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# *The Moonstone*

WILKIE COLLINS

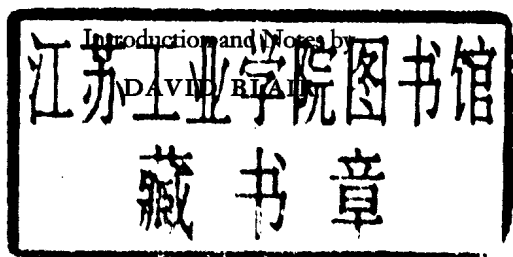


COMPLETE AND UNABRIDGED

# THE MOONSTONE

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## GENERAL INTRODUCTION

Wordsworth Classics are inexpensive editions designed to appeal to the general reader and students. We commissioned teachers and specialists to write wide ranging, jargon-free introductions and to provide notes that would assist the understanding of our readers rather than interpret the stories for them. In the same spirit, because the pleasures of reading are inseparable from the surprises, secrets and revelations that all narratives contain, we strongly advise you to enjoy this book before turning to the Introduction.

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## INTRODUCTION

In Jane Austen's *Northanger Abbey*, published posthumously in 1818 but devised and written in the late 1790s, Catherine Morland is staying at Northanger as the guest of General Tilney, whose son and daughter have befriended her in Bath. Her young head filled with incidents from Gothic novels, she identifies the chest in her bedroom as the likely repository of some dark family secrets, and by the light of her candle rummages through each of its many drawers before finding a roll of papers which she anticipates to be a manuscript of the kind generally discovered in Gothic novels, some harrowing and hitherto suppressed confession written by a victim of tyrannies and violence perpetrated in the Abbey in the past – she particularly suspects that the late Mrs Tilney may herself have been such a victim. By the light of morning she discovers that the roll of papers is nothing but a collection of laundry lists.

In July 1860, in the village of Road in Wiltshire, a young woman called Constance Kent was interrogated by the celebrated Inspector Whicher of Scotland Yard concerning the murder of her half-brother, Francis Kent. Whicher had been called in to take charge of the case after the local police officer, one Inspector Foley, had twice arrested the child's nurse and had been twice obliged to release her for lack of evidence. Whicher had Constance Kent charged with the boy's murder, his evidence against her comprising chiefly the house's laundry list, which revealed that one of the accused's nightgowns was missing – because, he deduced, it had been stained with the victim's blood. The local authorities in fact dismissed Whicher's case and released Constance Kent, although years later she admitted to having carried out the murder. Wilkie Collins characteristically squirrelled the details of the notorious case away, and seven years later Inspector Whicher was mutated into Sergeant Cuff, the blood-stained nightgown into a paint-stained nightgown and the murder into the theft of an Indian diamond, the Moonstone.

For Jane Austen, Northanger Abbey's laundry lists – not merely in their banality but in their assurances of orderliness, accountability and cleanliness – acted as the guarantee that 'Gothic' experience was not to be discovered in 'the midland counties of England', as she put it. Collins, on the other hand, in *The Moonstone*, is writing in a tradition of nineteenth-century novelists who were not entirely prepared to accept Austen's assurances on this score, and who used the conventions and structures of Gothic fiction to expose and explore the dark underside of English respectability. In this fictional world the laundry list, as for Whicher in Road, may, when inspected, disclose hidden secrets or, as in *The Moonstone* itself, may survive investigation but none the less fail to disclose the existence of an item of dirty linen. In Collins's novel that item and its secret lie deeper still – a white, crumpled mass crammed into a tin case at the end of a chain sunk under the oozy surface of the Shivering Sand, and accompanied by a suppressed manuscript confession which proves to be as agonised and as sensational as anything that Catherine Morland might have hoped to find.

