



THE WILKIE COLLINS SOCIETY

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NEWSLETTER

SPRING AND SUMMER 2013

COMBINED NEWSLETTERS

We are conscious that the 2013 Spring Newsletter is rather overdue. This is mainly because our efforts have been directed at publishing *The Lighthouse* (see below) which we have been keen to make available to members as part of their 2013 subscription at no extra charge. We have also spent a good deal of time in considering the future of the *Wilkie Collins Journal* and the WCS website (also see below). In addition, it has been necessary to keep an eye on the ever increasing cost of postage and for this year we have therefore combined Spring and Summer into this single Newsletter. The Winter Newsletter will put us back on schedule in due course.

THE LIGHTHOUSE

As part of Society's continuing programme of republishing Collins's works which have not been seen since their early publication, our latest production is *The Lighthouse*. This is a drama written by Wilkie Collins and first performed privately in 1855 under the enthusiastic direction of Charles Dickens at his home at Tavistock House. There were two professional productions, in London during 1857, and in New York during 1858. Although there was a French translation of the play with an introduction in French by Collins himself, because of his caution in preserving dramatic copyright there has until now been no English edition.

The Lighthouse is the story of a murder thought committed long before and confessed by its perpetrator when almost at the point death by starvation. The

play explores the psychological effects of the crime on the other characters and when the supposed victim is rescued from a shipwreck, it finishes with forgiveness and reconciliation.

The Lighthouse is published by the Wilkie Collins Society in association with Francis Boutle Publishers and consists of a transcription of the version licensed by the Examiner of Plays for the Olympic Theatre in 1857 with a detailed introduction by Andrew Gasson and Caroline Radcliffe (of the Drama Department of Birmingham University). This analyses the creation and the original stage production of the drama and is accompanied by a translation of Collins's own introduction to the French edition of the play and several contemporary reviews which set the drama in context as well as indicating the reception of both the play and its actors by the literary critics of the day. Our Patron, P. D. James, has graciously consented to write a Foreword to the publication and by one of those nice coincidences she had also written a crime story entitled *The Lighthouse*, published in 2005 – exactly 150 years after Collins's drama. The work includes numerous illustrations of the various productions, most of which are rarely seen, and a recently discovered sketch of Charles Dickens as he appeared in 1855. The date of publication is 16 June, the anniversary of the play's original production at Tavistock House.

Because of its importance in the canon of Collins's dramatic works, The Wilkie Collins Society has produced it as a hardback book for its members in a limited edition of 250 copies. As mentioned above, this is included within the 2013 subscription. Members can purchase additional copies from the WCS at £12.50 but there is also a paperback, trade edition available at £9.99 direct from the publishers, Francis Boutle, 272 Alexandra Park Road, N22 7BG (www.francisboutle.co.uk).

THE WILKIE COLLINS WEBSITES – THE FUTURE

The Society currently has two complementary websites. That for the Wilkie Collins Society now has all but the most recent Newsletters uploaded and presented in an easily searchable form. The other, for the online *Wilkie Collins Journal*, has had the first issue of the Third Series, under the editorship of Andrew Manghan, freely available since the end of 2012. Our new Journal editor, Ann-Marie Beller, is working hard on the issue for 2013 and under her guidance and a new web designer we will be making new arrangements for the future to give members a proper period of priority. The two websites will be combined and members will be given a password to access the latest issue which will not be available to non-members and casual browsers for at least a

year. The ability to print either individual articles or whole issues will be made much easier together with improvements to the search facility. We will be able to provide photocopies for those members who do not use the internet and Newsletters will continue to be sent in printed form.

