



THE WILKIE COLLINS SOCIETY

PATRON Faith Clarke

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

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

NEWSLETTER

WINTER 2017-2018

MEMBERSHIP RENEWAL FOR 2018

Members who have not already renewed for 2018 are reminded that the annual subscription is unchanged at £16 for UK and Europe and £28 for other overseas members. Payment may be made by cheque, Paypal or BACS bank transfer to the Society's new account details:

SORT CODE	401158
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THE RED VIAL

Wilkie Collins's play, *The Red Vial: a Drama in Three Acts*, was written and professionally staged at the Royal Olympic Theatre in 1858. It was never published. The plot was later expanded and adapted by Collins as the basis for the novel, *Jezebel's Daughter* (1880). *The Red Vial* followed Collins's earlier dramas, *The lighthouse* in 1855 and *The Frozen Deep* in 1857 but this time without the apparent involvement of Dickens. The cast was led by Frederick Robson as Hans Grimm and the renowned actress, Fanny Stirling, as Madame Bergmann. Despite its strong cast and carefully staged production, *The Red Vial* was not well received by the Olympic's first night audience and suffered at the hands of the critics. Although the play ran for a month, it was described as 'the most brilliant failure of the day.'

The Red Vial has now been published in paperback by Francis Boutle in the same format as *The lighthouse*. It consists of an introduction by Caroline Radcliffe and Andrew Gasson, the text of the play as presented at the Olympic Theatre, illustrations,

contemporary reviews, a foreword by Stephen Isserlis, a cast list and synopses of both the play and *Jezebel's Daughter*.

Members who have paid for 2017 will receive a copy of the limited hardback edition, produced for the WCS, with this Newsletter. Additional copies are available at £12.50; the paperback version is available direct from Francis Boutle Publishers at £9.99 (272 Alexandra Park Road, London N22 7BG, info@francisboutle.co.uk).

THE LIGHTHOUSE IN CORNWALL

The performance of *The Lighthouse*, organised by Jak Stringer, duly took place on 14 October 2017 at the Acorn theatre, Penzance. Most of the audience were Comish locals, supplemented by a handful of WCS members who had made the journey to the far west.

The evening began with an introductory performance by Jak in her own inimitable style. The Speakeasy Players then gave a thoroughly professional play reading of *The Lighthouse*, using the text published by the WCS in 2013. This was the first full reading of the play for nearly 150 years, complete with projected images, Dickensian style sound and special effects and a virtuoso rendering of Dickens's 'Song of the Wreck'.

150TH ANNIVERSARY OF *THE MOONSTONE*

4 January 2018 marked the 150th anniversary of the first appearance of *The Moonstone*. It was first serialised from 4 January – 8 August 1868 in both *All the Year Round* and *Harper's Weekly* in the United States. The novel was published in book form in an edition of 1500 copies six months later in July 1868.

The complete manuscript of *The Moonstone* was sold as Lot 22 of the sale by Sotheby, Wilkinson & Hodge on 18 June 1890. It consists of 413 numbered quarto leaves and is now held at the Morgan Library (MA 78). The British Library holds a transcript consisting of 193 leaves in an unidentified hand but revised by Collins (Add. MS 53191).

The Moonstone was described by T. S. Eliot as 'the first and greatest of English detective novels' (although priority is now usually given to *The Notting Hill Mystery*). *The Moonstone* has several archetypal features of modern detective fiction and created many of the ground rules for the genre. The plot is Collins at his intricate best and a contemporary critic stated that "not a window is opened, a door shut, or a nose blown, but, depend upon it, the act will have something to do with the end of the book."

In addition to its success as a detective story, *The Moonstone* is notable for its enlightened social attitudes as well as Collins's respectful handling of the Indians and their religious motivation in their quest for the Moonstone. Collins is also ahead of his time in his sympathetic characterisation of the reformed thief and servant Rosanna Spearman where his description has resonance with today's financial machinations in the City of London.

“Rosanna Spearman had been a thief, and not being the sort that get up Companies in the City, and rob from thousands, instead of only robbing from one, the law laid hold of her.”

