

UNIVERSITY OF RIJEKA
FACULTY OF HUMANITIES AND SOCIAL SCIENCES

Nika Kršul

WILKIE COLLINS' "THE MOONSTONE"
AS THE STAPLE STORY OF DETECTION

Bachelor's thesis

Rijeka, 2024

UNIVERSITY OF RIJEKA
FACULTY OF HUMANITIES AND SOCIAL SCIENCES
DEPARTMENT OF ENGLISH

Nika Kršul
0009087282

WILKIE COLLINS' "THE MOONSTONE"
AS THE STAPLE STORY OF DETECTION

Submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the B.A. in English Language and
Literature and Philosophy at the University of Rijeka

Supervisor:
Sintija Čuljat, PhD

Rijeka, September 2024

IZJAVA O AUTORSTVU

Kojom izjavljujem, da sam završni rad naslova **Wilkie Collins' *The Moonstone as the Staple Story of Detection***, izradila samostalno pod mentorstvom doc.dr.sc. Sintije Čuljat.

U radu sam primijenila metodologiju znanstvenoistraživačkoga rada i koristila literaturu koja je navedena na kraju rada.

Tuđe spoznaje, stavove, zaključke i teorije koje sam navela izravno ili parafrazirajući, na uobičajen način sam citirala i povezala s korištenim bibliografskim jedinicama.

Nika Kršul

Abstract

This thesis focuses on *The Moonstone*, a novel by Wilkie Collins, as an early example of the modern detective novel and one of the most important works within the genre. T. S. Eliot, named *The Moonstone* the first, the longest and the best of modern English detective novels, and considered Collins as the inventor of the detective fiction genre. One of Collins' contributions also lies in his depiction of the role of the detective. Seargent Cuff is seemingly based on a real-life detective, Jonathan Whicher, who solved the "Constance Kent case" of 1860, a real-life murder case where a sister killed her young half-brother, which is thought to be the case that inspired Collins to write *The Moonstone*. The employment of multiple narrators, in order to showcase how a single agent is not enough to successfully carry the narrative and solve the mystery is another of Collins' accomplishments. The Moonstone is in the centre of the motives of the novel, and it keeps the narrative in motion and the reader interested, while simultaneously posing as the critique of British imperialism. The aim of this thesis is to depict the intricacies that make up *The Moonstone* and make it one of the greatest pieces of detective fiction of all time.

Keywords: Wilkie Collins, *The Moonstone*, detective fiction

Table of contents:

Introduction.....1

1. The traits of contemporary detective fiction.....3

2. Emergence of detective fiction in the 19th century.....7

3. The Moonstone – object as the lever of mystery.....11

4. Wilkie Collins’ employment of narrative techniques.....14

5. Cultural significance and contemporary relevance of Wilkie Collins’ *The Moonstone*.....18

Conclusion.....20

Bibliography.....22

Introduction

The focus of this thesis is on the analysis of Wilkie Collins' *The Moonstone*, which is considered as one of the first modern, full-length instances of detective fiction in English. *The Moonstone* set some ground rules and defining characteristics, which serve as the blueprint of all subsequent literary works under the genre of detective fiction. Other than his contribution to the detective fiction, Wilkie Collins' is also known for his unorthodox attitudes, which amongst other things manifested in his refusal of the institution of marriage, as well as his detest towards the traditional Victorian society and its norms and expectations. The narrative of the novel begins with a prologue, named the Storming of Seringapatam, which describes the British invasion of India, the theft of the Moonstone from its sacred shrine in a palace of Seringapatam and its subsequent journey to England. The stone enters the Verinder family household as a gift for a young heiress, Rachel Verinder's eighteenth birthday from her uncle, Mr. John Herncastle. It was John Herncastle along with his cousin who took the Moonstone from India in 1799, while serving in the British military. He blatantly disregarded warnings about the curse put on the stone and those who come in contact with it, and presented it to his niece fifty years later. Franklin Blake, a relative of the Verinder family, bound by the promise his father gave to Mr. Herncastle, is the one to deliver the stone to Rachel, unaware of the Indian priests following his every move, with the intention of getting their hands on the Moonstone. Franklin and Rachel fall in love during his stay at the Verinder family property. He gives her the jewel on her birthday, and she wears it as a decoration on the lapel of her dress throughout the gathering. Other guests in the attendance are Godfrey Ablewhite, Rachel's cousin who also shows romantic interest in her, Mr. Murthwaite, an experienced traveller and Mr. Caddy, a local doctor. During the night following the celebration of Rachel's birthday, the Moonstone appears to be missing from the cabinet she stored it in prior to going to sleep. Upon discovering the stone's disappearance in the morning, the local police are called, and the investigation starts, putting suspicion on the staff, including the main butler Gabriel Betteredge, his daughter Penelope and the maid, Rosanna Spearman, who has records of a criminal past. Since the local police prove themselves utterly useless, Franklin Blake calls in a notable detective from London, Seargeant Cuff, who, with the help of Betteredge, starts the investigation anew, in his own careful and reserved manner. His first order of business is the

