

Wilkie Collins

The Moonstone



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Wilkie Collins

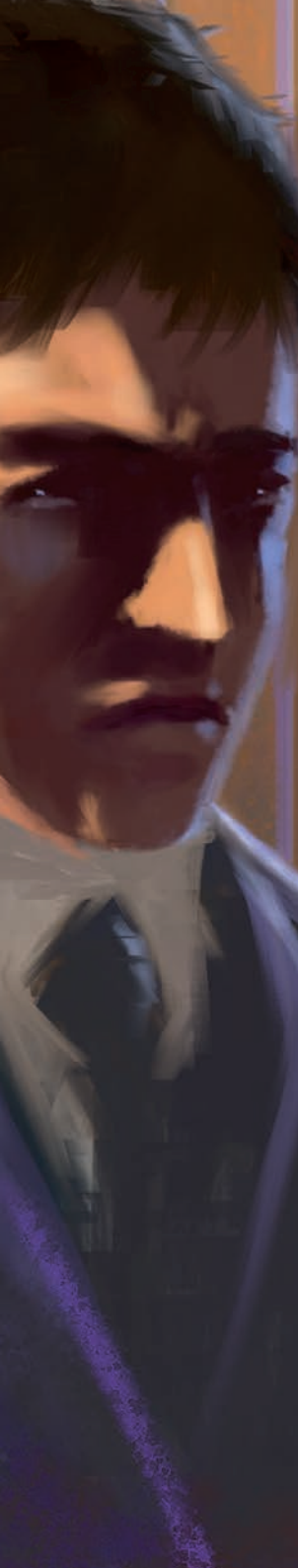
The Moonstone

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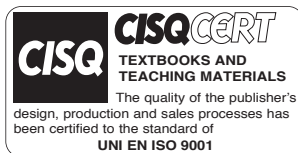
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These symbols indicate the beginning and end of the extracts
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Wilkie Collins
(about 1871).

About the Author

Wilkie Collins (1824-89) was born in London. His father, William Collins, was a painter. After leaving school, Wilkie Collins began legal training in London, but he did not qualify as a lawyer. He met Charles Dickens in 1851, and they became close friends and collaborators. Collins contributed to *Household Words*, the magazine that Dickens edited, and Collins and Dickens wrote two plays and a book of comic prose together.

Collins wrote a series of novels and short stories in the 1850s, but he discovered his true genius in the 1860s when he became the leading exponent of a new popular genre called 'the sensation novel'. His best known works – all of which fall into the category of sensation

fiction – are *The Woman in White* (1860), *No Name* (1862), *Armadale* (1866) and *The Moonstone* (1868). All these works follow Collins's personal philosophy of fiction writing: 'Make them laugh, make them cry, make them wait'; that is to say, they all contain elements of comedy, pathos¹ and suspense.

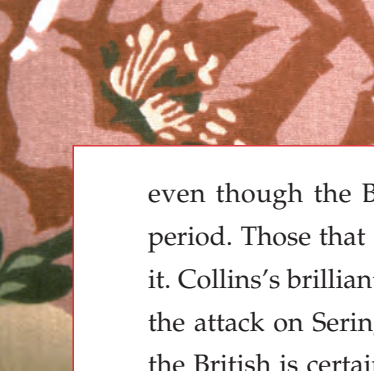
Sensation novels were the most popular type of fiction in the 1860s. Like the gothic novels of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, they appealed directly to the reader's feelings by arousing fear, excitement and curiosity. Like the detective stories of the late nineteenth and twentieth centuries, they used suspense to keep the reader's interest: in sensation novels, as in detective stories, there is always a secret that is revealed at the end. Gothic fiction, the sensation novel and the detective story can be seen as three generations in the same family of popular fiction: each generation inherited characteristics from the one before but also provided new elements and new combinations.

The Moonstone, like *The Woman in White*, is told by several narrators. The narrators only narrate the event they saw with their own eyes, so that the effect is like giving evidence before a judge or magistrate. The modernist poet T. S. Eliot described *The Moonstone* as 'The first, the longest and the best of modern English detective novels'. The famous question at the centre of all detective novels – whodunnit?² – is also at the centre of *The Moonstone*, and here the question more specifically is 'Who took the Moonstone?' Because the Moonstone is an Indian treasure, sacred to Hindus, the question is not simply about a specific theft but about ownership and imperialism in general. Very few Victorian novels discuss imperialism in detail,

1. **pathos** : the ability to create sadness.