The Shivering Sand, its fir-plantation and its stretch of bleak coast reflect the novel at large in functioning as a gateway between what is visible and what is concealed, what is acknowledged and what is unacknowledged, what is open and what is mysterious, what is in the public domain and what is deeply private, what is respectable and what is transgressive. That the solution to the first and most perplexing of the novel's mysteries should be hauled up from beneath its surface expresses how the novel uses 'detective fever', as Betteridge calls it, not

simply to investigate a crime or to solve a specific mystery. Beyond this, it takes the form of probing and groping beneath surfaces, confusing and subverting normal social rhythms. 'The witnesses, or the company (which shall I call them?) reached the house an hour since,' writes Jennings on the evening of his 'experiment' (p. 380). Friends and colleagues can thus become witnesses; social gatherings can become the basis of testimony; servants can become spies:

'As to listening, sir,' I remarked . . . 'we shall all be rowing in the same boat, if this sort of thing goes on much longer. Prying, and peeping, and listening are the natural occupations of people situated as we are. In another day or two, Mr Franklin, we shall all be struck dumb together – for this reason, that we shall all be listening to surprise each other's secrets, and all know it . . . ' [p. 136]

Collins explores the shifts, flows and tensions which lie beneath the surface of the apparently settled world of the novel, as the genteel half of that world yields up more of its secrets than simply the whereabouts of the Moonstone. The diamond itself is the instrument of the late John Herncastle's resentment and malice against Lady Verinder as well as the visible token of his unscrupulousness and greed. The embarrassing extent of Franklin Blake's bad debts surfaces in the shape of the intrusive French creditor, and more broadly the genteel world is portrayed as a society largely living on credit, beyond its immediate means, waiting like Mr Micawber in *David Copperfield* for something to turn up – an inheritance, perhaps, or an advantageous match. This is seen most spectacularly and most fraudulently, of course, in the case of Godfrey Ablewhite. Sergeant Cuff is only extrapolating from experience when he suspects that Rachel has stolen her own diamond to settle some secret debts, and he hints, only just delicately, at some of the reasons why a young woman in respectable society might have incurred secret financial embarrassments (p. 155).

The confrontation between Mr Ablewhite senior and Rachel during the latter's stay in Brighton after she has broken off her engagement with his son brings again to the surface all of the hidden social tensions and sensitivities which attend on the marriage alliance between the Ablewhites and the Herncastles. Betteridge's account of this 'misalliance' as he describes it (p. 57) between 'the Honourable Caroline' and 'plain Mr Ablewhite' has earlier suggested that 'Time and the progress of modern enlightenment' have allowed the misalliance to '[pass] muster very well' and that the 'modern way' has levelled out such social distinctions. However, Mr Ablewhite's apoplectic outburst, in which he attributes Rachel's rejection of his son to Herncastle 'family pride

insulting Godfrey, as it insulted *me* when I married your aunt' (p. 242), shows us that 'modern enlightenment' has effected a very superficial accommodation with divisions of social class. Mr Murthwaite's explanation of the 'sacrifice of caste' incurred by the three Brahmins (pp. 72-3) carries unintended ironies in a social gathering where the Herncastle-Verinders play host to the Herncastle-Ablewhites.

The servant-world which Betteridge reports on is itself fraught with tensions, with small and big resentments, with mutual surveillance and with internecine strife, a world excluded, famously, from Austen's representations of her society. While Betteridge and most of the other servants in the novel appear to be cheerfully reconciled to the social *status quo*, Rosanna Spearman, with her 'dash of something that wasn't like a housemaid, and that *was* like a lady' (p. 28), is acting out the impulse that most transgresses the boundaries between social ranks in the novel, her desire for Franklin Blake. The text of that forbidden desire is enclosed with the soiled nightgown and the solution to the mystery below the quicksand, and through the retrieval of the text Rosanna posthumously draws Blake into an enactment of the forbidden intimacy she desires.<sup>1</sup> Among the things to which Rosanna's text testifies is the habitual indifference of the served class to the serving class. Revoiced by her friend and accomplice, Limping Lucy, this is expressed as the most overtly rebellious outburst of the novel:

'Where's this gentleman that I mustn't speak of, except with respect? Ha, Mr Betteridge, the day is not far off when the poor will rise against the rich. I pray Heaven they may begin with *him*.'