smear on the freshly painted door of Rachel's sitting room, but he fails in retrieving an article of clothing which caused the smear. His main suspects are Rosanna Spearman, because of her history with thievery, and Rachel herself, due to her increasingly strange behaviour, manifested in her refusal to be questioned by the police about the events surrounding the disappearance of the Moonstone. Consequently, Cuff suspects Rachel of falsifying the Moonstone's disappearance as a smokescreen to disguise her own stealing of the stone, and forcing Rosanna into helping her. His relentless investigation of Rosanna ends up leading nowhere, when she decides to end her life by jumping into a local pool of quicksand. Refusing to stay in the house while Cuff is investigating, Rachel chooses to leave, and affected by the loss of her, Franklin also decides to depart and travel the continent for the upcoming year. Upon failing to discover any leads, Seargent Cuff too departs back to London, and the investigation stagnates. Rachel, previously living with the Ablewhites, following her mother's death and agreement to Godfrey's marriage proposal, discovers the intention of the Ablewhites to steal her inheritance, and breaks off the engagement. She goes to live with Mr. Bruff, her family lawyer, and he aids her in figuring out the whereabouts of the Moonstone, which was pledged to one year in the local bank. The mystery begins to unravel with the return of Franklin Blake to England, as he finds out, from a letter Rosanna wrote to him prior to her death, that she hid a vital piece of evidence, his paint-stained nightgown, which puts him at the scene of the crime as the thief of the Moonstone. Knowing he did not commit the crime, he takes the evidence to Bruff, where he is reunited with Rachel, and she reveals that she saw him steal the Moonstone with her own eyes. He tries to contact other guests but none of them are available; however, he learns that Mr. Caddy wishes to speak to him. Upon his arrival to Mr. Caddy's house Franklin meets his assistant, Ezra Jennings, who exposes his suspicions towards Franklin, influenced by Mr. Caddy's fevered ramblings. Ezra reveals that Mr. Caddy put opium into Franklin's tea the night of Rachel's birthday celebration, in order to help him achieve better sleep, as a practical joke. Ezra, who is intimately familiar with the unidentified effects of opium, discloses his theory that Franklin stole the Moonstone under the influence of opium and stress of the stone not being sufficiently protected while in the Verinder family home. They test and subsequently prove that theory by re-enacting the events of the night of the theft. It is revealed that Franklin, while in the middle of the theft in his opium-induced haze, collided with Godfrey and gave him the stone to take back to the bank where it would be safer. They attempted to retrieve the Moonstone, but are unsuccessful and the Indian priests retrieve it back to Indian shrine, where it rightfully belongs. Ultimately, Franklin and Rachel get married and are expecting a child, while the Moonstone is never to be seen by them again (Collins, 1868).

This thesis is structured to examine the significance of *The Moonstone*. First it analyses the landmark traits of contemporary detective fiction, showing which of the characteristics can be traced back to Collins' work. Next, the emergence of detective fiction in the 19th century is discussed, situating the novel in a broader historical context. The focus then shifts to the *Moonstone* itself, as the central object of the mystery. Following this is an examination of Collins' groundbreaking use of narrative techniques. Finally, the cultural significance and contemporary relevance of *The Moonstone* are being analysed.

1. The traits of contemporary detective fiction

Contemporary detective fiction dating from the mid-19th century and around the publication of Wilkie Collins' *The Moonstone* exhibits certain important traits that contributed to the development of the genre. In his work, *The Pursuit of Crime*, David Porter (1981) discusses contemporary detective fiction with a primary focus on backwards construction and the art of suspense, as the traits of the early detective fiction. He defines backwards construction as a technique of creating the plot of a story by creating the resolution of the mystery and the crime itself first and the beginning of the story second. With the use of this technique, it is ensured that all the clues and other narrative elements, such as detective's deduction and the sequence of events will be aligned logically and will appear plausible in order to smoothly lead to the final resolution of the plot (Porter, 1981). On the other hand, he defines the art of suspension as creating and maintaining a sense of anticipation and uncertainty which keeps the reader engaged and eager to uncover the solution of the story. The art of suspense includes pacing, false clues, unresolved questions, and character development. Porter (1981) suggests that of multiple devices of obstruction used in detective fiction, some of them are also featured in other narrative genres and genres particularly centred around the process of criminal investigation. He categorized them on five consecutive levels, based on plot, roles, character types, content, and formal elements (1981). On the first level, the level of plot the first device of narration is a turning point. A turning point is a discovery or an event which involves a deflection or hindrance in the progress of the plot towards resolution (Porter, 1981). He also calls this peripeteia, and it is exemplified in parallel intrigues, including rival investigations and motifs of love that interrupt the primary investigation, false trials as well as false solutions which are