2. **whodunnit?** : a colloquial way of saying 'who did it?' ('it' is the crime in question).





even though the British Empire was at its height in the Victorian period. Those that do discuss the British Empire are rarely critical of it. Collins's brilliant detective story opens with a scene from history – the attack on Seringapatam in May 1799 – and his representation of the British is certainly not heroic. Here, then, are three good reasons to read *The Moonstone*: it is the first detective novel; it is one of the few Victorian novels to discuss the Empire in a critical way; and, most importantly, it is a really good story.

1 Comprehension check

Say whether the following statements are true (T) or false (F). Then correct the false ones.

- | | T | F |
|---|--------------------------|--------------------------|
| 1 Wilkie Collins worked as a lawyer. | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 2 Wilkie Collins was always competing with Charles Dickens, whom he disliked. | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 3 Wilkie Collins was the leading writer and promoter of the sensation novel. | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 4 In a sensation novel, the writer tries to keep the readers' interest by appealing to their feelings. | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 5 Suspense and surprise endings are important parts of the sensation novel. | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 6 Sensation novels were a development of detective novels. | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 7 <i>The Moonstone</i> is a story told by different characters as they present information in court. | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 8 <i>The Moonstone</i> has been defined 'the first detective story'. | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 9 <i>The Moonstone</i> 's first scene is set in an English country house. | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 10 Wilkie Collins was a popular writer with English readers because he wrote about the heroism of soldiers in the British army. | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |

The Characters



Top left to right: **Lucy, Mrs Yolland, Mr Jennings, Rosanna, Mr Betteredge, Mr Seegrave, Lady Verinder**

Bottom left to right: **Sergeant Cuff, Mr Blake, Rachel, Penelope, Mr Ablewhite**

Before you read

1 Reading maps

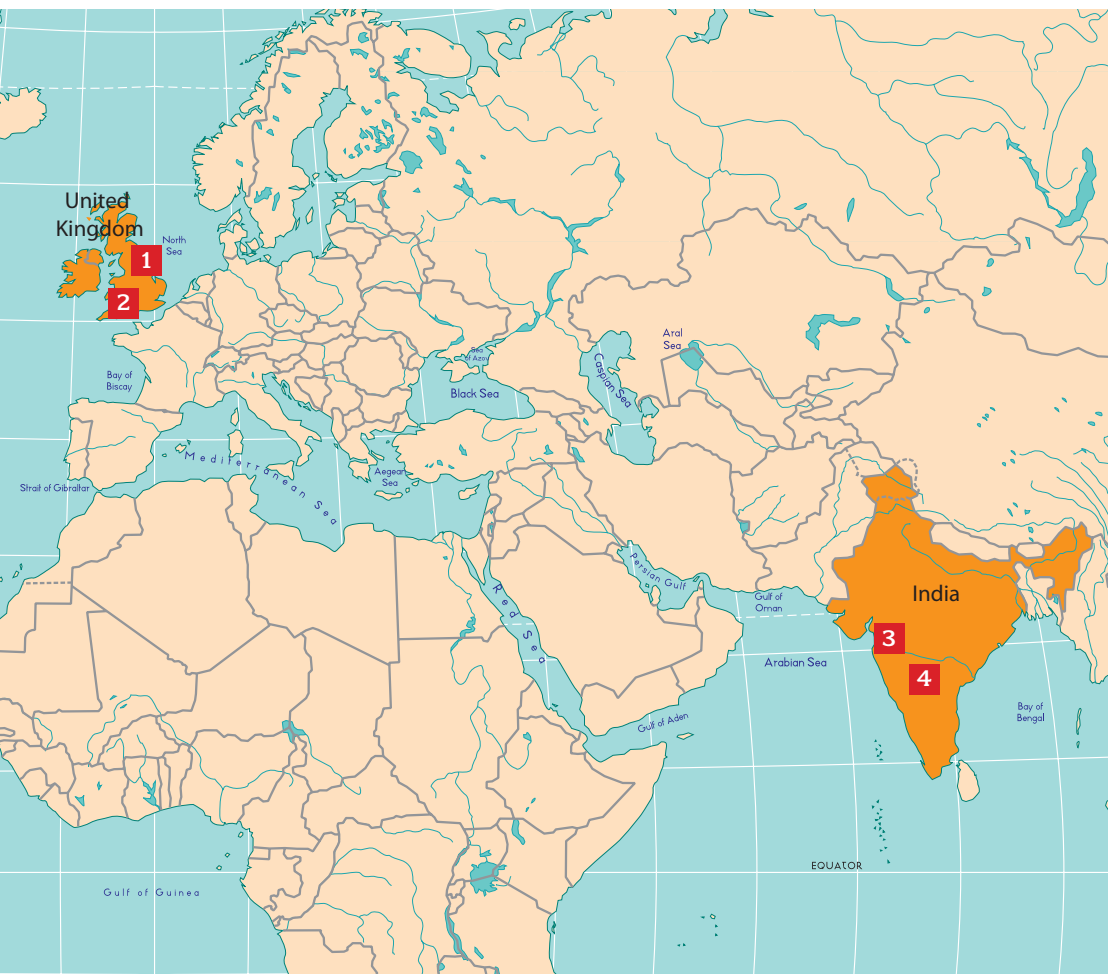
Look at the map and at the place names below. All of these places will be mentioned in the story. Try to match the names with the places on the map, then look at an atlas to see if you were right.

