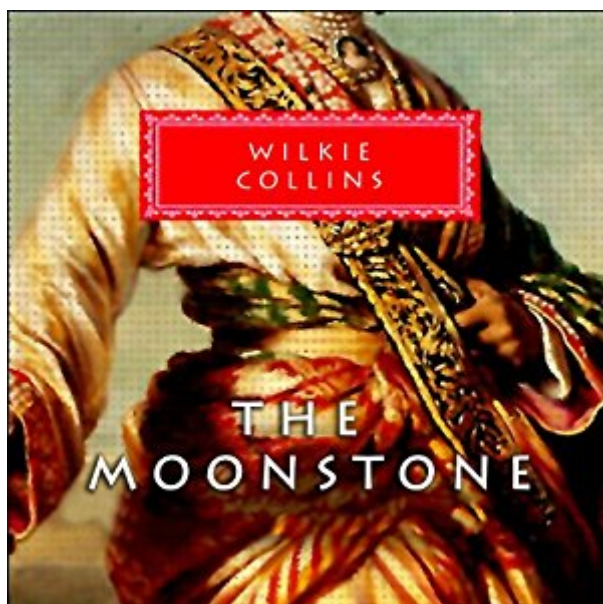


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The Moonstone



Synopsis

The Moonstone By Wilkie Collins --This text refers to the Paperback edition.

Book Information

Audible Audio Edition

Listening Length: 20 hours and 32 minutes

Program Type: Audiobook

Version: Unabridged

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Whispersync for Voice: Ready

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Customer Reviews

As many reviewers have noted, T.S. Eliot called 'The Moonstone' "the first and greatest English detective novel." Is the novel worthy of such praise? We shall see...The story begins with a brief prologue describing how the famous yellow diamond was captured during a military campaign in India by a British officer in 1799. The action moves quickly to 1848 England, where, according to the British officer's will, the diamond has been given to one of the soldier's young relatives, Rachel Verinder. Yet only hours after the diamond arrives at the Verinder estate, it disappears. Was it stolen by a relative? A servant? And who are these three Indian men who keep hanging around the estate? 'The Moonstone' is told from the point of view of several characters. The first portion of the tale is told by Gabriel Betteredge, house steward of the Verinder estate, who has been working for the family practically his entire life. Although over 200 pages, Betteredge's account holds the reader's interest as he introduces the main players and the crime itself. The next account, by distant Verinder relative Miss Clack, is humorous and somewhat important, but far too long (nearly 100 pages) for its relevance to the story. But after Miss Clack's account, things really take off at breakneck speed. Readers who latch onto the T.S. Eliot quote expecting a modern detective tale will be sorely disappointed. You aren't going to see anything resembling Jeffrey Deaver, James Patterson, Sue Grafton, or even Mary Higgins Clark. You also won't see Mickey Spillane, Dashiell

Hammett, or Raymond Chandler. Nor will you see Agatha Christie, Dorothy Sayers, or Martha Grimes. You won't even see Arthur Conan Doyle. But you WILL see the novel that influenced them all. You'll also see something else. Something that modern mystery/detective writers have for the most part lost. Characters. Oh sure, modern writers have characters, but for the most part, the reader only learns enough about the character to forward the plot. In our time, plot is King. When 'The Moonstone' was published (1868), one of the novel's attractions was its characters. Collins has painted each of these characters so well that the reader feels that they know not only how they look, but their mannerisms, their movements, how they think, and their view of the world they live in. That type of character development is seriously lacking today, not from all writers, but from far too many. Of course, the down side is that Collins also took over 500 pages to develop those characters. Is the book too long? For most modern readers, the answer is yes. I believe it all has to do with your expectation. Put modern mystery/detective stories out of your head. Then read 'The Moonstone' as you would any other novel. Get lost in the atmosphere and the characters. Immerse yourself. Most of all, enjoy. Reading 'The Moonstone' is like eating at a fine restaurant after months of fast food. When it's over, you just want to sit back in your favorite chair and say, "It's nice to know that the finer things are still available." Yes they are. Treat yourself to this gourmet book. 522 pages

