



THE WILKIE COLLINS SOCIETY

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NEWSLETTER

SPRING 2018

THE BBC'S WOMAN IN WHITE

The BBC publicity machine really went into overdrive in the lead up to its new five-part adaptation of *The Woman in White*. I stopped counting at 20 articles in the press about the serial or, more often, one of its cast members. *Radio Times* was a little unfair when it said “The BBC’s latest version, written by Fiona Seres and directed by Carl Tibbetts, takes the existing plot and re-works the storytelling structure.” It referred to un-signposted and, I suspect, to many viewers confusing flash-forwards. That was simply the dramatic technique used to convert to a narrative serial the nature of the original which was relayed in a series of testimonies.

Yes, there was some very un-Victorian language such as ‘subconscious’ and ‘totally’. But Wilkie himself reworked his novels for the stage and his own dramatic version of the story was very curtailed – as it must be to fit the huge complexities of the three-volume novel into two or three hours in the theatre – or even five hours on screen.

Critics complained about anachronisms in the costumes. I was shocked in episode one when Laura seemed to suggest skinny-dipping to her new art master even though accompanied by her cousin and a chaperone. And of course, having pieced together carefully the famous walk where Walter Hartright encounters

Anne Catherick on the high road from Finchley, I despaired a little at the muddy path through the woods where it was depicted in the adaptation. But, as with the book, the dramatization grew on me from that moment onwards.

The acting was generally excellent. Charles Dance made you laugh at first but then turned on the cruel indifference of the dreadful print and coin collector Frederick Fairlie. “I hope your collection is devoured by flames” spits Marian at his agreement to the marriage of Laura to Glyde, in a wonderful line that is not in the book. Jessie Buckley was not of course ugly, as Wilkie described Marian, and there was barely a hint of the “dark down on her upper lip” which “was almost a moustache”. But bright, frank, and intelligent she was, as well as brave and determined. Lara Croft one reviewer called her.

Dougray Scott’s oily Glyde made my skin crawl until he was eclipsed by Riccardo Scamarcio as Fosco. Not fat and without mice but overwhelmingly sinister. And he does once utter the word ‘mice’ just to let us know that the writer knows that we know. The main characters - Olivia Vinall as both Laura Fairlie and Anne Catherick and the seemingly 12-year-old Ben Hardy as wet Walter Hartright - were serviceable. Many small parts - Gilmore especially and Mrs Michelson - were just right.

Early publicity stressed the #MeToo aspects of the oppression of women -which Wilkie clearly set out himself in the novel. Laura’s wonderful line on the forced marriage “I may be your true and faithful wife, Sir Percival-your loving wife, if I know my own heart, never!” survived almost intact into the script, as did this stirring speech from Marian:

No man under heaven deserves these sacrifices from us women. Men! They are the enemies of our innocence and our peace-they drag us away from our parents’ love and our sisters’ friendship-they take us body and soul to themselves, and fasten our helpless lives to theirs as they chain up a dog to his kennel. And what does the best of them give us in return?

Both Gilmore and Mr Fairlie also spoke many original lines from the book, as did Glyde at times, and the creepily loyal Countess Fosco - well played by Sonya Cassidy.

Perhaps in a subtle nod to the problem Wilkie had with dates in his complex plot the wedding on 22 December in the book is moved to 22 September. The scene

where Laura refuses to sign the document giving Glyde her fortune is brilliantly done conveying both the power of men and the determination women must show to resist them. Laura's incarceration and then rescue from the asylum - which was rather flat in the book - was turned into a frightening and then gripping piece of drama. The death of Glyde ended in as dramatic a fiery death as you could wish to see. Old Welmingham Church was itself brilliantly cast, though the daft notion that both copies of the parish register were in the church is of course not Wilkie's.

The adaptation created a new character, Ebenezer Nash, described as a scrivener though in fact a lawyer too, who is revealed as the mystery man in the flash forwards taking evidence from a variety of people and at the end, in real time, collects the final pieces of the puzzle for Walter and Marian to establish Laura's identity. The serial ends oddly with Marian travelling in countries where - in a hint of Wilkie's own description of her - she can hide her face.

Overall this was to me by far the best screen adaptation of Wilkie's most popular and in many ways best novel. The wonderful backdrops of Limmeridge House and Blackwater Park and the scenes in London and other towns captured the feel of the late 1840s. And throughout it all the horror and sheer injustice of Laura's treatment by Glyde poured out in tear-making moments.

