



## ***THE WILKIE COLLINS SOCIETY***

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**NEWSLETTER**

**WINTER 2015**

We begin this Newsletter with a theatrical flavour with two new books featuring Wilkie Collins and an article on the famous *Woman in White* poster.

### ***VICTORIAN WRITERS AND THE STAGE: THE PLAYS OF DICKENS, BROWNING, COLLINS AND TENNYSON***

*Victorian Writers and the Stage* by Richard Pearson is a study of the plays of Dickens, Browning, Collins and Tennyson together with the fiction and periodical writings of Thackeray and others. These major Victorian writers wrote numerous professional plays but Pearson questions why these have been largely overlooked despite enjoying long and successful theatrical runs. He examines the aspirations of these writers to become part of the growing theatrical establishment and

"the problems they encountered in risking their reputations on a literature felt by many to be vulgar and illegitimate. A wealth of new detail carefully positions the plays within the context of the changing Victorian theatre industry and the great battle between the Major and Minor theatres for the future of the modern stage."

The book consists of six chapters in three sections: 'Comedy and Tragedy, Before the Theatres Act of 1843'; 'Collaborations at Mid-Century, 1845-1868'

and 'Dramatic Identities, 1870-1883'. The material relating to Collins is mainly contained in Chapters 4 and 5. 'Dramatic collaboration: Dickens' and Collins' melodramas' mentions *The Lighthouse* but concentrates on *The Frozen Deep*. Pearson's assessment is that

"Collins could do drama better than Dickens. Dickens could collaborate so long as he was in charge; but Collins could *defer*, something essential for the playwright in the Victorian theatre."

Further along he adds

"In Collins' early plays we see a confrontation with the simplicity of action-based melodrama and an attempt to develop a drama that incorporates sensationalistic elements while endowing them with more social significance or meaning. By the time he began stage adaptations of his famous sensation novels, he had developed a working theory of drama that resisted the popular desire for an Adelphi 'screamer', and defeated audience expectations by excluding the sensational entirely."

Chapter 5, 'Adapting to the stage: Wilkie Collins and the double text', discusses *The Woman in White*, *Man and Wife*, *The New Magdalen*, along with adaptations of *Miss Gwilt* and *The Moonstone*. There are some unfamiliar illustrations, including a scene from *The Woman in White* originally published in the *London Journal* of 9 December 1871.

Richard Pearson lectures at the National University of Ireland Galway. He is the director of an AHRC-funded digital archive, The Victorian Plays Project. *Victorian Writers and the Stage* is published by Palgrave Macmillan, ISBN 9781137504678, at £55; also available on Kindle for £52.25.

### ***THE WOMAN IN WHITE IN THE EPHEMERIST***

The latest issue of *The Ephemera*, the journal of the Ephemera Society (No. 170, Autumn 2015) has an interesting article by Graham Hudson on 'The woman in white: a famous theatre poster and the part it played in 'the streets as arts-galleries'.'

The essay gives a brief idea of the plot and a history of the novel's dramatic adaptation, from the unauthorised production at the Surrey Theatre in 1860 to Collins's own successful version at the Olympic Theatre in October 1871 which ran for nineteen weeks. Hudson notes that he has taken biographical details from Andrew Lycett's *Wilkie Collins, a Life of Sensation* and there is the frequently repeated quote about spin-offs such as *Woman in White* cloaks, bonnets, perfumes and toiletries (although nobody seems ever to have located any of these articles of merchandising). The article does, however, include colour illustrations of 'The Woman in White Waltz' and 'The Fosco Galop'.

Most of the essay is devoted to the famous poster

"which publicised the drama - which through its striking appearance can have played no small part in the play's success and was to earn an honoured place in design history."

This of course refers to the artwork produced by Frederick Walker, originally sketched out at the home of Charles Collins, Wilkie's brother. Walker wrote to the wood engraver William Hooper

"I propose trying my hand at the thing itself - a dashing attempt in black and white. The figure ought to be not less than 4 ft. 6, or 5 ft in height; and to my way of thinking a vigorous woodcut would be the thing, on a sheet of pear wood the size of a door."