used to stall the progress of the main detective's investigation. On the second level, the level of roles Porter (1981), introduces an antidetective, or a criminal whose role can be passive and not interrupt the main detective's investigation, or active, continuously disrupting in a multitude of ways to prevent discovery and capture. There are other characters who can fill this role in a detective novel, such as confused or hesitant witnesses, false detective who prolongs the investigation by wrongly interpreting the evidence, witness testimonies and potential suspects and criminals alike (Porter, 1981). The third level, also known as the level of character types, introduces the character of an uncommunicative detective, whose thought processes are not disclosed to the reader until the very end in order to keep up the suspense, the detective's assistant, often presented as a chatterbox and a whole group of so-called grotesques whose role is not quite clear (Porter, 1981). The fourth level is content, which includes episodes, that are used in adventure novels and false clues, which when mixed with true clues make the resolution more complex. Porter concludes the division with the fifth and the final level which includes formal elements, such as the plot, as well as the introduction of a "perpetual idiot" as a narrator, passages of description or dialogue, commentary narrative and interventions of the author. The detective novel encourages the false notion of the necessary chain of events, even more obviously than other literary genres do. It does so by implying that the only way to the resolution of the mystery is step-by-step following of the logical and temporal cues of the story in order to reconstruct the plot. However, according to Porter (1981) the only obligatory elements of the detective novel are the minimal number of obstacles necessary to maintain the desired level of suspense and ensuring that the reader reaches the feeling of insight after blindness upon the resolution of the mystery. Porter (1981) notes description as a powerful tool used in a detective novel. Namely, descriptive passages bring a multitude of benefits in constructing the story. For example, when a new character is being introduced, a descriptive passage is used to leave a reader with a lasting impression of the new character as well as to provide the reader with general information about the character and their moral. In order to make the character memorable, authors generally resort to insistence and repetition, using language rich with epithets and adjectival phrases as well as hyperbole and metaphors (Porter, 1981) Despite the authors persistence on the importance of descriptions, they are still considered unpopular by some readers because they are viewed as obstacles meant to stop the plot from continuing smoothly and should be skipped in lieu of action (Porter, 1981). Another such device, which faces a difficult road to recognition is dialogue. Dialogue is considered as one of the main narrative techniques for two reasons. First is that it creates a greater dramatic effect than reported speech or narrative summary do (Porter,1981). The second reason is that

is has the ability to imitate real life well, to an extent that it directly represents the interaction of characters as it is happening in real time. In a detective novel, dialogue most often manifests in the form of a detective interrogating witnesses or suspects. Consequently, information becomes known gradually, as a result of a method of a back-and-forth question and response (Porter,1981). Accordingly, using dialogue as a narrative technique in the detective novel has dual benefits, it both enhances credibility of the genre by putting an emphasis on the mystery of people and the difficulty in detection, as well as posing as a vital instrument in upholding suspense (Porter, 1981). What can be easily concluded by analysing detective fiction is that as opposed to other genres, the art of narration is superlative at both withholding, and providing information (Porter, 1981). Literary constituents have been discussed since the beginning of time. In his *Poetics* Aristotle delved into literary constituents of tragedy, and introduced the terms of reversal (*peripeteia*) and recognition (*anagnorisis*) stating that they are closely intertwined. Referring to Aristotle and his findings about tragedies, Hartman (1975) comes to similar conclusions about name reversal and recognition as essential elements of the detective novel, albeit less powerfully connected than tragedies. Reversal in detective fiction is used to describe unmasking, and recognition is what follows that unmasking in order to test the intelligence of the reader (Hartman,1975). Another term, also introduced by Aristotle, which Hartman deems important to mention in the discussion about detective fiction is what Aristotle named *to Pathos* or the Suffering, otherwise described as a “destructive or painful action, such as death on a stage, bodily agony, wounds and the like.” (Heartman, 1975). Hartman suggests that *Pathos* and such “dark” scenes are at the centre of detective fiction and that revelation and reversal are just means through which *pathos* is achieved. Inclusion of *pathos* in detective stories is crucial for the reader’s understanding of the creative circumstances of the crime and detective novel itself. (Hartmann, 1975).

According to Alewyn (1974), in his essay *The Origin of the Detective Novel*, there is a specific model in which a detective novel can be recognised; someone has been murdered, the question of who has done it continues to grow in its urgency throughout the entirety of the novel, especially when the second and possibly third murder comes to light, the race against the time intensifies with the help of hypothesised suspects and clues that emerge along the way . Ultimately, Alewyn (1974) concludes, that the correct interpretation of the clues along with a reconstruction of the course of events of the crime, is what leads to the winning formula to successfully detect the criminal. Allan Edgar Poe is considered the discoverer of the formula of the detective novel and his novel *The Murders of the Rue Morgue* is considered as the

exemplary of the genre (Porter, 1981). Porter (1981) lists two reasons for which *The Murders of the Rue Morgue* is considered a prototype of detective fiction, the first being that it introduced the notion of the detective hero as a brilliant amateur who is drawn to solving perplexing murders with the use of logic and second, it provides a model for the narrative in which the ending establishes the order and causality of the events described from the beginning. Even though he was the one to create the first model of the detective fiction, Poe did not continue to explore the possibilities of the genre. Moreso, he was less popular than both of his successors Emile Gaboriau and Arthur Conan Doyle. Between the two, Conan Doyle was more successful for the reason that his writing showed the exact extent of possibilities within the new genre (Porter, 1981).