TOM ALL ALONES

Tom-All-Alone's is an innovative novel by Lynn Shepherd which ends with a surprising Collins connection. Set in 1850s London, it uses the background and characters from *Bleak House*. The main protagonist is private detective, Charles Maddox, formerly of the Metropolitan Police and therefore well acquainted with Inspector Bucket who plays a major role in the plot. We also encounter Tulkinghorn, who is even more scheming and villainous than in *Bleak House*, along with Mr George and his shooting gallery, Dr Woodcourt, a series of 'Hester's Narratives' and descriptions of the eponymous London slums. The final denouement takes place in a Hampstead asylum wherein is detained none other than Anne Catherick, her treatment paid for by Sir Percival Glyde. In Lynn Shepherd's postscript she notes "Even if the relationship between this novel [*The Woman in White*] and my own is not made explicit until the closing chapters, the moment when *Tom-All-Alone's* really came to life for me was when I realised that the time-scheme of *Bleak House* could be made to run parallel with Collins' very precise chronology for *The Woman in White*, which culminates in Sir Percival Glyde's death in a fire in late November 1850." The ending is certainly a surprise but perhaps not entirely convincing to Collins enthusiasts.

A MISSING PORTRAIT

In 1890, the year following Collins's death, the then popular artist Walter Goodman exhibited at the sixty-seventh annual exhibition of the Royal Society of British Artists a portrait entitled 'The Late Mr. Wilkie Collins at the age of 56'. According to the catalogue, Goodman had his studio in Weston Place, Brighton and the painting was priced at £42. It was presumably unsold as there were reports in the Daily and Sunday Times for June 1891 that Goodman was attempting to sell it to the Garrick Club, pledging half the proceeds to a fund to support the comic playwright, Robert Reece.

Walter Goodman (1838-1912) was a student at the Royal Academy from 1851. He travelled extensively during the 1860s to Europe, the West Indies and the United States. His most prolific period for portraiture was during the 1870s. He also contributed articles to various periodicals, including 'People I have Painted' to Sala's Journal.

A lengthy biography can be found on Wikipedia which has several illustrations of Goodman's pictures. There is also an erroneous note that in 1877 *The Illustrated London News* carried "An illustration for a Wilkie Collins story, "A Bit for Bob" in the magazine's Christmas Number." Recent research has revealed details of nearly 100 of his works. Unfortunately the location of most of these – including the Collins – is unknown.

Most of the contemporary paintings of Collins are well known and include the Millais when he was aged 26; the Charles Collins, aged 29; and the Rudolf Lehmann, aged 56. There were also numerous photographic portraits nearly all of which can be found on the Paul Lewis website at www.wilkiecollins.com. Noting the similarity of the date for the Goodman painting, we can assume that it may have looked similar to the Lehmann; but where is its current location?

NOT BY WILKIE COLLINS

A very curious book by Duke de Medina Pomar called *Fashion and Passion; or Life in Mayfair* was published in three volumes in 1876. It consists of 94 short chapters, each one with the title of a contemporary work of fiction by other authors but clearly stated as not actually written by them. Many of them are well known although others are now very obscure. Thus we have *The Way we Live Now* – not by Anthony Trollope; *The Pathfinder* – not by Fennimore Cooper; *A Terrible Temptation* – not by Charles Reade; and *Pride and Prejudice* – not by Miss Austen. Collins is well represented by five titles, *The Woman in White*, *After Dark*, *Man and Wife*, *The Law and the Lady* and 'A Plot in Private Life'.

The book was apparently an extremely popular novel of London Society with the plot featuring the beautiful Señorita Consuelo and her lover Alfredo. They meet during a ship's passage from Spain to London following which melodramatic incidents in London Society abound. There is currently a copy for sale by Quaritch whose description notes:

What *Fashion and Passion* lacks in originality it makes up for in a lively descriptive style and good-humoured acknowledgement that it apes many of the tropes of popular fiction..... Medina Pomar revealed much about the novel's contemporary critical reception in the preface to his novel *Who is she?* of the same year. In a spirited defence he claims that 'no novel ever met with so much abuse at the hands of reviewers', but that their cruelty did him a service: 'every copy of the first edition was sold almost as soon as it was announced; and even my most intimate friends could not get a copy, for love or money, within two months of its publication – so that a new edition became immediately

necessary.' He ruminates on the irony that nothing buoys a novel's readership as much as a bad review.

