



THE WILKIE COLLINS SOCIETY

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NEWSLETTER

SPRING 2014

MEMBERSHIP RENEWAL

We are grateful to several members who have anticipated the Newsletter and membership renewal notice and already paid. The subscription notice accompanies this Newsletter for those who have not paid. With the ever increasing cost of postage, we have had to raise dues to £16 for UK members and £28 for those overseas. Payment details are on the form enclosed for those whose payment has not yet been recorded. If you have already paid we will not, of course, expect you to pay the difference this year.

EMAIL ADDRESSES

As mentioned in an earlier Newsletter, our list of members' email addresses was lost following a computer crash. Only a few members have so far let us have current email details to bring our membership list up to date. This will prove useful in letting you know of events at short notice. Obviously, addresses will be kept confidential and not released to any third parties.

THE LETTERS OF WILKIE COLLINS

Enclosed with this newsletter is the eighth supplement to the Collected Letters of Wilkie Collins. It includes 33 new items, 27 of which have not been published before and the rest have lain un-remarked in old periodicals or books. An important group of six new letters turned up at auction in a collection of

correspondence to Wilkie's friend Sir George Russell. Previously only one other letter to him had been identified. Other interesting finds include the only known letter to Hans Christian Andersen and a letter defending his sole authorship of *The Woman in White*. In another he writes to the mother of an aspiring writer - the granddaughter of a sculptor known to Wilkie's father:

"The number of ladies who are plunging head foremost into Literature is alarmingly large - and the competition is formidable as a necessary consequence.

But there is always a welcome ready for a writer who has a real vocation for the Art."

No trace of anything published by her has been found.

With this latest supplement the editors have added 245 letters to the corpus making a total of 3227. The editors confidently predict that number will rise again by the time the ninth supplement is published at the end of 2014.

THE LIGHTHOUSE AT THE DICKENS FELLOWSHIP

WCS members are cordially invited to a meeting of the Dickens Fellowship at 6.30 pm on Tuesday 20 May at Lumen URC, 88 Tavistock Place, London, WC1H 1HD. Dr Caroline Radcliffe will give a talk entitled: 'We mean to burst on an astonished World' which will concentrate on Dickens's involvement with Wilkie Collins's 1855 drama, *The Lighthouse*.

This follows the publication by the Wilkie Collins Society in 2013 of the first printed edition to appear in English, to which Caroline and Andrew Gasson wrote the introduction. Initially staged at Tavistock House, Dickens took the lead role of Aaron Gurnock and described the play as 'a regular old-style Melo Drama'. Dickens also contributed 'The Song of the Wreck' which was sung by his daughter Mamie who played the role of Phoebe. It is hoped to hear this song performed at the meeting with piano accompaniment.

Caroline Radcliffe lectures in the department of Drama and Theatre Arts at the University of Birmingham, publishing on popular Victorian theatre and sensation drama. She is also an active performer and has directed Wilkie Collins's play *The Red Vial*. (www.wilkie-collins.info/play_redvial.htm).

COPIES STILL AVAILABLE OF *THE LIGHTHOUSE*

Members are reminded that there are still some copies available of the WCS publication of *The Lighthouse*. Hardback copies can be obtained from the WCS

at a cost of £12.50 and paperbacks direct from the publisher, Francis Boutte, at www.francisboutle.co.uk for £9.99.

THE INVISIBLE WOMAN

The long awaited film of *The Invisible Woman* has now been released. It is directed with great attention to detail by Ralph Fiennes who also contributes a superbly over-the-top performance as Dickens, exactly as one imagines the real life Dickens would be. WCS member, Angela Richardson, has written the following review.

In Ralph Fiennes' new film, the second one he has directed, he puts himself into what might be thought the star role, that of Charles Dickens. But, as is fitting for the biography on which the film is based, it is the women who have the important parts. Felicity Jones as Nelly Ternan (Dickens's mistress), Kristin Scott Thomas as her mother and Joanna Scanlan as Catherine Dickens all deliver strong performances. The latter, though on screen the least and with the fewest lines, conveys a powerful dignity in the face of heartbreak. Although the main relationship in the film is the complex one between Charles Dickens and Nelly Ternan, there is also a strong emphasis on the relationships between parents and children. We see Catherine Dickens's closeness to her oldest son and Charles Dickens's critical and intimidating stance towards his children. The moral dilemma of Mrs Ternan and the difficult decisions she comes to make with her daughter are sensitively shown. And in the Wilkie Collins/Caroline Graves household, we are given glimpses of the loving way little Harriet is brought up.