The man who instructed that his gravestone should bear the words "The author of *The Woman in White* and other works of fiction" would, I like to think, have been amazed and pleased in turn. (The Paul Lewis verdict. Andrew Gasson was less enthusiastic and would still prefer the 1982 version with Jenny Seagrove, Alan Badel and Ian Richardson).

The DVD and Blu-ray are available from 14 May.

***THE WOMAN IN WHITE* – A NEW EDITION**

No doubt timed to coincide with the television series, Macmillan have recently published a new edition of *The Woman in White* in their *Collectors Library*, described as "books to love and treasure." This edition features an afterword by writer, editor and playwright David Stuart Davies. (£9.99 paperback, ISBN 9781509869367). Macmillan also feature *The Moonstone* ("one of the great

Victorian novels”) in the same series with an introduction by writer and historian, Judith Flanders.

THE RED VIAL

The new publication of Wilkie’s 1857 play, *The Red Vial*, was originally launched with dramatic readings from the text in Birmingham at the end of last year. The publishers, Francis Boutle, arranged for a second launch in London on 15 March at the Bookmarks bookshop. This once again featured dramatic readings, by Di Sherlock, Simon Vaughan and editor, Caroline Radcliffe.

All members should have received their copies of the WCS limited edition of *The Red Vial*. Additional copies of the hardback version are available from the Society at £12.50; paperback copies can be had direct from the publishers at www.francisboutle.co.uk/ for £9.99.

THE CAMERA NEVER LIES – BUT ARTISTS DO!

It’s interesting to try to recreate a modern photographic image of a nineteenth century scene. Obviously, we expect modern intrusions after 150 years but a recent attempt to recreate the lithographic illustrations from *Rambles Beyond Railways* revealed quite how much artistic licence was introduced by the illustrator, Henry Brandling. Perhaps the best example is St Michael’s Mount where the main axis of the castle-like edifice at the summit runs from left to right. This appears to be an angle which it is impossible to recreate from the front and equally impossible from the rear where there is firstly no access and secondly a sheer drop to the sea- until you notice that the lithograph is a mirror image of the scene! Whether this was Brandling’s deliberate intention or whether the reversal was a change introduced by the printers or publishers - by design or otherwise - we shall probably never know but it invites questions about the other illustrations.

‘Tintagel’, although not reversed, represents another impossible angle and also shows castle walls which even in Wilkie’s time had probably not existed for generations. ‘Kynance Cove’ shows a steeping rock surrounded by waves at high tide; but to take the picture from that viewpoint the photographer would be under water! ‘Logan Rock’ shows another impossible viewpoint and ‘Lamoma

Cove’ includes a huge rock in the foreground which has either been quarried out of existence or was possibly never there.

SERIALS REDISCOVERED

Our Patron, Faith Clarke, noticed an interesting piece in *The Times* for 12 March 2018 about serials. The author, Matthew Moore, has discovered that “Nearly two centuries after Charles Dickens won public attention by publishing stories as monthly serials the format is enjoying an unlikely revival. Young people and commuters are driving the demand just as digital technology develops the means to deliver stories in regular chunks.” The chief executive of Serial Box, Molly Barton, suggests “A growing number of people take pleasure in plots that unfold in manageable instalments.” The company charges £1.15 to download as an audiobook each episode of a story which will typically stretch over 10 to 16 weeks.

Wilkie, of course, knew all about serial publication. From *The Dead Secret* (1857) onwards most of his novels were first published in instalments, frequently in weekly publications such as *Household Words* or *All the Year Round*. He was a master of the cliffhanger ending but also suffered the stress of having to produce regular copy for the printers despite often suffering from ill health.

COLLINS IN ‘THE 100 BOOKS TO GIVE TO A FRIEND’

Book critic and author, Craig Brown, in his regular page in the *Mail on Sunday* on 15 April introduced his ‘100 Books to give to a Friend’. *Tess of the D’Urbervilles* took first position followed by *Middlemarch*, *Great Expectations* and *Alice in Wonderland*. With a pleasant change from *The Woman in White* or *The Moonstone*, Brown placed *No Name* at Number 11:

“Wilkie Collins had a soft spot for liars and frauds. [In the at times unbearably tense *No Name*, his heroine dons a bogus identity in order to seduce her weedy cousin into marrying her and thus gain the fortune that, but for a fault in the law, should rightly be hers. Will she succeed in her duplicity? We all hope so.”