THE MOONSTONE was the first mystery story, and it in many ways remains one of the most remarkable. Working in the shadow of the Gothic and Romantic literary traditions, Wilkie Collins managed to create something new and unique. Instead of the endless evocation of atmosphere and focusing on sinister villains, Collins focuses instead on a simple mystery and its solution: who stole the diamond known as the Moonstone, and where did it go? But any reader of the novel knows that the mystery is secondary to the exposition and the marvelous parade of characters. It isn't the getting to the resolution of the mystery that is the main thing, but the process of getting there. One of the great attractions of the novel is the extraordinary style of the writing. Although the first English mystery story, it had not yet devolved into a genre, and Collins was not aware that a mystery story could not also be great literature. As a result, he imbued his characters with enormous charm and give them each a vivid manner in expressing themselves. The multiple narratives by this remarkable characters was a strategy to deal with the problem of authorial point of view. On the one hand, Collins wanted to avoid the omniscient narrator who would know the truth both about each character and about the mystery of the fate of the diamond. Collins therefore cast the novel in the form of a succession of narratives by the various participants in the novel. He thereby limits the knowledge of each narrator, but he also is able thereby to provide considerable variation in the style of each

narrative. The two most remarkable segments are those by Gabriel Betteridge, House-Steward in the service of Lady Verinder and her cousin Miss Clack, a prim and fervid evangelical Christian whose missionary zeal and prudish moralizing provide many of the funniest moments of the novel. The style of these two could not be more distinct, both from the rest of the narratives and from each other. Miss Clack has constantly to fight a tendency to sermonize. She is apt to turn out passages such as: "A thundering knock at the street door startled us all. I looked through the window, and saw the World the Flesh, and the Devil waiting before the house--as typified in a carriage and horses, a powdered footman, and three of the most audaciously dressed women I ever beheld in my life." Betteridge, on the other hand, is solid, practical, a tad parochial, but ferociously loyal to his employer. For him the good life consists of a good pipe and a copy of ROBINSON CRUSOE at hand. If one laughs a bit at Miss Clack, the reader comes to thoroughly like Betteridge. Between the two of them, their narrative occupy more than half the novel. The others are also quite enjoyable, but not to the degree that these two are. THE MOONSTONE is a page turner, which is to say that it is a delight to read. One wants to read quickly both because each page is such a joy and because one wants to discover what happens next. The characters are mainly enjoyable, but like so many authors his eccentric characters are far more memorable and enjoyable than his central characters. Betteridge, Miss Clack, and Sgt. Cuff far outstrip the "hero" of the book, who while a good citizen, is from a literary point of view a tad boring. I can agree with those readers who consider THE WOMAN IN WHITE a better book, but this is another of those comparisons that are odious. The book is so enjoyable, fun, and memorable that I can't imagine any reader lamenting during the course of its pages that they weren't reading the other book instead.

I have become a recent convert to Victorian literature. Educated as an electrical engineer, I did not appreciate literature until I reached my 70's. This book is to the modern detective novel as Maxwell's equations are to the wireless engineer of today. All the modern detective novels follow the basics exhibited in Moonstone, but usually fall far short because they leave out one or more of the "equations". A thoroughly gripping and inventive novel by a master.

I forced myself to read this Victorian book since it is "the first English detective novel." Honestly, it was such a surprise when it turned out to be one of the Best Books I've ever read. I could not stop raving about it. The story is told by the different characters, and each character has a distinct personality. Collins's ability to capture different perspectives from all of the different characters is impressive. And there is so much humor! The prime narrator is a butler who sees the novel

Robinson Crusoe as the, to paraphrase from the movie "You've Got Mail", I Ching of all wisdom.
Read this book. You won't be disappointed. I promise!

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