A ☐ Bombay

C ☐ London

B ☐ Yorkshire

D ☐ Seringapatam (also spelled 'Srirangapatna')



2 Vocabulary

Fill in the blanks with a word from the list below. Use your dictionary if necessary.

sacred inherit generation throughout descendant

- 1 They travelled the country, going everywhere, to every part of it.
- 2 The word means the same as 'holy'.
- 3 You, your father and your grandfather are three
- 4 A word that means the opposite of 'ancestor' is
- 5 I this piano from my grandmother. She wanted me to have it after she died.

3 Brahmins and Moghuls

Indian history and culture is a complex subject. Here is a short explanation of two terms that will be introduced in the next pages. Read the text and fill each gap with one word. There is an example at the beginning (0).

Brahmins were priests, scholars and philosophers. They were (0) ...the..... highest group in India's caste system. This system was in place (1) thousands of years and was only made illegal (2) 1949. There were four main castes. After the Brahmins, the next highest caste were the Kshatriyas, who were warriors and rulers. The third highest caste were the Vaishyas. These were traders, merchants and farmers. The Shudras, (3) were labourers and servants, were (4) lowest caste. Below the Shudras were people considered to be (5) low that they had no caste at (6), the 'untouchables'. Caste was determined by birth. It controlled what occupations people (7) choose and who they could marry. There was no way for a lower caste person to join a higher caste. However, higher caste people could lose their caste if they did work that people in their caste didn't normally do, or (8) they married someone from another caste.

The Moghuls were nomads from central Asia who claimed to be descended (9) Ghenghis Khan's Mongols. The Moghuls invaded India in 1526 and established the Moghul (or Mughal) Empire, which lasted (10) 1526 to 1857. At the empire's highest point, the Moghul emperors controlled most (11) India and parts of what is now Afghanistan.



A Family Paper

Seringapatam, India, 1799

To my family in England,



I want to explain why I no longer speak to my cousin, John Herncastle. Because I have never talked about this, some members of my family have formed a bad opinion of me. I'm writing this to tell my side of the story, and I promise that what I write here is the absolute truth.

On 4 May 1799 my cousin and I both took part in a great historical event: the attack on Seringapatam. Before the attack, we had heard of the fabulous treasures in the Palace there. The most famous of these was a yellow diamond that is known throughout India as the Moonstone. The history of the Moonstone is fascinating. It was once part of a statue of the

Hindu ¹ moon god and it stood in a Hindu temple in Somnauth, India. Three Brahmins ² guarded the statue. One night they all dreamt the same dream. The Hindu god Vishnu appeared to them and said, 'The Moonstone is sacred. It must always be guarded by three Brahmin priests. If anyone steals it, the Moonstone will bring disaster to him and all his family.'

For generation after generation, the descendents of the three Brahmins guarded the Moonstone. Then, at the beginning of the eighteenth century, the Mogul ³ army attacked the Hindu temple and a Mogul general stole the Moonstone. The Brahmins decided to follow the Moonstone wherever it went. The Mogul general died a terrible death, and his son and his grandson also had very bad luck. Meanwhile, the descendents of the three Brahmins followed their treasure, waiting for the time when they could get it back. When the Sultan of Seringapatam inherited the Moonstone, he used it to decorate the handle of a dagger. ⁴ The three Brahmins got work as guards in the Palace of Seringapatam to be near the Moonstone.