[p. 174]

Even Betteridge, although he testifies, contrarily, to the solicitousness and care shown to him by his employers, holds firm views on the idleness of the wealthy and the gap between the poor and the rich. (pp. 53-4 and p. 151).

It may be, then, that, as Betteridge complains, 'the cursed Moonstone has turned us all upside down' (p. 82), but the Moonstone is in this respect a catalyst not a prime cause: what happens if you turn something upside down is that you see the side that is normally hidden; and the underside is generally less presentable. While much has been made, therefore, of the position occupied by *The Moonstone* as the first English detective novel, we need to recognise that its agenda of secrets

1 Some commentators have been ready to see Freudian significance in the topography of the Shivering Sand and in the mode of Blake's recovery of the tin case: see, for example, Heller (pp. 149-51) and Milbank (pp. 60-2).

and its strategies for disclosure are considerably more complex and wide-ranging, and participate in older novelistic traditions. Even its use of the loyal old butler as narrator looks back to Maria Edgeworth's *Castle Rackrent* (1800).

Sergeant Cuff, the professional detective, engaging as he is, and however suggestive he may be in his eccentricities and in his methods of later fictional detectives, has an odd role to play in *The Moonstone*. For one thing, in most substantive respects as regards the solution to the mystery, he is wrong, and he is actually dismissed by his employer, Lady Verinder. His shrewder guesses – about some aspects of Rosanna Spearman's conduct, about the identity of the person who has pledged the diamond to Septimus Luker, confirmed dramatically in the upstairs room of the Wheel of Fortune public house – are intermingled with mistaken assumptions or are leaps in the dark rather than deductions. As the novel's first and most taxing mystery unravels on the Shivering Sand and in Betteridge's sitting-room, and later by means of Ezra Jennings's experiment, Cuff is absent – Collins sends him to Ireland. As its last puzzles are solved, he is a strange, rusticated figure, wearing 'a broad-brimmed white hat, a light shooting-jacket, white trousers, and drab gaiters. . . [whose] whole aim and object seemed to be to look as if he had lived in the country all his life' (p. 402). He is a spectator rather than an instigator as Blake and Bruff, the latter extensively briefed by Murthwaite and assisted by the remarkable Gooseberry, employ surveillance rather than deduction in pursuit of the truth. At this level Gooseberry's protruding, rolling eyes are more functional than Cuff's probing gaze. Sleuthing is still, in *The Moonstone*, a matter substantially for amateurs with a personal stake in the mystery, rather than for the cool, detached, Scotland Yard man. Justice, when it comes, is poetic and dramatic, rather than dispensed by the courts.

## 2

Wilkie Collins wrote *The Moonstone* at the height of his powers as a novelist and at the height of his fame. The novel was published in 1868 and was the last of a sequence of what are now considered his major novels, which Collins published in the 1860s. Beginning with *The Woman in White* (1860), which had precipitated him into authorial celebrity, Collins had gone on to complete *No Name* (1862) and *Armadale* (1866) before starting work on *The Moonstone* in the spring of 1867. He had, besides, capitalised on his fame by publishing in 1863 *My Miscellanies*, a collection of short stories and essays which had been



published previously in the pages of the journals *Household Words* and *All the Year Round*.

When he began the novel Collins was in his forty-third year. He had been born in January 1824 and christened William Wilkie Collins, the Wilkie after his father's friend, the painter, David Wilkie, who was his godfather. Collins's father was himself a famous landscape and portrait painter and an Associate of the Royal Academy; and his elder son's first published book had been the *Memoirs of the Life of William Collins RA*, published in 1848. His first novel, *Antonina; or the Fall of Rome. A Romance of the Fifth Century*, the writing of which he had broken off on his father's death to write the *Memoirs*, appeared in February 1850.