***THE WOMAN IN WHITE* – A MUST-READ BOOK**

At the beginning of June, *The Daily Telegraph* featured its '500 Must-Read Books'. In the Crime section, top of the list is *The Woman in White* described as "the first great Victorian thriller." As ever, it resides in good company, along with Sherlock Holmes, Raymond Chandler, Agatha Christie, Robert Harris and Elmore Leonard. Also included is *The Suspicions of Mr Whicher*, which raises the question, why no *Moonstone*?

ANOTHER *MOONSTONE* FOR THE BBC

The Moonstone, however, according to the *Daily Mail* of 12 January will be made into a three-part series by the BBC. "It is more than 150 years since he first captured the nation's imagination, but Sergeant Cuff, star of Wilkie Collins' classic *The Moonstone*, is to be brought to the small screen ...Following the success of another 19th century detective, Sherlock Holmes, BBC One is to make a lavish new crime series following the adventures of Sergeant Cuff. Described by T.S. Eliot as the 'first and greatest of English detective novels', *The Moonstone* is widely regarded as a seminal work introducing fictional police drama to British literature. The three-part series will follow the original story but is being adapted for television. It sees Sergeant Cuff of Scotland Yard called in to solve the theft of a precious stone, which itself was originally stolen by a British army officer at the storming of a great palace in India."

The maths doesn't quite add up since *The Moonstone* was originally published in 1868 but with three episodes this new production may have time to do more justice to the original than the BBC's rather poor previous attempt in 2006.

THE FROZEN DEEP AND THE FRANKLIN EXPEDITON

Although the dramatic version of *The Frozen Deep* was written in 1857 and the story published in book form during 1874, it is now apparent that Collins still maintained his interest in the Arctic and the loss of the Franklin expedition at least until 1884. An interesting association copy has recently come to light.

The Narrative of the Discovery of the Fate of Sir John Franklin and His Companions by Captain McClintock was originally published by John Murray in 1859. This particular copy had originally been presented by the publisher to E. Osborne Smith, the Treasurer of the Geographical Club of London. It had subsequently been acquired by Collins who wrote the inscription "Purchased

from a London bookseller, in 1884, by Wilkie Collins.” This was a book which seems to have escaped previous notice since it isn’t mentioned in Professor William Baker’s comprehensively detailed *Wilkie Collins’s Library* nor in any of the sales catalogues following Collins’s death in 1889. The volume was later acquired in 1913 by Townsend W. Thorndike, a noted American collector of Arctic books.

The author, Captain McClintock, commanded the private expedition sponsored by Lady Franklin in 1857 to search for her husband and his crew, missing since 1845. This account details his thorough search of the area between the Boothia Peninsula and King William Island, and his discovery of the fate of Franklin with the recovery of written records left by Lt. Graham Gore, Captain James Fitzjames, and Capt. Francis Crozier.

THE INVISIBLE WOMAN

The film version of Claire Tomalin's biography of Charles Dickens's lover Ellen Ternan is now scheduled for release in February 2014. The film is directed by Ralph Fiennes, who also plays Dickens, and will include the first onscreen depiction of Wilkie Collins. That part will be played by Tom Hollander. The 45 year old actor is almost exactly Wilkie's age when Dickens died and, at 1.65m, is almost exactly Wilkie's height - which he put at 5'6". I look forward to seeing the beard! Hollander is perhaps best known recently for his depiction of Reverend Adam Smallbone in the BAFTA winning TV series *Rev.* Felicity Jones will play Ellen, Kristin Scott Thomas her mother Catherine, and Michelle Fairley will depict Wilkie's companion of thirty years, Catherine Graves. It is a BBC Films and Headline Pictures production.

CONFERENCE SEASON

Wilkie Collins will be the subject of two conferences in November, one in the USA and one in London.