WILKIE IN THE ‘GOLDEN AGE’

Over the years, Wilkie has consistently been a reference point for detective fiction. The now mainly forgotten writer of some excellent mystery stories, Joseph Smith Fletcher, observes about one of his characters in *The Middle of Things* (1922)

“Brought up in her youth on Miss Braddon, Wilkie Collins and Mrs Henry Wood, Miss Penkridge had become a confirmed slave to the sensational What she loved was a story which began with a crime and ended with detection, a story which kept you wondering who did it, how it was done, and when the doing was going to be laid bare to the light of day.”

Fletcher must have paid more attention to reading Collins than Agatha Christie who in *The Third Girl* (1966) had Hercule Poirot complain of “the lack of method or order in the romantic outpourings of Wilkie Collins.” – That must have been another Wilkie Collins.

Of the so called ‘Golden Age of detective fiction’, Wilkie's most consistent devotee was Dorothy L. Sayers who began a biography of Collins which she was never able to finish.

Sayers greatly admired Collins who strongly influenced her works. She followed his example in taking great pains to ensure the accuracy of her plots. *The Documents in the Case* (1930) is written in the epistolary style of *The Moonstone*. Lady Mary in *Clouds of Witness* (1926) behaves like Rachel Verinder, trying to protect Gerald, Duke of Denver, whom she incorrectly assumes is guilty of the crime, and in ‘Other People's Detectives’ (1939) she cites Cuff when writing that for a detective to be truly great he must have presence.

Sayers managed to compete only five chapters of her biography but these were eventually published as *Wilkie Collins: A Critical and Biographical Study*, edited by E. R. Gregory, Toledo, Ohio, 1977. This fairly often turns up on ebay.

THE WOMAN IN WHITE - THE MUSICAL

The musical version of *The Woman in White* has been running at the Charing Cross Theatre for a 12 week season until 10 February. This version, directed by Thom Southerland, is revised by Andrew Lloyd Webber and David Zippel from the original production in 2004 at the Cambridge Theatre. Despite being staged in a much smaller theatre, the much simpler set with sliding panels has the plot flowing rather more easily between the numerous scenes. Gone are the over-elaborate revolving stage and video technology, together with Fosco's white mice and the 'fat suit' of the original production.

Marian Halcombe is played by a much too attractive Carolyn Maitland ("The lady is ugly" in the novel); Laura Fairlie by Anna O'Byrne; Walter Hartright by Ashley Stilburn and a suitably evil Glyde by Chris Peloso. The 'immensely fat' Fosco of the novel is portrayed by a relatively thin but very Italian looking Greg Castiglione.

The musical has had mixed reviews. The *Times* of 15 December 2017 suggested "The Gothic chills and spills ... are slow in coming. The Narrative is clogged and the staging looks cramped." The *Stage* of the same date regarded it as "hard to take seriously" and "a brave salvage attempt," concluding that "As enjoyable as Southerland's production is though, it feels like this cast and creative team are wasted on this mediocre material." The *Guardian* preferred to say "A masterly set of actors leave their mark on a gothic revival" transforming the novel into "something far more tasteful and far less disturbing ...nicely dull, perfectly pleasant and completely inoffensive."

London Theatre is a good deal more positive, telling us that *The Woman in White* is "brilliantly restored" and "beautifully designed by Morgan Large, supported by a superb team that also includes sterling work from costume designer Jonathan Lipman and lighting designer Rick Fisher."

What would Wilkie have made of it? He would probably have approved of the logical condensing of the plot - as he did with his own stage adaptations of the novels - but he might have winced at some of the dialogue!

EMIL FORGUE IN *THE DICKENSIAN*

The latest issue of *The Dickensian* (No. 502, Vol. 113, Part 2) has several references to Collins in 'A Final Indiscretion: Emil Forgues and his Authorised 1856 Biographical

Sketch of Dickens' by Robert C. Hanna, Professor of English at Bethany Lutheran College, Minnesota.

Forgues was a French critic and translator. He was the dedicatee of *The Queen of Hearts* (1859) in recognition of his positive essay on Collins in *la Revue des Deux Mondes* of November 1855. Forgues also translated *The Lighthouse*, *The Dead Secret*, *The Woman in White* and *No Name*.