Tzvetan Todorov (1966), in his essay *The Typology of Detective Fiction*, from his book *The Poetics of Prose*, divided detective fiction into three sub-genres: the whodunit, the thriller and the suspense novel. The integral parts of the whodunit novel are two murders, of which the first one is merely the occasion for the second, as well as two separate narratives, where one describes the crime and following investigation (story of a crime), and the other describes the events that led up to the crime (story of investigation) (Todorov, 1966). The thriller stories fuse the two separate narratives into one singular story, supressing the story of a crime and focusing of the story of investigation, therefore promoting suspense, unlike the whodunit stories, which promote curiosity in the reader (Todorov, 1966). The third and the final sub-genre is the suspense novel. The suspense novel is a combination of the whodunit and the thriller, keeping the mystery and two stories from the whodunit and the focus on the second story from the thriller. However, the suspense novel unites aforementioned sub-genres by striving to promote both curiosity and suspense, as the reader is interested about the future as much as the past (Todorov, 1966). It is also important to note twenty rules detective fiction should follow, written by S. S. Van Dine, which Todorov summarized into eight subsequent rules:

1. "The novel must have at most one detective and one criminal, and at least one victim (a corpse).
2. The culprit must not be a professional criminal, must not be the detective, must kill for personal reasons.
3. Love has no place in detective fiction.
4. The culprit must have a certain importance:
 - (a) in life: not be a butler or a chambermaid.

- (b) in the book: must be one of the main characters.
5. Everything must be explained rationally; the fantastic is not admitted.
 6. There is no place for descriptions nor for psychological analyses.
 7. With regard to information about the story, the following homology must be observed: 'author : reader = criminal : detective.'
 8. Banal situations and solutions must be avoided (Van Dine lists ten)." (1966:142).

2. Emergence of detective fiction in the 19th century

Albert D. Hutter (1975), in his essay *Dreams, Transformations and Literature: The Implications of Detective Fiction* provides an analysis of the emergence of detective fiction in the 19th century focusing on the historical background, structural innovations, cultural significance as well as its connection to psychology. According to him, the detective novel combines a subjective and unreliable narrative and reconstruction of past events in the present time (Hutter, 1975). Detective fiction is the purification of a general literary experience which at its centre has the interaction and interpretation of language. Detective fiction is commonly perceived as the result of the gothic, or a combination of gothic romance and the realism which are associated with the rise of the novel (Hutter,1975). There is a historical connection between the detective police and their fictional counterparts. The need for new police in the Victorian England began when the old ways of self-policing in rural and semi-urban areas failed to be effective anymore (Hutter,1975). The first task of the new detective police was protecting the property and the wellbeing of the middle-class population. The detective police were a part of a carefully constructed social system which was developed as a response to an incomprehensible upsurge in the technological development. Accordingly, it came as no surprise when with development of the railroad and the telegraph, they were immediately included in the fictional portrayal of detection (Hutter,1975). Detective fiction emerged when the crime rapidly and violently increased in the Victorian city and the need for new police was stronger than ever. First fictional detectives were amateur researchers as well as first-rate actors skilled in the arts of bluffing, impersonation and disguises. Their ability to imitate, relate to and to mimic the particular behaviours of the criminals provides them with a unique skillset which enables them to relatively quickly and efficiently identify and solve crimes. Therefore,

detectives are engrossed with a problem of knowledge which only became more prominent with the urbanisation of the world (Hutter,1975).

The Founding Fathers, who are considered responsible for the emergence of detective fiction in the 19th century, are Allan Edgar Poe, Emile Gaboriau, and Charles Dickens. Authors responsible for the growth of detective fiction as a genre are Artur Conan Doyle and Wilkie Collins. Hutter (1975) observes that Allan Edgar Poe and Arthur Conan Doyle, introduced a unique way of telling their stories, beginning by describing the crime, and then working backwards to reconstruct and subsequently retell the deeds of the past using the fragments of the reader's knowledge and combining it into a cohesive storyline. The early years of the 19th century's detective fiction, as a consequence of relying on the straight-forward retelling of past events, were marked by the bleak and borderline sterile subgenres such as stories of pure puzzle and stories labelled as the tales of the "Golden age of Detection" (Hutter,1975). The only reason why Poe and Conan Doyle were spared of that bleakness is the irrationality with which they wrote their main detectives, manifested in seeking the intellectual dominance and the presence of personal disturbances which hinder the main detective's objective vision (Hutter, 1975).