COLLINS AND DICKENS AT AUCTION

The sale by Forum Actions on 22 March 2018 featured some interesting theatrical Collins-Dickens items. The prices mentioned below are without the buyer's premium.

Lot 85 included a series of playbills for the Dickens touring production of Bulwer Lytton's comedy *Not So Bad as We Seem* in 1852. Wilkie acted in this production as he had the previous year on the occasion when he first met Dickens. The item sold for £3,800.

Lot 88 featured a playbill for the performance of *The Lighthouse* on Tuesday 19 June 1855 at Tavistock House of "An Entirely New and Original Domestic Melo-Drama, in Two Acts, by Mr. Wilkie Collins, now first performed." *The Lighthouse* was Collins's first theatrical collaboration with Dickens and members of course have the 2013 WCS edition of the play. The playbill sold with a hammer price of £2,200.

Lot 89 offered the playbill for Collins's second theatrical collaboration with Dickens, *The Frozen Deep*, performed at Tavistock House on 6 January 1857. This sold for £1,800.

Lot 90 featured *The Frozen Deep* playbill for the Command Performance at the Gallery of Illustration on 4 July 1857 in the presence of Queen Victoria, Prince Albert, King Leopold of Belgium, Prince Frederick William of Prussia, Princess Victoria, William Thackeray and Hans Christian Anderson. The Playbill sold for £1,700.

Lot 91 offered another playbill for *The Frozen Deep* at the Gallery of Illustration, this time for the performance on 11 July 1857 "In Remembrance of the late Mr. Douglas Jerrold." With the benefit of Dickens's manuscript corrections, the item sold for £4,000.

Lot 92 included a programme for the first professional production of *The Frozen Deep* at the Olympic Theatre in December 1866 which sold for the more modest price of £450.

THE KING'S ARMS HOTEL, LANCASTER

Another interesting item recently appeared on ebay in the form of a bill for a Major Thornton at the King's Arms, Lancaster. The Hotel's claim to literary fame is the visit of Dickens and Collins during their walking tour to Cumberland in 1857. This was subsequently recorded in 'The Lazy Tour of Two Idle Apprentices' in *Household Words* from 3-31 October 1857. They visited Lancaster en route from Carlisle to Doncaster which they reached on 14 September.

The King's Arms produced a small booklet (5" x 3" in paper wrappers) in 1866 with the following introduction:

The reader is perhaps aware that Mr. Charles Dickens and his friend Mr. Wilkie Collins, in the year 1857 visited Lancaster and during their sojourn, stopped at Mr. Sly's King's Arms Hotel. In the October number of *Household Words*, under the title of "The Lazy Tour of Two Idle Apprentices," Mr. Dickens presents his readers with a remarkable story of a Bridal Chamber, from whence the following extracts are taken.

The booklet includes a steel engraving showing the entrance hall and main staircase of the establishment and includes a quote from Dickens which noted that "There is a good old Inn at Lancaster, established in a good old house."

IS THERE ANY LAW IN ENGLAND WHICH WILL PROTECT ME FROM MRS BADGERY?

So begins Collins's 'Mrs Badgery', the story of how a bachelor, on moving into his new house, is persecuted by the constant presence of the widow of its former occupant. It was originally published in *Household Words* on 26 September 1857 (shortly before the publication of 'The Lazy Tour') and reprinted in *My Miscellanies* (1863). The ever alert Pierre Tissot van Patot has recently noticed that it was published in the Australian *Spectator* in December 20 15. The piece was introduced by writer and columnist, Philip Hensher:

Wilkie Collins's 'Mrs Badgery', rarely seen since its first publication in Dickens's *Household Words* magazine in September 1857, is an enchanting little chip off the block. Like a lot of British short stories, it is absurd, very funny, and in uproarious bad taste. British writers have often enjoyed stories of making a home, and also the theatrical trappings of grief. (George Bernard Shaw

commented on the national enthusiasm for requiems). Here they collide, with richly enjoyable results. The narrator is clearly stuck with Mrs Badgery for ever. [In time, he might even regard her as a picturesque addition to his home, like an indoor and rather saline water feature.

‘Mrs Badgery’ can be downloaded from <https://www.spectator.com.au/2015/12/mrs-badgery/> It can, of course, also be found on the excellent resource, ‘Dickens Journals Online’ (www.djo.org.uk/).