After *Antonina*, Collins brought his fiction back to more local and contemporary subjects. During the 1850s he completed three full-length novels – *Basil* (1852), pointedly subtitled 'A Story of Modern Life', *Hide and Seek* (1854) and *The Dead Secret* (1857) – as well as a considerable number of shorter fictions, plays and non-fictional essays and sketches.

*The Dead Secret* was Collins's first excursion into serialisation – the novel appeared in instalments in *Household Words* – and most of the major fiction that followed it was to be composed in this format. By the time of the publication of the first edition of *The Moonstone*, most of the novel had appeared in serial form in Britain and America. In Britain it appeared in the same journal, *All the Year Round*, that had brought *The Woman in White* to the public in 1859–60. The first part of *The Moonstone* appeared in the Saturday 4 January 1868 number, and it ran until Saturday 8 August, when the 32nd weekly episode completed the story.<sup>2</sup>

The nature of Victorian serial publication is worth dwelling on, because it involved the novelist differently from the modern practice of serialisation and was much more a part of the dynamics of composition. Today, if a book is serialised, by the time extracts appear the author can be assumed to be well into his or her next book or reclining in tax exile in the Bahamas. When serialisation of a novel commenced in a Victorian magazine, the novelist might be still in the midst of composition and possibly only a few episodes ahead of the readers.

This was more true in the case of *The Moonstone* than Collins wished or intended. He had researched the book as thoroughly as he felt he needed to, consulting C. W. King's *The Natural History of Gems* for information about famous diamonds and reading up on the history of the British in India for material for the Indian 'framing' of the story. As

2 The details of the serialisation are set out at the end of this Introduction.

he generally did, he had drawn up an extensive outline of the novel and had checked plot details from the first half thoroughly against plot details from the second: the complexities of the novel's plotting and structure had made him, perhaps, more than usually cautious, especially since eagle-eyed reviewers of *The Woman in White* had spotted, to Collins's irritation, some potentially crucial discrepancies in the detail and timing of incidents in that novel. As early as June 1867 he had written up the first three instalments of *The Moonstone* and shown them to Dickens, who had expressed himself greatly pleased with them. However, in late 1867 Collins had had to drop the writing of the novel for a number of reasons. One was that Dickens had roped him in to co-write the 'Christmas Number' of *All the Year Round*. Dickens and Collins devised a mystery story, *No Thoroughfare*, and then wrestled with the story until late October, during which time Collins made no further progress with *The Moonstone*. Then Dickens went off on a reading tour in America, leaving with Collins the task of writing the dramatic adaptation of *No Thoroughfare*, which was to open immediately after Christmas.

On top of this, as Collins tells the reader in his 1871 Preface to the second edition of the novel, his mother was taken seriously ill in January, just as serial publication of *The Moonstone* began, and he had to spend much of January and February at her bedside, trying all the time to keep at work on the novel. She died on 19 February, just before the eighth instalment was due to appear. During this latter period, as the Preface also indicates, Collins's health broke down. He had suffered from often crippling attacks of what he calls 'rheumatic gout' from the early 1850s, and now, perhaps in part as a result of his distress at his mother's rapid decline and the stresses of keeping up with the demands of serial publication, he experienced what he calls 'the severest illness from which I have ever suffered' (p. 5). He was later prone to exaggerate the extent to which, at this period, he had to resort to the services of an amanuensis during the composition of Miss Clack's narrative, but Collins recalled that 'my cries and groans so deeply distressed my amanuensis, to whom I was dictating, that he could not continue his work, and had to leave me' (quoted Gasson, p. 79 – see Select Bibliography). As Miss Clack's narrative comprised instalments 14 to 19 of the novel, it can be seen that Collins, at this period, was at best ten instalments ahead of the press.