In Poe's character of the main detective Dupin this is manifested in his desire to distance himself from people, both in body and mind. Conan Doyle's character Sherlock Holmes embodies it by seeking solitude and through his addiction and depression (Hutter,1975). Objectivity and rationality of the main detective are doubted by his subjective and innate vision, so much so that they are made to appear as two sides of the same coin (Hutter,1975.) This duality is perfectly exemplar in Poe's *The Purloined Letter*, where the police are unable to discover the truth, whereas the main detective Dupin uses his imagination and logical reasoning to solve the case. According to Hutter (1975) detective fiction involves transformation of a scattered and incomplete chain of events into an ordered and logical one, and by doing so it alters our perception of the past through language. This is where stories of pure puzzle fail to keep hold of the reader's interest and retain the tension between mystery and resolution of the story (Hutter, 1975). When reading such stories, the reader is left to predict the plot and conclude the resolution of the crime, and if successful the goal of the genre is wasted (Hutter,1975). In Poe's stories the end goal isn't resolution as such but testing the limits of logical deduction in a world based on subjectivity and deception which is fundamentally illogical. (Hutter, 1975) *The Moonstone* by Wilkie Collins is considered a prototype of detective fiction and as such is the first full-length English detective novel. Wilkie Collins was

successful in connecting the foundations of logical deduction with the subjectivity of the world, and merge them into *The Moonstone's* narrative structure by forcing the reader to build a logical solution to the story using only the fragmented and partial clues from his individual narrators. (Hutter,1975). He does so by centering the plot of the novel around a single object, the Moonstone, having it passed around and having it bring nothing but violence and murder to the one who currently holds possession of it (Hutter,1975). In order to fully understand the crime, the reader must experience puzzlement of reflection and details which are given to him, until the language, ambiguities, contradictions and the symbolisms of the story can be deciphered enough to be comprehensible to the reader (Hutter,1975).

Collins considerably impacted the shaping of the fictional aesthetic by combining credibility with contradiction and inconsistency in various opposing viewpoints of the narrators, which lay at the heart of *The Moonstone* (Hutter,1975). Collins' multiple narration was undoubtedly influenced by the double narrative in Charles Dickens' *Bleak House*, which was the first British novel that involved a detective (Hutter,1975). Creation of *The Moonstone* and the growth of the detective fiction in general was what inspired a more significant change in literature, especially by emphasizing some of the major social concerns of the time (Hutter,1975). One such concern explored in *The Moonstone* is Collins' understanding of the British colonial utilization which ends once the gem is returned back to its initial sanctuary (Hutter,1975). Another social aspect Collins utilises in *The Moonstone* is the racial prejudice of his characters, as well as his readers. Collins encourages and keeps fuelling the prejudice until the very end of the story and that is clearly exemplified in the description of Ezra Jennings, whose complexion is described as of gypsy darkness and in Ablewhite's disguise, with dark hair and a swarthy complexion (Hutter,1975). The entire novel is based on a prejudicial testament, misinterpretation and mistreatment, which initiated the mystery, trepidation and bias accompanying the Indians (Hutter,1975). Simultaneously, as is usual in detective novels the reader regards the character with a single most prominent emotion until the resolution, and that is suspicion, and while the novel does end in a resolution, the readers experience while reading *The Moonstone* persuades them into feeling suspicious until the end (Hutter,1975). The changing political opinions of the mid-nineteenth century significantly impacted the ending of *The Moonstone*, since Collins relies on two medical figures, Dr. William Benjamin Carpenter and Dr. John Elliotson, to include information about preconscious thought, memory, the effects of drugs and hypnosis that all take up a prominent portion of the ending section of the novel:

“Having first ascertained not only from books, but from living authorities as well, what the result of that experiment would really have been, I have declined to avail myself of the novelist's privilege of supposing something which might have happened, and have so shaped the story as to make it grow out of what actually would have happened - which, I beg to inform my readers, is also what actually does happen in these pages” (Collins, 1868 from Hutter,1975).