Walker later wrote rather presciently to Hooper that he considered "it might develop into a most important branch of our art."

Hudson considers it likely that Walker was influenced by the bright posters of Jules Chéret which were to be seen on the boulevards of Paris from about 1866. Apart from two versions of Walker's poster, the article also shows the Frederick Waddy caricature of Collins acting as his own bill poster posed in front of Walker's original, published in the issue of *Once a Week* for 24 February 1872. The article concludes with more on the use of posters in advertising and notes:

"Close on twenty years after that poster had disappeared, Sir John Millais RA observed, 'Fred Walker's "Woman in White" was just what wall advertising ought to be, not a bad copy of a picture disingenuously twisted to suit the advertising, but a splendidly designed figure, serving to decorate the hoarding, and please every intelligent person who looked at it; whilst it exactly served its purpose as an advertisement.'"

Further details of The Ephemera Society can be obtained from PO Box 112, Northwood, Middlesex HA6 2WT.

### ***THE ART OF ADAPTING VICTORIAN LITERATURE***

The Waddy caricature is the front cover illustration for *The Art of Adapting Victorian Literature, 1848-1920: Dramatizing Jane Eyre, David Copperfield, and The Woman in White* by Karen E. Laird. Quoting from the publisher's blurb:

"[In *The Art of Adapting Victorian Literature, 1848-1920*, Karen E. Laird alternates between readings of nineteenth-century stage and twentieth-century silent film adaptations to investigate the working practices of the first adapters of Victorian fiction. Laird's juxtaposition between stage and screen brings to life the dynamic culture of literary adaptation as it developed throughout the long nineteenth-century. Focusing on Charlotte Bronte's *Jane Eyre*, Charles Dickens's *David Copperfield*, and Wilkie Collins's *The Woman in White*, Laird demonstrates how adaptations performed the valuable cultural work of expanding the original novel's readership across class and gender divides, exporting the English novel to America, and commemorating the novelists through adaptations that functioned as virtual literary tourism. Bridging the divide between literary criticism, film studies, and theatre history, Laird's book reveals how the Victorian adapters set the stage for our contemporary film adaptation industry."

There are two chapters devoted to Collins. 'Adapting the Sensation Plot: *The Woman in White* on the Victorian Stage,' goes into details not easily found elsewhere of reviews of J. M. Ware's unauthorised adaptation at the Surrey Theatre as well as providing details of his version of the plot, noting that "*The Times* goes so far as to warn that reading the novel is a prerequisite for understanding the play." I think we would all like to have witnessed Hartright fighting an unequal duel with Fosco, only to be saved when the Count is shot by a Brotherhood assassin. The second part of the chapter discusses Collins's own successful 1871 adaptation of *The Woman in White* and how he in turn altered the novel's plot for the stage.

Laird provides exemplary detail throughout, although some of us might take issue with her comment that

"Collins's subsequent public protests against the practice of adaptation was hypercritical, as his own career was marked by creative borrowing, recycling, and reimagining of texts - both his own original texts and those first conceived by other writers."

We might also disagree with her description of Collins's position in relation to Dickens as "servile."

In Chapter 6, 'Sensational Modernity: *The Woman in White* on the American Screen,' Laird wants "to consider more deeply how the form of the sensation novel, as adapted by American filmmakers in the 1910s, helped to establish the dominant style of film adaptation." More usefully, we are given plot summaries of lost early films and details of the second Thanhouser 1917 adaptation of *The Woman in White* (which is currently available to purchase on DVD). This chapter is well illustrated with film stills and early advertising material.

Karen Laird has taught Victorian literature and film history at the universities of Colorado, Missouri and Salford. *The Art of Adapting Victorian Literature, 1848-1920: Dramatizing Jane Eyre, David Copperfield, and The Woman in White* is published by Ashgate Publishing, ISBN 9781472424396 at £60 but cheaper on the Ashgate website or from Amazon.