What Collins's Preface does not disclose is the extent, during this illness, of his resort to opium, which, like Ezra Jennings in the novel, he had come to take in massive doses. He had been prescribed opium first in the early 1860s to relieve the pain of his arthritic attacks, and had

developed a dependency on it which he never conquered, although through the 1860s he had made, like Jennings, periodic attempts to wean himself off it, only to be faced again with 'the dreadful alternative between the opium and the pain' (p. 396). Laudanum – the mixture of opium in alcohol which was the usual form in which opium was available medicinally in Collins's time – features in all of the novels he wrote in the 1860s, but in none as centrally as in *The Moonstone*. Undeniably, much of Collins's own experience with the drug is reflected in Jennings's journal entries, where Collins pointedly discloses the difference between the dose of a habitual user like himself or Jennings (five hundred drops) and the dose necessary to induce trance in someone unused to it – twenty-five drops in Mr Candy's original administration to Blake, which Jennings thinks fit to increase to forty for his experiment.

Perhaps, therefore, it is not surprising that the novel expands in its final third to accommodate and develop Ezra Jennings more than at first seems necessary. Collins provides him with a complex and shadowy past, including the mysterious lost love of his life, whose name is on his lips at his death (p. 425), and uses his journal to explore not just the experience of opium but the experience of estrangement, marginalisation and rejection. In this respect, it is striking how Jennings is used to 'replace' Rosanna Spearman in the novel. His name is first mentioned just as Rosanna has dropped strong hints about her imminent death (p. 140), the last words that we ever hear her speak directly in the novel, and he first appears in person in the middle of Betteridge and Blake's reading of the letter which is Rosanna's last testament (p. 299). Like Rosanna he is held back by his unprepossessing appearance; like Rosanna he is a solitary nomad, adrift from family and love, suffering from a passion with no prospect of consummation, and like Rosanna he has a 'doubtful character' (p. 300) but has been offered a position of trust by a generous employer. Like Rosanna also, he is strongly and inexplicably attracted to Franklin Blake, as he confesses in his journal (p. 366). Both characters focus Collins's interest in the pathology of loneliness, dispossession and despair, whereby again he is drawn to explore aspects of society which are generally overlooked or shunned.

The activity of detection and the processes of disclosure in *The Moonstone* direct our attention, I have suggested, to the broader relationship in the world of the novel between what is acknowledged and what is hidden, what is respectable and what is transgressive. On

another level, it alerts us to the processes by which characters in the novel 'detect' – that is, how they identify evidence and how they – and we – are drawn into the processes of surmise and conclusion.

In the Prologue, the anonymous 'family paper' which implicates John Herncastle in the original theft of the Indian diamond, Collins is already raising issues about the nature of evidence and therefore about the nature of narrative, how known or observed 'facts' are strung together to form a coherent and consistent 'story'. Part of the Prologue's narrative comes to the writer as hearsay or legend, and so comes to him at several removes. Part of the narrative comes from his own experience as a witness. But is the one source any less circumstantial than the other? Just as there are crucial gaps in the first part of the paper, gaps filled by inference or surmise, so at the climax of the second part there is another crucial gap. Did Herncastle kill the three Indians and steal the diamond? The narrator makes his own inferences while remaining scrupulously aware that they are inferences. To 'accuse' Herncastle would be to give a dubious, official, public status to a narrative which is completed only by surmise. The narrator is withheld from so doing by a scruple about the legal status of 'proof': he didn't see the deed with his own eyes, unlike Rachel Verinder, who will later cut through Blake's queries about suspicion by asserting that she did see the later theft of the diamond 'with [her] own eyes' (p. 318). He also exercises a gentlemanly scruple about a fellow officer and a near relation; but there remains also this uncertainty about the nature of narrative itself, how the imagination completes fragmented narrative by projecting inference into the gaps.