What Collins failed to reveal to his readers is that Elliotson, in spite of his contribution to psychology of the time, he and his ideas about the mind were considered by many charlatanic because he believed in mesmerism. (Hutter, 1975). Mesmerism is a type of hypnosis based on non-verbal prompts and energy transfer in order to induce trance and healing, which were highly frowned upon in the beginning of its invention in the 19th century. Despite the unconventionality, Collins still made sure to include Elliotson's teachings and even based a character of Ezra Jennings on his eccentricity and intelligence. (Hutter, 1975). It was equally important for Collins to introduce both the scientific methods and the notion of quackery in the process of the resolution of the novel, because by doing so he at the same time expands the readers' trust and the readers' suspicion (Hutter, 1975). In history, the line between the scientific methods and the beliefs of mesmerists and similar practices was distorted and so the modern psychoanalysis originated due to interest in hypnosis, Collins' description of sleep-walking and the study of the occult of the 19th century (Hutter,1975.) Clairvoyance is described as the ultimate form of mesmerism, as it connects past and future with the present and is not limited by space and time (Hutter,1975.) In *The Moonstone* clairvoyance is evident in the performing of the English medium of the Indians, a boy who is able to predict the future by falling into a trance while looking at the ink poured into his hand. The readers are assured of the act being a trick by the character named Murthwaite, who believes the child is vulnerable and easily manipulated by the mesmeric influence (Hutter, 1975). Once more Collins makes it quite clear how he is capable of achieving a healthy balance between the scientific methods and mesmerism, especially in the way Murthwaite examines the clairvoyance from the perspective of scientific rationality, which is of great importance not only to *The Moonstone* but for the detective fiction in general (Hutter,1975). Ezra Jennings is considered an ultimate, yet unexpected detective in *The Moonstone* unique in his ability to perceive the importance of the slightest of details while at the same time permitting his mind to drift over the limitations of the rational thought (Hutter, 1975). Furthermore, he is able to embrace others' perspectives and in turn use their individual experience (Hutter, 1975). Reconstruction of the storyline is

of great importance to both the form and the content of the detective novel, however it is the most powerful when paired to an equally important sense of mystery. (Hutter, 1975.)

The tension between the mystery and the resolution of the narrative is so important to every detective story that it applies itself onto any subject or a plotline and consequently turns itself into a second story of a novel, which verifies the theory of Tzvedan Todorov who declared that there must always be two stories in one detective novel, the story of the crime and the story of the investigation. (Hutter, 1975).

3. The Moonstone – object as the lever of mystery

The Moonstone by Wilkie Collins is widely accepted as one of the core literary works within the genre of detective stories. The Moonstone is described as a rare, yellow diamond and is used as the centre of the novel narrative. The stone appears to embody contradiction and mystery, as it can be grasped without difficulty while being mysterious at the same time. (Roberts, 1997). Originally it was stolen from a sacred Hindu shrine in India and it is said to carry a curse, bringing bad luck and trouble to anyone who comes to possess it unfairly. (Collins, 1868). The curse is a central part of the story as it includes a new complex layer of supernatural suspense to the story. The jewel has the ability to both uncover and disguise the reality of its nature (Roberts, 1997).

The effect that the Moonstone had on Rachel Verinder, Franklin Blake and Godfrey Ablewhite seems to suggest the stone's ability to occasionally aid in developing and promoting love, concealed obsession and endorsing humiliated self-understanding in these characters, implying both restorative and destructive properties of the Moonstone. (Hennelly, 1984). Marie-Louise von Franz, who was a Swiss Jungian analyst, known for her psychological interpretations of fairy tales and alchemical manuscripts, described the Moonstone as a symbol of the many sides of the Self (Hennelly, 1984). According to von Franz, multi-surface jewels and diamonds, such as the Moonstone, have the power of invoking an intuitive feeling in people, which helps them realise the spiritual energy such stones possess. (Hennelly, 1984).

The Moonstone depicts the precise retelling of the stone's history and uses it as a method to reveal and understand the ambiguity behind its disappearance. The reaction of Gabriel Betteredge, a loyal servant of the Verinder family and one of the narrators of *The Moonstone*, upon first encountering the Moonstone, is a testimony to the stones' power to both enthrall and confuse the beholder:

“When you looked down into the stone, you looked into a yellow deep that drew your eyes into it so that they saw nothing else. It seemed unfathomable; this jewel, that you could hold between your finger and thumb, seemed unfathomable as the heavens themselves. We set it in the sun, and then shut the light out of the room, and it shone awfully out of the depths of its own brightness, with a moony gleam, in the dark.” (Collins, 1868: 97 from Roberts, 1997: 168).

However, the Moonstone represents more than just a valuable object, it also represents a number of contradicting terms, such as: West/East, insider/outsider, detective/thief, narrator/character, alienation/community, stranger/family. These opposing terms uncover an opinion of apprehension and aversion toward typical Victorian society (Roberts, 1997). Though originally depicted as obvious and familiar, these distinctions become blurred and change throughout the novel and Collins' relation between the British imperialism and domestic crime (Roberts, 1997).