A COURT DUEL

Robert C. Hanna has also published in *Dickens Studies Annual* (Vol. 47, 2016) '*A Court Duel* as Performed by Wilkie Collins, with an analysis of the Manuscript, Playbill, and Advertisement'. Quoting from Hanna's abstract, the article

"examines the performance's advertisement and playbill, including the venue and charity; identifies the amateur and professional performers; summarizes the play's intricate plot; lists major differences between the original play and its English translation; analyses the manuscripts (Act III of which is in Collins's handwriting); considers why Collins might have selected this play for a charitable performance; and reviews themes and plot events in the play subsequently explored by Collins in his own literature from 1850 through 1860. The article then presents the full text of *A Court Duel*."

A Court Duel was Collins's first dramatic adaptation, in which he made his first appearance on a public stage on 26 February 1850, at the Soho Theatre at 73 Dean Street. It was advertised in *The Times* of 22 and 26 February and afforded a wider public audience than that of Collins's earlier amateur theatricals.

Collins translated from the French a melodrama set in the French court of 1726. The original was by 'Monsieur Lockroy' (J. P. Simon) and Edmond Badon. Charles Collins played the lead and Wilkie the part of Soubise, a comic courtier. The cast also included Henry Brandling and the professional actress, Jane Mordaunt. The play was staged in aid of the Female Emigration Fund which assisted impoverished women to settle in the colonies. This theme later appears in *No Name* (1862) where Magdalen's maid, Louisa, emigrates to Australia.

A Court Duel was never published and this article in addition to its superbly detailed and scholarly analysis presents a welcome addition to Collins's 'lost' works which are now available in print.

AN AUSTRALIAN AUCTION

There were three interesting Collins items in the December sale by Michael Treloar of Adelaide. The star item was Lot 5, the dedication copy of *The Legacy of Cain* to Mrs Henry Powell Bartley, who ‘has skilfully and patiently helped me, by copying my manuscripts for the printer’. At the head of the printed dedication page, the author has written boldly in ink ‘From | Wilkie Collins 16th December 1888’. Mrs Henry Powell Bartley (Elizabeth Harriet Laura Graves, 1851-1905) was the only child of Caroline Graves and Wilkie’s goddaughter. She married Bartley, his solicitor, who ultimately embezzled money from Wilkie’s estate. The lot sold for A\$18,000 (about £10,000 plus auction costs of some 20%).

Lot 6 was a small French colour pictorial greetings card with a short note signed by Robert du Pontavice de Heussey, Collins’s French collaborator and translator, writing in ink on the verso: ‘A mon maître et ami Wilkie Collins avec les vœux sincères du plus humble et du plus dévoué de ses disciples ... Rennes 29 décembre 1884’. Lot 4 consisted of a copy of *The Charles Dickens Birthday Book* signed on Collins’s birthdate, 8 January (“Wilkie Collins 1888”)

The provenance of the three items was from Mrs Henry Powell Bartley, by descent to her great-grandson. All of the further details of the interesting sale are at www.treloars.com/catalogue/archive.

A DUTCH BIBLIOGRAPHY

Long-standing WCS member, Pierre Tissot van Patot has just published *Wilkie Collins: Bibliographic overview of the Dutch language translations* (ISBN 978-90-8273 75-0-9). This elegantly produced publication is the result of many years of worldwide research. It covers editions of the novels and short stories with detailed information on their periodical publication. It is heavily illustrated with numerous colour illustrations on almost every page. Pierre has provided a comprehensive introduction which includes biographical material as well as excellent detail of numerous aspects of publishing history in the Netherlands. There is everything from Collins’s relationship with the Dutch publishers Gebroeders Belinfante to a report of the meeting of Collins and Dickens with Queen Sophie of the Netherlands.

For further information, Pierre can be contacted on tissotvanpatot@gmail.com.

SWEDISH BIBLIOGRAPHIES

Continuing the bibliographical theme, WCS members will remember from mentions in earlier Newsletters that Lars-Erik Nygren has produced a comprehensive

bibliography of Swedish editions of Wilkie Collins's novels and short stories. He has now issued five supplements which have recently been incorporated into a single document.

Lars-Erik has just published a new edition of an earlier bibliography of Edgar Allan Poe. This consists of 146 pages, illustrated in colour with many new items and an index. There is a revised layout which makes it easier to follow how Poe's stories were introduced into Sweden. Copies can be obtained direct from Lars-Erik at lars-erik.nygren@comhem.se or from Per Olaisen Forlag <http://www.olaisen.se/>. The price is 250 SEK plus postage.