As the novel proceeds this is developed by Collins as its central activity, and he is characteristically self-conscious about how his characters and his readers attempt to 'complete' narratives from the fragments of truth or report or personal observation available to them. Here we are invited not merely to observe the process and, insofar as we can, to participate in it, but also to weigh the different methodologies practised by the novel's various detectives. On the novel's first visit to the Shivering Sand, Franklin Blake invites Betteridge and the reader to grasp the distinction between Subjective and Objective surmise (p. 46), a perplexity which will recur both to Betteridge and to Blake himself as the mysteries deepen (p. 163, p. 331). Another version of this tension in the novel's unravelling is the conflict between inference purely from circumstances and inference which is coloured by knowledge – actual or supposed – about individual character. Cuff's deductions from circumstance clash with Betteridge's and Lady Verinder's fierce assertions of Rachel's good character: "You don't

know her; and I do,"' is the objection Betteridge imagines giving to Solomon himself should he assert Cuff's conclusions (p. 129); and Lady Verinder more grandly tells Cuff,

'... she is *absolutely incapable* of doing what you suppose her to have done. Your knowledge of her character dates from a day or two since. My knowledge of her character dates from the beginning of her life... I am sure, beforehand, that (with all your experience) the circumstances have fatally misled you in this case. Mind! I am in possession of no private information. I am as absolutely shut out of my daughter's confidence as you are. My one reason for speaking positively, is the reason you have heard already. I know my child.'

[pp. 154-5]

The phrase about 'circumstances hav[ing] fatally misled' Cuff recurs in Lady Verinder's message from Frizinghall (p. 166). Later Mr Bruff, in conversation with Miss Clack, rehearses some of the "ugly circumstances" which might point to some complicity by Godfrey Ablewhite in the disappearance of the Moonstone (p. 205) and constructs a hypothetical narrative by pursuing what he calls 'the plain inference' from known facts. When Miss Clack reminds him of Cuff's different inferences from the known facts, Bruff again asserts his pre-emptive knowledge of 'Rachel's character' (p. 206). Bruff's inferences themselves, however, are later contested by Jennings as 'rest[ing] on a mere assumption' (p. 362). Meanwhile, the novel reminds us through Godfrey Ablewhite that 'character' can be falsely attributed and fraudulently maintained, and through Franklin Blake's astonishing discovery that the self can itself be destabilised and fragmented. In this context, what is character? Even Rachel can be thought of as being '*not* Rachel, but Somebody Else' (p. 163). And what is circumstance? Blake is led to a level of speculation where he has to query 'whether I had any sort of right... to consider any sort of thing... as existing at all' (p. 331).

Later in the novel we find a striking variant on this activity of inference – of filling the gaps – one which could almost stand as a metaphor for the book's whole method of reassembling narrative, when Ezra Jennings tells Franklin Blake that he has noted down the broken utterances which Mr Candy has spoken in his feverish state of mind and has filled in the gaps to produce a hypothetical 'complete text' of which the doctor's words and phrases were fragments. He has done with these fragments exactly what most of the characters in the novel have been doing and continue to do in their attempts to complete the narrative of the Moonstone's disappearance: gluing surmise into the gaps on the basis of suspicion, of report or of a more

or less well-informed prejudice about human nature in general or the nature of certain characters in particular. Jennings brings to his version of the activity a theory about human dementia just as Betteridge's endeavours to read events around him have been informed by his homespun theories about women, the family he serves, foreign people and the potency of *Robinson Crusoe*. Jennings leaves Franklin Blake to admire 'the ingenuity which had woven this smooth and finished texture out of the ravelled skein' (p. 356). It is as if Collins himself were soliciting our admiration for his own ingenuity and art.

Collins's self-consciousness about narrative procedures is, of course, foregrounded in his adoption of a method which he had used also in *The Woman in White*, the construction of the novel out of separate, sequenced, first-person narratives. When he took up the method in the earlier novel, Collins described it as resembling the depositions in a courtroom from successive witnesses whose separate testimonies accumulate to give a complete view of the case. In fact, however, the method as he uses it is less forensic than that. It is a tease – a way of turning the authorial process into a pseudo-editorial process and keeping the potential embarrassments of authorial omniscience at bay by delegating the narrative tasks. In *The Moonstone* even the editorial task is delegated to Franklin Blake, of whose role we are occasionally reminded by one of his editorial footnotes or, most memorably, by Miss Clack's entering into a correspondence with him about the difficulty of narrating while suppressing the wisdom of hindsight and the desire to 'improve' the reader (pp. 225–6). Blake has selected the 'witnesses' and solicited from them their separate depositions while setting the ground rules which occasion Miss Clack's little protest. This method is less concerned to arrive at the truth than it is to recapture the processes of arriving at the truth. One can become conscious that Blake's selection, on Collins's behalf, of some witnesses and his omission of others in fact strings the mystery out wonderfully: no courtroom would tolerate the obliqueness – or the prolixity – of the witnessing. The ordering and selection of detail are arch and artful.