## **THE CASE OF THE LIVING GHOST**

A curious website, aptly named [strange.co.blogspot](http://strange.co.blogspot), featured in August a summary of the eighteenth century Douhault case which was one of the main inspirations for *The Woman in White*. This real life case of abduction, substituted identity and incarceration in a lunatic asylum was originally described in Méjan's *Recueil des Causes Célèbres* of 1808-9. The case was the subject of a full length book, *The Woman without a Name*, by G. Lenotre, translated from the French, in 1923. The summary can be found at [strange.co.blogspot.co.uk/2014/08/the-case-of-living-ghost.html](http://strange.co.blogspot.co.uk/2014/08/the-case-of-living-ghost.html).

## **WILKIE COLLINS: A BRIEF LIFE - THE CD**

Peter Ackroyd's short but readable biography of Collins was originally published in hardback during 2012. There is now an unabridged audio CD from

Blackstone Audio read by Gildart Jackson at about £25 from Amazon. The Book Depository (incidentally, owned by Amazon) is now discounting the paperback version by about 50% and currently sells it for £4.29. By comparison, the hugely more comprehensive biography by Andrew Lycett is available in paperback through Amazon from £5.81.

### **'VOLPURNO' OR 'A MANIAC BRIDEGROOM**

Collins's first identified short story, 'Volpurno', was discovered by Daniel Hack, Associate Professor in the Department of English at the University of Michigan, during the autumn of 2008. It was particularly significant because it preceded 'The Last Stage Coachman' which has previously been the earliest known work by Collins (appearing in Douglas Jerrold's *Illuminated Magazine* in August 1843).

'Volpurno' was originally published in New York on 8 July 1843 in *The Albion, or British, Colonial, and Foreign Weekly* and in the same month in two other broadsheets - in Philadelphia in the *Pennsylvania Inquirer and National Gazette* on 20 July and again in New York in *The New Mirror of Literature, Amusement, and Instruction* on 29 July. Later that year, on 25 December 1843, it was republished in *The Rover, a Weekly Magazine of Tales, Poetry, and Engravings* using the entirely different title, 'A Maniac Bridegroom'.

Further research now reveals that 'Volpurno' was also published as 'A Maniac Bridegroom', "A thrilling told Love Story of Venice", in at least two other newspapers: *The Evansville Journal* of Evansville, Indiana of 2 November 1843 (Vol. IX, No. 50); and *The Union* of Lexington, Mississippi on Saturday 11 November 1843 (Vol. V, No. 38). Both of these can be seen and printed from the extensive 'Chronicling America' newspaper website.

It was almost certainly published earlier in England but so far the original journal has not been identified. This is still a challenge for WCS members in the course of their other reading or research to trace the first publication of 'Volpurno'. It was, of course, issued by the WCS in 2009 and a few copies are still available for new - or existing - members.

## FRENCH BIBLIOGRAPHY

There is also useful information available online from the Gallica website of the Bibliothèque National de France ([gallica.bnf.fr](http://gallica.bnf.fr)). A search on Wilkie Collins shows, for example, the front cover illustrations of a 5 centimes version of *The Evil Genius (Le Mauvais Genie)* and an equally dramatic picture of the 50 centimes version of *The New Magdalen (La Nouvelle Madeleine)* in No. 76 of the Grande Collection Nationale. There is also *Un Menage de la Mer*, a French translation of 'A Message from the Sea', the 1860 Christmas number of *All the Year Round*.

It is also possible to download an article by Paul-Louis Hervier to commemorate the centenary of Collins's birth, 'Le Centenaire de Wilkie Collins', published in the Paris journal *La Nouvelle Revue*, Vol. LXXI, 1 June 1924, pp. 239-243.

## WILKIE COLLINS AND GRAPHIC NOVELS (COMIC BOOKS)

*The Woman in White* and *The Moonstone* have both been available in the *Classics Illustrated* series from the Gilberton Company for many years. *The Woman in White* is Number 61, originally issued in the 1960s; *The Moonstone*, number 30 in the USA and 102 in England was originally published in 1946. Both titles were frequently reprinted with different artwork. They were also translated into several foreign languages. More details can be obtained from various online sites such as [dcomicsartists.com/classic%20comics/-classics%20illustrated%20uk%20by%20date-2.htm](http://dcomicsartists.com/classic%20comics/-classics%20illustrated%20uk%20by%20date-2.htm).