The Midwest Modern Language Association conference focuses on the theme Art and Artifice and a special session will be devoted to Collins. "Often dismissed as a writer of lighter fare" the conference wants to put him in its critical spotlight to see how he "explored deeper social issues - marriage, sexuality, ethics, and science...while catering to his audience's taste for art and artifice." The conference takes place in Milwaukee, 7-10 November. Registration costs \$45 or \$95 but you may have to join MMLA first. <http://luc.edu/mmla/annualconvention.html>

In the same week in London on 9 November the Victorian Popular Fiction Association will devote a study day to Collins. 'Wilkie Collins: New Directions and Readings' will include papers by Tara MacDonald of University of Amsterdam, WCS Journal editor Anne-Marie Beller (Loughborough) and Joanne Ella Parsons of Bath Spa. The day will be at the English Institute, Senate House, London. More information from Janice Allan j.m.allan@salford.ac.uk.

CAMBODIAN ECHO OF *THE MOONSTONE*

The *Indian Express* saw parallels between the return to Cambodia of two tenth century Khmer statues and the plot of Wilkie's 1868 novel *The Moonstone*. New York's Metropolitan Museum of Modern Art recently decided to return the figures after evidence that they were plundered during the Vietnam War. Cambodia has appealed to other American museums to return artefacts stolen after 1970. In *The Moonstone* Indian priests track down the unique yellow diamond stolen from the head of a statue by a British soldier in Seringapatam in 1799. At the end of the novel the diamond is returned to its original place.

SPOOKY PASTICHE

"I woke, as it seemed, from a nightmare of being stretched on the rack." With those words John Harwood opens his novel *The Asylum*. Described by the *New York Times* as 'a clever simulation of a sensation novel' it draws heavily on the plot of *The Woman in White*. Georgina Ferrars, unmarried and living with her uncle over his Bloomsbury bookshop, awakens to find herself locked in an asylum in Cornwall. The doctor in charge says she is Lucy Ashton and her uncle swears Georgina is still with him. But she knows they are both wrong. You can buy this 'deliciously spooky pastiche of high and low gothic' from Amazon in various formats including Kindle and MP3 and, of course, as a hardback for about £14.

THOMAS HYDE HILLS AND JOHN BELL

On the recently refurbished fascia (Welbeck Street side) of well known London chemists, John Bell & Croyden, is an artist's representation of Thomas Hyde Hills. Hills was a pharmaceutical chemist who became the sole proprietor of the original firm of John Bell & Co in June 1859.

Hills was a friend of Dickens, Millais and Landseer. He was also very helpful to Wilkie who wrote to his mother about *Armada* in March 1866 "And as to the work, I am better than halfway through the last number. I should have been

nearer the end, if I had not encountered difficulties in reconciling necessary chemical facts, with the incidents of the story. But Hills has helped me nobly, and the difficulties are vanquished, and I hope and trust I shall have written the last lines.” Earlier, in 1863, Collins had written to Hills “Mr Beard willingly approves of my trying the prescription which you have so kindly sent to me. I enclose it, in order to save you the trouble of referring to your books again before making up the lotion. Please leave directions that it may be returned to me – for I shall take it abroad in the capacity of travelling companion.” The two obviously became quite friendly so that during the run of *No Thoroughfare* in January 1868 Hills was invited to dinner and to see the play in the ‘author’s Box’ along with Forster, Landseer and Charles Collins.

A CANINE WILKIE COLLINS

There is yet another new Wilkie Collins web page at www.graysonhumane.org/animals/detail?AnimalID=1506515. This one, however, is rather unusual as it’s the personal page on the Grayson County Humane Society site of a rescued Jack Russell terrier. “I’m called Wilkie Collins, named after the writer because of my adorable curled up whiskers. I’m not interested in being quite so prolific as he; I just want to write a nice long autobiography with a happy ending.”

Wilkie would probably have approved as he was a great animal lover, writing in *The Fallen Leaves* "There are periods in a man's life when he finds the society that walks on four feet a welcome relief from the society that walks on two."

39 AVENUE ROAD

Wilkie’s early home with his father, mother and brother from 1838 to 1840 at 20 Avenue Road in London’s St John’s Wood had been on the market for some while. It is now renumbered 39 and the entire original house was pulled down and rebuilt in an enlarged version a few years ago. According to one of the local property magazines, it was sold during 2012 for £38 million. Pictures can be found at www.wilkie-collins.info/home_sjwood.htm.

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