However, it is the processes by which the *male* characters arrive at the truth which provides the novel with its structure and its suspense. The two most material witnesses are female, but their testimony is buried in the book: Rosanna's literally in the Shivering Sand, and Rachel's in, first, her own silence but then, structurally, by its being contained, framed alongside Rosanna's, in Franklin Blake's deposition. To feminist commentators this can look like 'silenc[ing] of women's voices' or the 'deauthoris[ing] of female language' (Heller, p. 155). It is also interesting to learn from Rosanna's testimony how Betteridge's

daughter, Penelope, anticipated Cuff's more authoritative deductions about the paint-smear (p. 294), for which he, of course, took the credit, and how easily Rosanna herself saw through the famous Cuff's interviewing technique (pp. 304-05). These instances of female astuteness have also been silenced. However, as Heller also discusses, silence is vital to the battle between the male and female characters for knowledge and, with it, power: female silence endows Rosanna and, more obstructively, Rachel with a temporary power which disrupts the expectation of male authority and female (and, in Rosanna's case, class) compliance. It is one of several destabilisations, turnings-upside-down which need to be rectified before the 'household' on which Blake comments (p. 170) can be restored. Blake's opening of Rosanna's tin case and the carrying of its contents from the unstable Shivering Sand to the reassuringly male space of Betteridge's sitting room – with its early-morning 'grog' – followed by his unauthorised violation of Rachel's private space through the ambush connived at by Bruff, are acts that are central to the solving of the mystery, but they also commence the reassertion of normative male-female power relations in the novel. Blake's editorial authority, and his exercise of it over his one female narrator, Miss Clack – especially through the 'incubus', as she puts it (p. 189), of his cheque – remind us of the legacy of this reassertion through the very structure of the novel itself.

Narrative procedure is also complicated, of course, by the inevitability of narrators – especially inexperienced narrators – narrating themselves. The mode of Jennings's contribution, the private confessional diary, does this directly; but those more explicitly contracted to Blake as editor also discover that they 'confess' with greater or lesser degrees of self-consciousness. As Betteridge completes the second 'chapter' of his contribution, Penelope, with her characteristic astuteness, points out that '[he has] been telling the story of [his] own self' (p. 20). In the course of providing Blake with what he has demanded and paid for, Miss Clack discloses her own unacknowledged sexual fascination with Godfrey Ablewhite: like Rosanna's sexual fascination with Rachel's other admirer, this betrays itself in a disparagement of Rachel (p. 191. p. 193) as well as in her comical account of her most intimate moment with Godfrey (p. 235). Likewise, Miss Clack's worldly acquisitiveness is crudely betrayed in her comments on Lady Verinder's will (p. 205) and her worldly curiosity excuses itself transparently as a desire to '[relieve Rachel's] mind of its guilty secrets' (p. 238).

These strategies do not just testify to Collins's self-consciousness about the nature of narrative itself, and its fluid negotiation between subjective and objective disclosure, but are all part of Collins's desire to

embroil the reader in the world of the novel, not merely in the dynamics of its plot. Very few, if any, Victorian novelists are as solicitous about the reader's participation in the novel as Collins is; and Lonoff's book in the Select Bibliography below deals in detail with this aspect of his work, generally and in *The Moonstone*. The reader, ambushed into companionship with the various narrators, tends to have his or her participation in the novel, if anything, over-determined. In an early essay on George Eliot in the *Atlantic Monthly* in October 1866, Henry James considered how the novelist 'makes the reader very much as he makes his characters'.<sup>3</sup> Desiring that 'the author [should] place the sympathetic reader at a standpoint to deduce for himself', James argued that

when he [the writer] makes him [the reader] ill, he does no work; the writer does all. When he makes him well, . . . then the reader does quite half the labor.