Our ever alert Dutch member, Pierre Tissot van Patot, has come across some more recent French graphic novels. **He** tells us that:

In 2006/ 2007, Roger Seiter and Vincent Wagner created two comic books based on Wilkie Collins's *The Law and the Lady*. *Mysteries, Seule contre la Loi*, Parts one and two were originally published by Casterman in French and later translated into Dutch.

In 2012/ 2014 Roger Seiter and Vincent Wagner created two more comic books now based on Collins's *The Haunted Hotel (Venise Hantée)*. In the first part,

Wilkie Collins is one of the possible investors in a new hotel in Venice. Later, he goes to Venice where he becomes one of the main characters, investigating the marriage and death of Lord Montbarry.

The comic books are in an artistic modern style and very popular with collectors since they are well printed with lively colours. Roger Seiter and Vincent Wagner have used the original stories to create their own plot, Collins, of course, not appearing in the original nineteenth century version.

Currently, there are only French and Dutch versions of these graphic novels. They will probably not be published in English.

*Venise Hantée - Mort de Lord Montbarry*; 15.11.2012; 48 pages, ISBN-13: 9782848104232. *Venise Hantée - Le Mystère de la Chambre*; 28.06.2014; 48 pages; ISBN-13: 9782848104607. Emmanuel Proust éditions Paris.

*Mysteries - Seul contre la Loi - première partie*; 12.05.2006; 48 pages; ISBN-13: 9782203392487. *Mysteries - Seul contre la Loi - seconde partie*; 26.04.2007; 48 pages; ISBN-13: 9782203392526. Casterman, Brussels.

There was also a schools edition with some extra information in the final pages of the book about both the story and Wilkie Collins. The format is much smaller which makes the pictures less interesting. It concludes with an interview with the (modern) authors. Apparently it was Roger Seiter's idea to use novels by Wilkie Collins as he is interested in nineteenth century English authors.

### ***THE HAUNTED HOTEL***

These days we are fortunate that nearly all of Collins's works are back in print. There is now an attractive new paperback edition of *The Haunted Hotel* published by Vintage Classics at £5.99. This is part of Vintage Publishing, itself part of the Random House Group which in turn owns Chatto & Windus. So Wilkie has come full circle since the first edition of *The Haunted Hotel* was published by Chatto in 1879. This edition also includes another supernatural



Collins story, 'The Dream Woman', originally published in *Household Words* in 1855. The website quotes a nice review from the *Daily Telegraph*:

"Wilkie Collins is the finest practitioner of the novel of sensation... he took the elements gothic fiction relied upon - secret lives, lovers, villainy - and moved them into the suburbs... here the genre fused with the already established crime novel and took it in a new direction, more familiar and more frightening."

Vintage Classics also publish *The Woman in White*, *The Moonstone* and *No Name*.

### **'MY LADY'S MONEY'**

*The Haunted Hotel* was originally published together with 'My Lady's Money.'

*The Times* of 3 August 2015 reported that British writer Annie Dalton has been commissioned to write two novels about dog detectives - where a dog helps its human to solve a crime. In the USA this genre is, the article says, already big. Of course, you can guess who wrote the first dog detective story? Yes, of course, Wilkie Collins!

'My Lady's Money', originally his 1877 Christmas story for *The Illustrated London News*, features Tommie, a Scotch terrier, who solves the mystery of a missing £500 note by finding a crucial piece of evidence. Tommie is modelled on Wilkie's own much loved Scotch terrier with similar name. Wilkie kept a note in his travelling desk, along with other anniversaries, that Tommy died on 28 August 1885. He wrote to his friend and doctor Frank Beard three days later, on 31 August:

"I am getting on fairly well - and finding the refuge from myself which I had hoped to find, in my work. How closely that poor little dog had associated himself with every act of my life at home, I only know now. I can go nowhere and do nothing - without missing Tommy."

### **WILKIE'S TAILOR**

The Archives of Henry Poole & Co, the Savile Row tailor, are being opened to the public. Some details about Churchill and Dickens have already been published. But Wilkie and his brother Charles were also customers.