Furthermore, Collins dissects the terms of imperialist ideology in order to showcase how the externally opposed terms of wild and domestic intermingle with each other (Roberts, 1997). *The Moonstone* is a novel about a crime, the theft of a prized jewel, but the robbery doesn't start with Franklin Blake, laudanum-induced, unconsciously stealing the stone from Rachel Verinder's bedroom, but in India from where the Moonstone was originally stolen during the occupation of the British. Therefore, the theft of the Moonstone represents the unfairness and blatant nationalistic violence of the British imperialism. (Roberts, 1997). The critics of *The Moonstone* gave their two cents on Collins' handling of the topic of the British imperialism in the novel. For instance, John Reed mentioned how Collins arranged the Moonstone to function as the symbol and the core of the British imperial greed:

“ The Moonstone is emblematic of the novel's central crime. In itself ambiguous, its significance lies in its misappropriation. ... More particularly, however, the Moonstone becomes the sign of England's imperial depredations - the symbol of a national rather than a personal crime.” (Roberts, 1997: 179)

On the other hand, Ian Duncan advised against interpreting *The Moonstone* solely as a conviction of imperialism, since the novel doesn't offer any anti-imperialist support toward the oppressed nor does it establish a side it stands on in regards to imperialism, it simply remains undecided as it selects to remain objective about the topic. He goes further to state that just as the British have colonised India, the three Indian priests sent to recover the Moonstone leave a significant impact on the reader's understanding of the common English domestic succession (Roberts,1997). Additionally, Reed concludes that the further the characters of *The Moonstone* distance themselves from the traditional English society the less likely they are to be linked to the imperialism and the more effective they become in solving the mystery (Roberts,1997). Accordingly, Reed notes that only the outsiders are useful to effectively solve the mystery because they are the only ones who can see through the veil of the mundane (Roberts,1997). Franklin Blake was precariously close to becoming an outsider cast away by the society, had the knowledge of his theft of the Moonstone reached the public, however it is unclear if him becoming an outsider would have posed as a danger to him or given him a clearer insight into the reality of the world (Roberts,1997). Ezra Jennings saved him from such faith by providing insight into the circumstances of Blake's actions and by doing so effectively re-inserting him back into society (Roberts, 1997). The completion of the experiment culminates in an end of *The Moonstone* as Rachel and Franklin achieve a happy ending and the continuation of the traditional English family ensures with the announcement of their wedding and a upcoming heir (Roberts,1997). However, it isn't the end of the Moonstone, despite the closing of the story of Rachel and Franklin, it is merely the termination of the British segment of a much greater story of the Moonstone (Roberts,1997). Finally, it is Murthwaite, in the role somewhat of a mediator between the English and the Indian part of the story, who concludes the narrative of *The Moonstone* by narrating the story of the three Indian priests who followed the Moonstone across England and ultimately returned it back to its rightful place in a shrine in India (Roberts,1997). The story of the Indians is the only story of *The Moonstone* which successfully transcends the multiple narratives of the novel and effectively avoids the assertion of truth which such narrative structure assumes (Roberts,1997). The Indian priests are considered outsiders, alienated in a foreign country and their suffering gives them a layer of mystery offered to none of the other, more English characters, so their story of recovery and return of the sacred stone uncovers the moral hypocrisy of all English characters and situations (Roberts,1997).

By contrasting the English story of the theft of the Moonstone, and the Indian story of the stone's return back home, Collins succeeds in more than merely criticising the British treatment of the foreign, because by surrounding the English storyline with the stories of the Moonstone from both past and the future, he reveals the inauthenticity of narration and storytelling (Roberts,1997). By doing so, Collins alludes that even novels with the best plotlines and the most researched novels cannot reach the unattainable position of truth, simply because the truth suggests a status of the lack of understanding (Roberts,1997).

4. Wilkie Collins' employment of narrative techniques

Wilkie Collins is often considered a father of modern detective fiction, thanks to his novel *The Moonstone*, which is considered a prototype of detective fiction. The use of narrative techniques, such as multiple narrators, descriptions, dialogue and carefully constructed narrative structures, help Collins to maintain a constant level of suspense and keep the interest of his readers. The novel is divided into multiple sections, and each is narrated by a different character, which include Gabriel Betteredge, the Verinder family's steward, Miss Clack, an ethically inflexible relative of the Verinder family, and Franklin Blake a central figure of the novel as well as a nephew of Lady Verinder. Each narrator provides their own unique perspective of the events surrounding the Moonstone and its theft thus influencing the reader's understanding of the storyline while simultaneously exposing their own opinions and prejudices, allowing for the creation of a more complex and layered narrative.

The use of multiple narrators also adds to the suspense, as the truth is gradually revealed through these various perspectives. It invites the reader to piece together the mystery, much like a detective. In the Preface to the first edition of *The Moonstone*, Collins states that the events of *The Moonstone* aren't procured from sheer assumption, but are consequences of his character's motives (Robert,1997). Precise, accurately representing real life storytelling is an important feature of both the novel's narrative structure, manifested in the first-person point of view narration and in narratives of eyewitnesses, as well as the scientific experiment which demonstrates the occurrences and motivations surrounding the theft of the Moonstone (Roberts, 1997).

