is the perfect medium for this reintroduction. Though this has been tried with Collins’s most popular novels, *The Woman in White* and *The Moonstone*, the length and complexity of these novels have not allowed adaptors to do them justice in film form. In contrast, the interesting characters, suspenseful plot, and sinister atmosphere of *The Dead Secret* are only heightened when adapted for the medium of film. ... thanks to Collins’s tight plotting and the story’s timeless relevance.... Since Collins wrote *The Dead Secret* for serialization and with a play adaptation in mind and thanks to Collins’s vividly visual style of writing, the transition from book to film is a remarkably smooth one.”

Porthgenna: A Screenplay Adaptation of Wilkie Collins’s “The Dead Secret” is published by Proquest, Umi Dissertation Publishing, ISBN 978 1243402691.

A THESIS ON *THE WOMAN IN WHITE*

The same publishers, ProQuest, have also issued *The Significance of Silence: The Muted Voices of Count Fosco and Laura Fairlie in “The Woman in White.”* by Melanie Virginia Page (ISBN 13: 978-1249892991). According to the advertising blurb,

“This thesis examines the intricacies of voice using narrative theory and reader-response theory with Wilkie Collins’ *The Woman in White*. Since Collins first wrote this epistolary novel serially, he wrote aware of his audience as he printed segments with different narrators. This novel allowed Collins the opportunity to reveal an internal set of narrators’ responses to other characters’ voices - responses that sometimes conflict with and modify one another. At the same time, Collins’ contemporary audience’s responses to the novel reveal the role of characters’ voices in shaping reactions of members of the novel’s reading public. Two opposing figures - Laura Fairlie and Count Fosco - aid this examination of understanding voice through multiple lenses as both of these characters are relatively silent in the context of the narrative while still remaining essential to the plot. Their distance from the narrative makes the interpretations the readership and narrators of the novel have of these two characters imperative to consider.”

The published version in paperback costs an alarming £59 from Amazon or £47.57 from the Book Depository (also owned by Amazon). The text can, however, be downloaded for free from the academic website <https://digitalcommons.liberty.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1229&context=masters>

MARK TWAIN ESSAY

WCS member Chris Adye found an essay by Mark Twain (Samuel Clemens) which refers to Wilkie’s admiration for the American novelist James Fenimore Cooper. The essay does not share Wilkie’s view. Clemens begins with three quotations praising Cooper. Two are from literary professors and this one is attributed to Wilkie: “Cooper is the greatest artist in the domain of romantic fiction in America.” The essay then goes on to challenge these views in uncompromising terms.

“It seems to me that it was far from right for the Professor of English Literature at Yale, the Professor of English Literature in Columbia, and Wilkie Collins to deliver opinions on Cooper’s literature without having read some of it. It would have been much more decorous to keep silent and let persons talk who have read Cooper.”

The exact quote from Wilkie is untraced – though it is possible it was in a lost letter to Clemens or one Clemens had seen. Wilkie does praise Cooper in at least three recorded letters. He refers to him as one of the “three kings of fiction” in a letter to Miss R – along with Walter Scott and Honoré de Balzac (12 July 1883). And he uses the same phrase to Paul Hamilton Hayne opining that “It may be hundreds of years, or it may be only hundreds of days, before another Fenimore Cooper appears in America, or another Walter Scott in England.” (3 May 1884).

The letter to Miss R specifically mentions Cooper’s *The Deerslayer* as one of his favourite works - along with Scott’s *The Antiquary* and Balzac’s *Le Père Goriot*. It is *The Deerslayer* which Clemens goes on to slate as violating eighteen of the “nineteen rules governing literary art in the domain of romantic fiction”.

Mark Twain’s essay ‘Fenimore Cooper’s Literary Offences’ can be read here <http://xroads.virginia.edu/~hyper/hns/indians/offense.html>.

INCONVENIENT PEOPLE

Sarah Wise’s new book examines the Victorian use of the madhouse to get rid of inconvenient people - especially inconvenient women and in particular inconvenient wives.

There are numerous references in the book to Wilkie and, of course, to *The Woman in White* and Laura’s incarceration in a madhouse under the name of Anne Catherick. Sarah Wise has a whole chapter entitled ‘The Woman in Yellow’ about the novelist Bulwer Lytton’s relationship with his wife. They separated after a few years but Rosina’s pursuit of her husband for a bigger allowance lasted many years, eventually including disruption of public meetings when he stood for Parliament. In 1858 Bulwer had her incarcerated in the private asylum Wyke House. She became something of a cause célèbre and after pressure from influential friends was released after a few weeks. She wrote her own account of it in her book *A Blighted Life* (1880). Like Percival Glyde in *The Woman in White* Bulwer Lytton was a baronet. Apparently not seeing Glyde as a villain at all, Rosina wrote to Wilkie after its publication “the great failure of your book is the villain; Count Fosco is a very poor one, and when next you want a character of that sort I trust you will not disdain to come

to me. The man is alive and is constantly under my gaze. In fact he is my own husband.” (Cited in *Collected Letters of Rosina Bulwer Lytton*, 2008, vol. I).

Inconvenient People by Sarah Wise is published by Bodley Head at £20.

ARMADALE

A Wilkie Collins fan who blogs under the name Elizannie wrote in October of her trip to Armadale, the small town on the coast of Skye. She went there simply because she loved Wilkie’s writing and that “One of Collins’s best books in my opinion is *Armadale*.” In her blog she is pictured by an Armadale ferry sign: rephidimstreet.blogspot.co.uk/2012/10/on-road-or-whisky-and-kilts.html

There are, in fact, three Armadales in Scotland; two in Australia, plus an Armadale; one in Canada; and a Scottish cheese with the same name but which seems unobtainable south of the border. There was also an early English three-wheeler motor car manufactured from 1906 to 1907. (See en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Armadale). Wilkie would probably have first encountered the name in 1842 as it is a village about thirty miles from Thurso where he travelled with his father in 1842. (*Memoirs of William Collins, R.A.* vol. II, p. 209).

THE NAME’S THE SAME

Laura Glyde – the married name of Laura Fairlie in *The Woman in White* – is not a common name. But it turned up recently in the *Echo* – a local online paper in Essex. It reports that Laura Glyde, who runs the Stafford Hall care home in Benfleet, has been named as the care home manager of the year by the Essex County Council https://www.echo-news.co.uk/news/local_news/8971655.stafford-halls-laura-glyde-is-care-home-manager-of-the-year/

Our thanks to biographer Andrew Lycett for this information.

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