In addition to the above, Lars-Erik has also produced several other bibliographies including those for Anna Katherine Green, H. Rider Haggard and Jules Verne. Some details of his other works can be found at the University Library in Lund, www.alvin-portal. Obviously an indefatigable bibliographer, he writes that he will "continue to search for interesting literature as long as it is fun."

ANDREW LYCETT AND THE LONDON LIBRARY

Andrew Lycett, author of the recent *Wilkie Collins: A Life of Sensation*, recently figured in issue 37, Autumn 2017, of *The London library Magazine*. It is very evident from the biography that it involved a large amount of detailed research. In this piece, 'Behind the Book', Lycett describes the resources he used in the London Library's collections. These included amongst others *Inconvenient People* by Sarah Wise (2012) which explored Collins's use of asylums and mental illness; *Mudie's Circulating Library* by Genevieve Griest (1971) which details publishing history in the nineteenth century; and *Memories of Half a Century* compiled by R. C. Lehmann (1908) which gives many personal anecdotes of Collins's great friends Frederick and Nina Lehmann.

NINA LEHMANN'S PORTRAIT BY JOHN EVERETT MILLAIS

The John Everett Millais portrait of the Lehmann's seven year old daughter, also Nina, featured as Lot 12 in the Sotheby's New York sale of European Art on 21 November 2017. The estimate was \$400,000-600,000 and the picture remained unsold. The lengthy catalogue description begins:

Outside of one trip to the salesroom over thirty-three years ago, John Everett Millais' opulent portrait of the young daughter of Augustus Frederick Lehmann (1826-1891) and the former Jane Gibson Chambers (1830-1902), herself known as Nina, has not been seen in public since the memorial exhibition for the artist at the Royal Academy of Arts in London in 1898. This work represents one of Millais' earliest masterpieces of chi Id portraiture, a genre in which he would excel and become known for throughout

the world by the time of his death. First exhibited at the Royal Academy summer show in 1869, in that institution's initial display at its new home, Burlington House, Piccadilly, Millais was cognizant of trying to make a good showing, and the present work was hung in the privileged Gallery III.

The full catalogue description with a large image of the portrait together with its detailed provenance and exhibition history can be found at www.sothebys.com/en/auctions/ecatalogue/2017/european-art-n09940/lot.12.html

‘THE GHOST’S TOUCH’

The Rumpus Theatre Company has revived for its Autumn 2017/Spring 2018 tour their earlier adaptation of Collins's ‘The Ghost's Touch’. The supernatural short story was written especially for the young Anne (Nannie) Wynne. Originally published in *The Irish Fireside*, 30 September-14 October 1885 and in *Harper's Weekly* for 23 October 1885, it was reprinted as ‘Mrs Zant and the Ghost’ in Collins's collection of short stories, *Little Novels* in 1887.

Full details of the production and the remaining dates and venues can be found at www.rumpustheatrecompany.co.uk/future.htm.

BBC PRODUCTION OF THE WOMAN IN WHITE

There is still no firm transmission date for the new BBC One production of *The Woman in White*. ‘Sometime in the Spring’ is the only guidance we could get. Several articles have appeared in newspapers about the cast which includes *Eastenders* actor Ben Hardy who plays Walter Hartright and Cathy Belton, interestingly listed as ‘Mrs Hartwright’. Charles Dance also appears and the series has a skeleton entry at imdb.com.

RICHARD DALBY

The editors are sad to report the death of WCS member Richard Dalby. Richard devoted his life to supernatural fiction. He made many collections of ghost and supernatural stories including *Crime for Christmas* (1991) in which he included Wilkie's early story ‘Mr Wray's Cash-box’. In 1993 he founded with David Tibet the Ghost Story Press which altogether published 14 volumes. He was for a time described as an ‘unofficial’ deputy editor of the *Book and Magazine Collector*. He was a member of the Wilkie Collins Society from 2005. Richard Dalby died 4 May 2017 aged 68.

Paul Lewis

paul@paullewis.co.uk

www.wilkiecollins.com

Andrew Gasson

apogee@apgee.co.uk

www.wilkie-collins.info