That was the story we had heard as we prepared to attack Seringapatam. My cousin John Herncastle listened to it with intense interest. He said, 'I'll take the Moonstone!' We all laughed at him.

The next day we attacked. We fought all day, and the battle was extremely violent. When we finally won, our general told some officers — including my cousin and me — to stop the soldiers stealing the treasures from the Palace. My cousin and I got separated for a while, then I went into the Palace because I'd

1. **Hindu** : relating to Hinduism, an Indian religion with many gods.

2. **Brahmins** : members of the highest Hindu caste (class).

3. **Mogul** : relating to the Muslims, who invaded India from Persia (now Iran).

4. **handle of a dagger** :





heard that some soldiers were stealing. There I saw my cousin. Two Indians were lying dead at his feet and a third Indian was seriously injured. In one hand my cousin held a torch; in the other he held a dagger covered with blood. A diamond in the handle of the dagger flashed ¹ in the torchlight. The injured Indian looked up at my cousin and said, 'The curse ² of the

1. **flashed** : reflected strong light.

2. **curse** : magical words that bring bad luck.



Moonstone will bring you and your family certain disaster!’ Then he fell dead on the floor.

When my cousin saw me, he shouted, ‘Put a guard at the door! We must stop the soldiers stealing the treasures!’

‘Who killed those Indians?’ I asked.

‘I don’t know who killed them,’ said my cousin.

I turned and walked away from him. I haven’t spoken to him since.

The text and **beyond**

FCE 1 **Comprehension check**

For questions 1-5 choose the correct answer — A, B, C or D.

- 1 John Herncastle's cousin is writing this letter because
 - A ☐ he has to tell his story in a letter as he can't talk about it.
 - B ☐ he wants to make peace between his family, himself and his cousin.
 - C ☐ he wants his family to understand his actions towards his cousin.
 - D ☐ he wants his family to form a bad opinion of his cousin.

- 2 How did Herncastle's cousin learn the story of the Moonstone?
 - A ☐ He studied Indian history in England.
 - B ☐ He heard the story from another soldier before the attack.
 - C ☐ He heard the story from an Indian Brahmin.
 - D ☐ He heard the story from his cousin.

- 3 How did the Moonstone get to Seringapatam?
 - A ☐ A Mogul general gave it to the Sultan on his birthday.
 - B ☐ It was given to the Sultan of Seringapatam as a gift to decorate his dagger.
 - C ☐ It passed to the Sultan of Seringapatam after three generations of the Mogul general's family died.
 - D ☐ It was brought there by the three Brahmins, who thought it was a safe place for it.

- 4 The three Brahmins worked at the Palace of Seringapatam because
 - A ☐ they had decided to change their religion and join the Moguls.
 - B ☐ as part of their religion, they had to serve the person who controlled the Moonstone.
 - C ☐ there was a statue in the Palace of Seringapatam of a Hindu moon god.
 - D ☐ they were waiting for a chance to take the Moonstone back to Somnauth.

- 5 What's the main reason why Herncastle's cousin no longer speaks to him?
- A ☐ He thinks Herncastle took the Moonstone.
 - B ☐ He thinks Herncastle did not obey his general's orders.
 - C ☐ He is angry that his cousin wasn't honest with him.
 - D ☐ He considers Herncastle to be a thief and a murderer.

2 Discussion

Discuss these questions in groups and present your answers to the rest of the class.

- 1 In the introduction, it says that Collins's 'representation of the British was far from heroic'. Do you agree? Find some evidence from the preface that shows that this is true, or not true.
- 2 Who really owns the Moonstone? Why do you think so?
- 3 Suppose the English general found the Moonstone instead of Herncastle. What do you think he would do with it?
- 4 Is stealing from the losing side in a war a crime? Why or why not?

'Before the attack, we had heard of the fabulous treasures in the Palace there.'

We use the past perfect to show that an event in the past was completed before another event or time in the past.

Look at this sentence: *Before the attack, we **had heard** of the fabulous treasures in the Palace there.*

In this example, Herncastle's cousin uses it because he wants his readers to know that he and the other men already knew the story of the Moonstone before they attacked Seringapatam.