SOME OBSCURE COLLINS TRANSLATIONS

Pierre has also located some rather obscure translations. The first is a French version, of Collins short story, ‘Qui est le Voleur?’ (The Biter Bit). This was published anonymously in the *Revue Britannique*, Volume 16 for 1858. It can still be found online and downloaded from www.delpher.nl/nl/boeken1/gview?query=theakstone&coll=boeken1&identifier=NfVfAAAAcAAJ

‘The Biter Bit’ was originally published with the title ‘Who is the Thief?’ in the *Atlantic Monthly* for April 1858 and subsequently included in *The Queen of Hearts* (1859). It makes a claim to be an early, if not the first, humorous crime story, featuring a comically inept detective, Mathew Sharpin, as well as other features of the detective genre.

From rather further afield, Java in the Dutch Indies, there was a translation of ‘A Queen’s Revenge’ as ‘De Wraak Eener Koningin’ in *Samarangsch Advertentie-Blad* for 27 January 1860. The story was originally published in *Household Words* for 15 August 1857 and reprinted in *My Miscellanies*. ‘A Queen’s Revenge’ is an historical account of the murder at Fontainebleau in 1657 of the Marquis Monaldeschi at the instigation of the Swedish Queen Christina. The full issue with a transcript in Dutch can be located at www.theeuropeanlibrary.org/tel4/newspapers/issue/3000115908149?record-spatial=NLD&hp=1&page=1&decade=1860-1869&month=1

THE LIGHTHOUSE - MORE FROM THE NETHERLANDS

Pierre Tissot van Patot who recently published the incredibly detailed *Wilkie Collins: Bibliographic overview of the Dutch language translations* has now issued *Wilkie Collins: The Lighthouse: Six versions in one document*.

The six versions in question are transcripts of the four extant manuscripts - held at the British Library, the Victoria and Albert Museum, and the two copies at Berg - together with the French translation (*Le Phare*) and the Dutch translation (*De Vuurtoren*). The six texts are presented side by side so that differences between the different versions can easily be determined.

Pierre's edition includes an introduction and numerous illustrations including pages from the original French and Dutch texts and from *L'Ami de la Maison*; extracts from the various manuscripts; and pictures of the Eddystone lighthouse itself.

Altogether a remarkable piece of work and the definitive edition of the various versions of *The Lighthouse*.

WILKIE IN RUSSIA

Wilkie's works have always been extremely popular in Russia. Most of his titles have been published in translation from the nineteenth century to the present day, often in large editions in the hundred thousands. Wilkie Collins Society member and author Susan Hanes recently spent six weeks in Russia and her account of, as she puts it, 'my relationship with Wilkie' will appear in Russian in the 2018 volume of *Bibliofily Rossii Almanakh* (Bibliophiles of Russia: Almanac) on pp. 67-90.

LINCOLN'S INN

Barrister and WCS member Julien Foster has recently moved with his legal practice to Lincoln's Inn Fields. In a short history of the square, which has long been associated with the law, he reminds us that Wilkie Collins, gave one of his fictional solicitors, John Loscombe, an address there. In *No Name* John Loscombe writes to Noel Vanstone's cousin, George Bartram, from 'Lincoln's Inn, London, September 6th 1847'. Julien could not, of course, resist a reference to Wilkie in the short history he wrote for the Chambers website <https://1gc.com/about-us/history>

And, of course, Wilkie attended Lincoln's Inn as a law student for five years from May 1846 although he confessed to engaging in "little or no serious study. Nevertheless, on 21 November 1851 he went through what he described as "the affecting national ceremony" of being called to the bar. He never actually practised as a barrister but used his knowledge of the law in several novels. Remember poor Alan Armadale who "fell headlong into the bottomless abyss of the English Law."

NOT A WILKIE LETTER!

A newly discovered Wilkie Collins letter appearing at auction is always exciting for the editors of *The Public Face of*. But a recent lot ascribed to him by the Berlin auction house Bassenge continued a confusion with another W.W. Collins which has been going on for more than 150 years.

On 20 April 1864 Wilkie wrote to William Whitaker Collins a civil engineer living at Hereford Square, SW, to thank him for forwarding a letter which had been wrongly sent to him. It clearly was not an unusual occurrence

"I begin to despair of our ever persuading certain people that we are two Mr Collinses, and not one."