We know from bank accounts at Coutts that Wilkie was a customer of Poole paying a dozen bills from 1861 to 1867 totalling around £150 with an average payment of just over £13 a time. Wilkie started paying Poole after his success with *The Woman in White* and it is possible that Dickens recommended the tailor to Wilkie. The coat and trousers he wore in the photograph by Herbert Watkins as a frontispiece to the one volume edition published in 1861 may have been a Poole creation and so may the outfits seen in subsequent photographs until at least the 1866 portrait by Elliott & Fry.

It is hoped the Poole records will show the style of the clothes he bought there as well as perhaps his size and details of the fittings he attended. Charles Allston Collins was also a customer over much the same period with one final bill paid from his estate in 1874. He paid Poole a total of £123. We hope to visit the archives shortly and publish a full account in the next newsletter.

#### **WILKIE'S SCHOOL BILL**

A bill from Cole's academy which Wilkie attended from 1838 to 1840 has been identified in the Victoria & Albert museum in London. Headed 'Mrs Cole's Acc<sup>t</sup> Mast<sup>r</sup> Collins' it is dated Xmas 1839 and lists various miscellaneous items for the Michaelmas Term.

Most of the charges are for posting letters. Collating it with the eight known letters from Wilkie while he was at the school reveals the existence of three new ones, though of course we have no texts. Letters were charged at 2d to post and there is also a charge of 6d for the receipt of a parcel which is mentioned in one of Wilkie's extant letters.

"I did not write until I had tasted the cake, as I thought you would like to know that it was most delectably luscious. The whole parcel arrived quite safe, and I am very much pleased with the trowsers, I think they are the nicest pair I ever had."

(This to his mother, Harriet Collins, 15 October 1839).

There is a final item of 6d for the omnibus, presumably taking him home at Christmas, and an initial charge of 8d for the carriage of a box, presumably of his clothes and possessions at the start of the term.

The extras total £4-17s-8d, with by far the largest amount being £4-15s paid to a Mr Armstrong, perhaps for extra tuition. Wilkie's school fees were £30 a term as he reported in two much later letters.

The bill was found by art dealer Alan Bean who is researching the life of William Collins. If any members have pictures, prints, or information that may help him please let Paul Lewis know.

## **NEW LETTERS**

Almost 20 new letters have been identified in the last twelve months. The new documents range from envelopes to responses to autograph hunters to full letters to his friend John Palgrave Simpson, publishers Thomas D. Galpin and George Bentley, and the wife of the actor Charles Fechter. We will be publishing our usual supplement in the New Year.

## **ANDREW LYCETT ON *NO NAME***

The latest number (Issue 48, Winter 2015) of *Slightly Foxed*, a quarterly literary magazine publishes an article by Wilkie's biographer on *No Name*. Each issue, edited by Gail Pirkis and Hazel Wood, contains around 16 essays on books and authors and encompasses a wide variety of genres. Lycett's essay is not actually available online but further details of subscription to *Slightly Foxed* are available at [foxedquarterly.com](http://foxedquarterly.com).

## ***THE WOMAN IN WHITE* - IF YOU'VE READ IT, FLAUNT IT**

The current issue of *The Happy Reader* for Winter 2015 (which featured *The Woman in White* in its first issue) contains "in the age of the empty bookshelf and the full Kindle" a letter concerning the gentle art of seduction.

"Could I please urge all readers to leave some physical evidence or what they're reading around the house. Or better still, use your reading tastes as part of a Tinder seduction strategy. I'm convinced posing with a copy of, say, *The Woman in White* on your profile pic would make you far more attractive than someone else next to, say, a tiger or flash car."

Incidentally, almost all of Collins's titles are available to download for free from Amazon's Kindle Classics.

## TWO FINAL QUESTIONS

This Newsletter raises two questions for which we would like to hear from anyone who knows the answers:

1. In which English journal was 'Volpurno' first published either under this or its alternative title 'A Maniac Bridegroom'?
2. Apart from the musical Waltzes, Quadrilles and Galops, has anyone ever seen any actual evidence of the *Woman in White* merchandising material - bonnets, perfumes, cloaks, toiletries?

Answers on a postcard .... or email will do nicely.

Paul Lewis

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