The past perfect shows the order of events in the past. For example, look at this sentence: *When I **got** to the station, the bus **had** already **left**.* (the bus left the station first, and then I arrived).

3 Past perfect

Make sentences (1-9) with the past perfect using the given words. Then choose the phrase or sentence that you think goes before it from the list below (A-J). There is an example at the beginning (0).

- 0 ☒ he/forget/to feed/pet alligator
He had forgotten to feed his pet alligator.
- 1 ☐ my dad/eat/already/all of it
- 2 ☐ he/never/live/away from his parents/before
- 3 ☐ unfortunately/I/not/practice/long time/so/it/sound/terrible
- 4 ☐ she/be tired/because/she/be/up all night
- 5 ☐ however/she/put/a lock on it
- 6 ☐ however/I/leave/her address/home
- 7 ☐ I/forget/do/homework
- 8 ☐ I/not/see/him/in five years
- 9 ☐ unfortunately/girl he wanted to meet/leave/already

- A At first I didn't recognise my cousin.
B I opened the container of ice-cream but it was empty.
C I hoped the teacher wouldn't ask me a question.
D Georgina fell asleep in class again.
E Fred moved into his first apartment when he was twenty-four.
F I tried to find Fiona's house.
G He finally arrived at the party.
H I sat down at the piano and tried to play.
I Fearghal was delighted to find his sister's diary.
J Jim had to rush home.

FCE 4 Fill in the gaps

Read the text below and choose the correct word (A, B, C or D) for each space (1-11). There is an example at the beginning (0).

The attack (0) ^A..... Seringapatam on May 4, 1799, was the final battle between British forces and the Tipu Sultan, who was also sometimes (1) as the Tiger of Mysore. The British forces and their (2), about 50,000 men in (3), fought against the Sultan's army of 30,000. About 7,400 people were killed during the attack, 6,000 of them on the losing side. One of the commanders of the British troops was Major General David Baird. He was a great enemy of the Sultan of Tipu; in fact twenty years earlier the Sultan had held him (4) for forty-four months. The city of Seringapatam was (5) by stone walls, and by the river Cauvery, which flowed around it. The British waited to attack until the river was at its (6) point. They camped near the city, looking for a weakness in the walls. Two days before the attack, in the middle of the night, they succeeded (7) destroying part of the (8) wall. They began their attack on May 4, (9) the hottest part of the day, when the people of the city (10) be resting. They crossed the river and attacked on several sides at once. After the battle, the body of the Sultan (11) found. Someone had shot him in the head and stolen his jewels.

- | | | | |
|---------------|--------------|------------|--------------|
| 0 A on | B in | C against | D from |
| 1 A called | B referred | C known | D named |
| 2 A armies | B fellows | C soldiers | D allies |
| 3 A entire | B total | C complete | D particular |
| 4 A jailed | B imprison | C confined | D prisoner |
| 5 A protected | B guarded | C built | D divided |
| 6 A driest | B lowest | C fastest | D highest |
| 7 A to | B as | C in | D for |
| 8 A protected | B protecting | C protects | D protective |
| 9 A during | B in | C on | D while |
| 10 A was | B had | C would | D will |
| 11 A is | B been | C had | D was |

Before you read



1 Listening

Listen to the first part of Chapter One. For questions 1-5 choose the correct answer – A, B or C.

- 1 Gabriel Betteredge is a servant
 - A ☐ who grew up with Lady Julia at her home.
 - B ☐ of Lady Julia's husband, Sir John.
 - C ☐ who has worked for Lady Julia since before her marriage.
- 2 This chapter is set
 - A ☐ in the spring of 1848.
 - B ☐ in the summer of 1848.
 - C ☐ in the late winter of 1848.
- 3 Penelope is worried, mainly because
 - A ☐ she saw one of the Indians pour ink into a boy's hand.
 - B ☐ she heard the Indians talking about Mr Blake.
 - C ☐ she thought the Indians would try to steal the Moonstone.
- 4 What is Betteredge's reaction to Penelope's story?
 - A ☐ He's worried and wants to tell Mr Blake.
 - B ☐ He thinks she shouldn't have followed the three men.
 - C ☐ He says she probably got the wrong idea.
- 5 Why is Nancy angry?
 - A ☐ She has to spend part of her lunch break looking for Rosanna.
 - B ☐ One of the Verinder family is late for lunch.
 - C ☐ Rosanna is supposed to make lunch for the family, but she's late.