Along with the entire cast of *The Frozen Deep* we are kept waiting for the first appearance of Wilkie Collins, when he is late for the first rehearsal with the 'real' actors - the Ternans brought in to replace Dickens's daughters. Wilkie arrives, breathless but unrepentant and wonderfully played by Tom Hollander. It is as if a portrait of Wilkie stepped out of its frame and made jokes with us.

The author of the book on which the film is based, Claire Tomalin, is said to have been consulted about the film but not to have become engaged in the screenplay. All the main facts contained in her biography are followed, except for one crucial scene where Nelly Ternan meets Caroline Graves. Tomalin wrote that Nelly was 'not in the same category' as Caroline and believed

Dickens would not have taken her to visit Wilkie at home. The medium of film however demands they are brought together in order to show us what it meant to be a 'fallen' and a 'respectable' woman in Victorian England.

The ambiguity of endings is explored in the film where the two different conclusions for *Great Expectations* are discussed. Nelly refers to this twice in key scenes and the film plays with two versions of her later marriage after Dickens's death.

Do see this film. The seascapes are stunning and the dim Victorian interiors authentic. It is not only charming to see Wilkie brought to life but to see him in his context shows the extent of his unconventionality, something we are apt to overlook from our 21st century viewpoint.

WILKIE COLLINS: NEW DIRECTIONS AND READINGS'

On 9 November 2013, the Victorian Popular Fiction Association devoted a study day to Collins under the title 'Wilkie Collins: New Directions and Readings'. The conference began with a keynote address by Professor William Baker of Northern Illinois University on "Wilkie Collins: Scholarship and Criticism: Past, Present and Future". This tour de force presentation covered the entire range of Collins studies and apart from setting the tone for the rest of the meeting gave a valuable insight into current Collins scholarship.

The rest of the morning session - Panel A - included papers by Tabitha Sparks (McGill University) on "Wilkie Collins's *The Law and The Lady* and Feminine Reason: 'Quite incredible, and nevertheless true'; Meredith Miller (Falmouth University) on "Popular Interiority and Political Address: *The New Magdalen* and *The Law and the Lady*"; and Tara MacDonald (University of Amsterdam) on "Sympathetic Doubles in Collins's Fiction."

The afternoon session began with Panel B with papers by Catherine Delafield "'The patience of cats,... the ferocity of tigers': Comparative Editing and the Serialization of *The Moonstone*."; Caroline Radcliffe (University of Birmingham) "*The Lighthouse* by Wilkie Collins: 'situations dramatique non encore exploitees"; and Jessica Cox (Brunel University) "Women in White: Neo-Victorianism and Wilkie Collins's Literary Descendants."

The final Panel had papers by Anne-Marie Beller (Loughborough University) on "'I want a husband to vex, or a child to beat': Sensation and Emotion as

Redemption in *Armada*"; and Joanna Ella Parsons (University of Bath) on "Fosco's Fat: Bodily Control and Transgressive Consumption in *The Woman in White*."

WILKIE COLLINS AND COPYRIGHT

Wilkie Collins and Copyright: Artistic Ownership in the Age of the Borderless Word by Sundeep Bisla was published during 2013.

Paul Lewis writes: Prolix is the word that came to mind when I embarked on Bisla's book. But then if you take ten years to write a book - as he tells us he did - you can perhaps be forgiven a little verbosity. This is not a book about Wilkie's long struggle with publishers around the world to be paid a fair price for his labours. Rather it is an analysis of his literary output for clues and perhaps hidden messages about his belief that intellectual property is indeed as much property that can be stolen as is a watch.

Each of the five main chapters is devoted to his search for these clues in one of Wilkie's pre-1870 novels - *Basil*, *The Woman in White*, *No Name*, *Armada*, and *The Moonstone*.

I am not competent to judge Bisla's academic success in what he finds - "an author locked in fierce negotiation with the theoretical underpinnings of his medium, the written word, underpinnings best delineated by the twentieth-century deconstructionist Jacques Derrida seeks to show" as the blurb has it.

But I do have the temerity to suggest that in terms of clarity and economy his writing is in the opposite corner from the author he studies. Perhaps it is my fault that 'The Comfortable Deniability of the Paradox of Iterability' conveys little and a discussion of it even less.

Wilkie wrote to aspiring writer Frank Archer

"You must be very much more careful than you are at present in the matter of Style. Look at your first paragraph - and at the marks which I have made on it - and you will see what I mean. When you have seen, cut out the first paragraph. It is quite useless. The right beginning of the story is at the second paragraph.

Again! The central interest in your story is in the walk across the heath, and in what came of it. You are too long in getting to this - and the frightful consequence follows - you will be "skipped."...

"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." (To Frank Archer 23 July 1886).