The German art, book, and photograph auctioneers clearly had the same problem. Despite coming from 2 Hereford Square and being in a very different hand from Wilkie's, it ascribed the letter of 2 February 1866 to a Miss Cooke as from Wilkie Collins "English novelist and close friend of Charles Dickens (1824-1889)" with an estimate of €400. After our intervention the description was changed to "Collins, Whitaker not an English novelist and not a close friend of Charles Dickens" though it still mentions that the letter was written in the same year as "his *Armadale*". It appears to have been sold after the auction for €200 - perhaps to someone who collects letters from Victorian engineers!

EAST ANGLIAN APPRECIATION

The 128th anniversary of Wilkie's death was the peg for a long and generous appreciation of him by Norwich journalist Courtney Pochin in the *East Anglian Daily Times*. Under the heading "So scandalous: a look back at the wonderful

work of Wilkie Collins' Pochin writes a short biography, summarises five of his novels - the big four plus *Poor Miss Finch* - together with 'Five things you may not have known' about him. Read it at www.eadt.co.uk search for 'Wilkie Collins'. There is also a review of the television *The Woman in White*.

SOUTH AMERICAN NOVEL

Eagle-eyed WCS member, the cellist Steven Isserlis, spotted this brief reference "near the beginning of a book I'm reading, *Where there's Love there's Hate* by Adolfo Bioy Cesares and Silvina Campo"

"Like Betteredge with *Robinson Crusoe* I resorted to my Petronius ..." Wilkie really does pop up everywhere!

P. F. COLLIER

There has been no complete edition of Collins's works although there have been several partial collections by nineteenth publishers which included Sampson Low (7 titles), Smith, Elder (10 titles) and Chatto & Windus (29 titles), Harpers of New York (17 titles). The most complete edition, however, was published around 1900 by P. F. Collier, also of New York, in thirty illustrated volumes. This is based almost entirely on Collins's fiction and the pamphlet enclosed with this Newsletter gives full details.

A NEW COLLECTION OF SHORT STORIES

Longstanding WCS member and author, Katheryn Haynes, has just published a collection of ten short stories entitled *Waiting in the Shadows*. It is published by Sarob Press, La Bliniere, 53250, Neuilly-le-Vendin, France; The press can be contacted at sarobpress@gmail.com with further details at <https://sarobpress.blogspot.com/2018/02/waiting-in-shadows-new-title-news.html>. Katherine has previously published *Grace Poole* which was a novel interpretation of *Jane Eyre* from the point of view of the housekeeper.

THE WCS JOURNAL - CALL FOR ARTICLES

The editor of the WCS Journal, Joanne Parsons, is planning a special issue on the theme of 'Materiality in Wilkie Collins and his Contemporaries' with Guest Editors, Dr Kym Brindle, Dr Laura Eastlake.

Wilkie Collins's fiction depicts a rich cabinet of material curiosities. His novels evidence the wealth of objects with which the Victorians surrounded themselves in everyday life. This special issue looks to explore the entanglements between object and subject in Collins's work. We seek proposals exploring the ways in which aspects of identity in Collins's novels are articulated through forms of material culture. What is the significance of property and personal possessions for identity formation?

In her work, *Material Identities*, Joanna Soafaer suggests that two approaches to materiality 'what one might broadly categorize as the aesthetic and the social - are not necessarily mutually exclusive', and this issue will focus on intersections between material aesthetics and their social implications and consequences. In what ways do the curiosities and clutter of Victorian life contextualize debates about issues of authenticity and disguise? What are the consequences of things for the Victorian body and its sufferings, pleasures, and performances? What social impact do material objects have for characters (and readers) in the quest for meaning?

Suggested topics include, but are not limited to: Property and property law; Wills, records, ledgers, testimonies, documents; Collecting and collections; Thing theory; Art, decoration, and ornamentation; Dress, fashion, and fabric; Publication, printing, print culture; Letters, diaries and narrative; Embodying the materiality of the body; Appearance and disguise; Nineteenth-century burial practices and relics of death; Memory and materiality; Medical materials; Neo-Victorianism and Wilkie Collins.

Please email abstracts of approximately 500 words to laura.eastlake@edgehill.ac.uk and brindlek@edgehill.ac.uk by Friday 27th July 2018.

Full articles of 5-8,000 words in MLA format due: Monday 27th October 2018. Further information is available at the journal site: <https://wilkiecollinsociety.org/journal/>

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