It is an astute comment, and one that will resonate for those who have shared the often strenuous burden of labour with the author in some of James's later novels. In *The Moonstone*, on which Collins was about to begin work when James ventured his remarks, the reader can feel, even while she or he benefits from the author's fierce ingenuity and meticulousness, that the author and his characters are too busy, standing in the way gesticulating and over-determining the reader's involvement. When Collins wants the reader to work, he tends to make it too obvious and to pre-empt the conclusions of the reader's labours. The signposts are obtrusive whether they lead down a false route or a true one. All possible inferences are drawn and contested. Likewise, Collins's determination to make Miss Clack betray herself and the fatuity of her evangelistic philanthropy is too transparent: she is, as one reviewer of the time complained, 'an absurd exaggeration' (p. 172) and turns a legitimate target for some tart satire into one so laughable and laughably easy that the case against the cult of philanthropic intrusiveness almost falls through being over-strained. Collins's contrary desire to elicit sympathetic interest for the outcast Ezra Jennings is likewise too obvious and manipulative. Collins's methods are in their own way original and brilliant, but incurably fussy: they involve the reader being ushered around the novel, almost oppressed with the degree of provision and attention she or he receives. Ironically, Collins can

<sup>3</sup> Henry James, 'The Novels of George Eliot', in Gordon S. Haight (ed.), *A Century of George Eliot Criticism*, London 1965, pp. 43-54. Quoted passages from p. 46.



almost seem in a way like the irritating Miss Clack, scuttling around the novel planting clues, signposts and diversions rather as she scuttles around Lady Verinder's house planting her 'precious publications' (pp. 212-13) to point Lady Verinder the way to salvation.

To step back from the novel, however, and in particular from this busy provision of voices and details, can allow the reader to see a design which is not simply the intricacy of its plot and its narrative. Framed by the Indian settings which open and close the novel, its English action delivers a version of Victorian England which appears oddly fragmented and embattled. The different narratives themselves contribute to this fragmentation; and Betteridge's mistrust of foreign influences, whether oriental or European – like Miss Clack's allusion to 'the howling ocean of popery that surrounds us' (p. 183) – suggests how their ideas of nineteenth-century Protestant England are felt to be persistently threatened from outside.

In this context, the narratives of India which appear at the beginning and end of the novel – the one in the Herncastle family paper and the other supplied by Mr Murthwaite – contribute significantly to this interrogation of Englishness. The family paper, it might be thought, casts the imperial project in no very positive light, and already begins to report on the spiritual, mystical value of the Moonstone as distinct from its value as an acquisition. At this level, Empire is a cultural intrusion by people unable intellectually or spiritually to grasp the nature of what is intruded upon and able only to muse upon it as 'fanciful'. Herncastle's acts of robbery, vandalism and murder in the Palace of Seringapatam may be individually shocking, but equally are only extensions in their way of the logic of the collective national enterprise. It is not, perhaps, as a re-enactment of Aurengzebe's 'havoc and rapine' (p. 8) that the British imperial project in India would have wished to be considered, but Collins's Prologue, by linking the two through the Moonstone's history, invites the reader to make the connection.

Murthwaite's final narrative of the return of the jewel to its place on the head of its Hindu deity – thus undoing finally the havoc worked by Aurengzebe and the British – also raises questions about the differences between Indian and English culture which reflect uncomfortably on the latter. Here there is a fine contrast implied between the solemn, collective spirituality witnessed by Murthwaite and the busy, fragmented materialism of the England of the novel. There is a contrast too between the mute, self-sacrificing devotion of the three Brahmins who have moved stealthily through the novel in pursuit of their goal and the busy, noisy intrusiveness of the novel's one English zealot,