Bisla's book is, of course, not a novel. It is well grounded in academic writing, referring copiously to other studies and, in its own way, challenges them or takes them on. But it is not an easy read.

Wilkie Collins and Copyright: Artistic Ownership in the Age of the Borderless Word (ISBN 13:978-0-8142-1235-6) is published by the Ohio State University Press both in hardback and CD format. The book is available from the Book Depository for £40.35 or from Amazon for £26.99 plus postage.

APPRECIATION

The Moonstone came in at Number19 in *The Observer* newspaper's 2014 list of the hundred best novels - one place behind *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* and ahead of Alcott's *Little Women*. Robert McCrum wrote "Wilkie Collins's masterpiece, hailed by many as the greatest English detective novel, is a brilliant marriage of the sensational and the realistic." In an earlier list, a decade ago, McCrum put *The Woman in White* at number 23. www.theguardian.com/books/2014/jan/27/100-best-novels-moonstone-wilkie-collins

Solicitor Louise Eccleston confesses to the *Chester Chronicle* in February that her favourite book is *The Woman in White* by Wilkie Collins. She also likes Dickens's *Bleak House* "but that is probably too close for comfort as it gives lawyers a bad press!" Wilkie generally liked lawyers, in his books at least. <http://www.chesterchronicle.co.uk/lifestyle/day-life-private-client-solicitor-6727507#.UwtFweN t8E>

WILKIE COLLINS: A LIFE OF SENSATION

Andrew Lycett's excellent and thoroughly researched new biography of Collins will appear in paperback on 10 April 2014 with one or two minor errors in the original hardback text corrected. *Wilkie Collins: a Life of Sensation* will be published by Windmill Books, an imprint of Random House, at the recommended price of £9.99.

TALKING BOOKS AND LIBRIVOX

There have been several Collins audiobooks produced over the last few years, originally on tape and more recently on CD. *The Moonstone* (Naxos and Fantom Films) and *The Woman in White* (Audiogo and BBC Audiobooks) are available in both abridged and unabridged versions. Other recordings are *The Evil Genius* (Tantor Media); *The Haunted Hotel* (Blackstone Audiobooks); *The Two Destinies* (Assembled Stories); *Supernatural Stories* (Fantom Films); and *Mr Wray's Cash-Box* (Assembled Stories). There are also various downloads available from Audible.co.uk.

Librivox, which rather grandiosely describes itself as "Acoustical liberation of books in the public domain" now has twenty-five Collins titles with one in progress. These therefore include most of the full length novels, from *Armada* to *The Woman in White* as well as shorter works such as *The Dead Alive* and *The Dream Woman*. There are also German language renderings of two or three books plus a Dutch version of *A House to Let*.

The books can either be listened to online or downloaded and subsequently recorded to CDs for use on a normal CD player; or listened to on a smartphone, player or tablet. Downloads for sale on ebay seem to be playable only on a computer. The readers are all volunteers rather than the professional actors found with the published versions. So although the sound quality is generally quite good the readers vary greatly in quality from good 'Standard English' through strong American English to sometimes other, less comprehensible, foreign accents. Nevertheless Librivox provides a great resource for those wishing to listen to rather than read not only Collins but a huge range of other out of copyright authors. They can be found at <https://librivox.org/search>

COLLINS ON MASTERMIND

Brave WCS member Terry Saunders decided to put his Wilkie Collins knowledge to the test on BBC television's Mastermind. This was broadcast on Friday 21 February with his specialist subject 'The Novels of Wilkie Collins'. This was a courageous undertaking with the plots of thirty or so novels and something like 200 characters to memorise. Ten novels featured in the thirteen questions. A previous Collins contender on Mastermind in the 1980s had limited her topic to the 1860s. Terry with his much wider remit and despite some difficult questions scored a very creditable overall total of 23 points, just beaten into second place by the winner, Lindsay Ashford, on 24.

MODERN CRIME

For those members who also enjoy modern crime fiction, dramatizations of the novels of our Patron P. D. James are regularly revived on Radio 4 Extra. The latest offering, in February, was *The Skull Beneath the Skin* which features her detective, Cordelia Grey, played by Greta Scacchi. This also contains a nice reference to the Constance Kent murder case.

ANOTHER 'WOMAN IN WHITE'

A headline on the Cricinfo website at the beginning of February gave us a new definition for a 'Woman in White'. This time it referred to the New Zealand cricket umpire Kathy Cross who became the first woman to be named to an ICC umpires panel. She has been added to the ICC Associate and Affiliate Panel of Umpires. Henceforward she will no doubt be known as the 'Woman in White Coat'.

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