Collins presents the reader with a comprehension of reality in which the concepts of comprehensible and incomprehensible exist in equal measures, which isn't anything unfamiliar to the detective novel, where the impulse towards revealing the truth and the reconstruction of events is the standard (Roberts, 1997). Similarly to the Moonstone, The Shivering Sands is an occurrence both intriguing and terrifying as it illustrates the contradicting notion of reality. The purpose of this mysterious, yet ominous location in Collins' story is to obscure and uncover secrets, therefore complicating the characters understanding of each other and themselves (Roberts,1997). The Shivering Sands function as both a grave and a hiding place, they are horror inducing, yet a natural occurrence, seemingly endless while simultaneously keeping and giving up some of the secrets hidden within its depths (Roberts, 1997). Collins uses the Sands to hide crucial evidence, Franklin Blake's nightgown which incriminates him in the theft of the Moonstone, making it recoverable but not easily understandable (Roberts, 1997).

By positioning the Shivering Sands at the centre of the narrative, *The Moonstone* examines the likelihood of characters grasping the concept of objective truth when faced with inexplicable circumstances (Roberts, 1997). Collins conveyed two goals of *The Moonstone*, the first being the mapping out of the effect the characters have on the events that happen throughout the novel (Roberts, 1997). Choices of certain characters, influenced by their personal viewpoints, intentions, traits and aspirations, is what assists the unfolding of the narrative (Roberts, 1997). The realities of individual characters are particularly important to *The Moonstone's* narrative since Collins did not assemble his novel with a single narrative narrated by one narrator, but rather as a sequence of first-person recounts where the narrators are both an element of the narrative action and witnesses of the narrative structure (Roberts,1997). Most of the narrators of *The Moonstone* are entailed in recounting a factual report of what actually occurred in the novel, while at the same time building their narratives in such a way as to disguise the narrative importance of their statements (Roberts,1997). Therefore, the narrators relate their knowledge of the events which happened in the time period of their narration, while suppressing their awareness of the importance of that knowledge. As a consequence, each individual narrative complicates the reader's understanding of the connection between the knowledge and reality (Roberts, 1997). Franklin Blake explains the benefits of constructing the narrative in such way, regarding the potential consequences of the plot being inaccurately reiterated:

“[T]he characters of innocent people have suffered under suspicion already. . . .

The memories of innocent people may suffer, hereafter, for want of a record of the facts to which those who come after us can appeal. There can be no doubt that this

strange family story of ours ought to be told.” (Collins, 1868:38, from Roberts, 1997:170).

After consultation with his lawyer Bruff, Blake explains that in order to stay as accurate as possible the narrators are closely monitored on what they can and cannot narrate:

“We have certain events to relate and we have certain persons concerned in those events who are capable of relating them. Starting from these plain facts, the idea is that we should all write the story of the Moonstone in turn -- as far as our own personal experience extends, and no farther.” (Collins,1868:40 from Roberts, 1997:170)

These rules he sets put Franklin Blake in a particular position in the novel, as he functions less as a traditional hero and more as a narrator, detective, thief, and even a chief editor of the story (Roberts, 1997). He fits into the role of the chief editor of *The Moonstone* because he was the one who took initiative to put together all the narratives, set the boundaries of the narrators as well as been involved in dialogue and communication with the narrators for the duration of the story (Roberts, 1997). However, if Franklin Blake rounded up all the narratives together and selected the narrators by himself, with the intention of presenting an accurate retelling of events surrounding the Moonstone, the question surfaces as to why he failed to include Rachel Verinder and Godfrey Ablewhite as the narrators, given their personal relation to the mystery and the centre of the narrative (Roberts, 1997).

According to Roberts (1997) both Rachel and Godfrey are vital characters of the story, however including them into the narration process as narrators would have caused structural problems for Collins, as Godfrey would both have to lie in his narration so as not to reveal the plot too soon, and be unable to provide his input in the narration after the resolution of the story because he dies before the culmination of the novel. Allowing Rachel to participate as one of the narrators presents a different problem for Collins, as it was of absolute necessity to keep the explanation for Rachel’s erratic behaviour towards Franklin throughout the novel a secret until the certain point in the novel, so as to preserve the anonymity of the culprit and preserve the mystery and suspense for as long as possible (Roberts, 1997). Furthermore, Rachel’s silence is crucial, since, had her knowledge been revealed at any other point but the resolution of the mystery, Franklin would have been convicted and the mystery would have remained unsolved (Roberts, 1997). Since Rachel’s unexplained behaviour had been the focal point of the reader’s

interest for the better part of the novel, the moment she reveals her knowledge of it being Franklin who is the culprit responsible for the theft of the Moonstone, the reader's interest shifts from Rachel's behaviour to Franklin and the motives of his actions (Roberts,1997). This shift of the focus from Rachel's behaviour to Franklin's signifies a quite well-known gender bias characteristic of traditional Victorian fiction, manifested in the tendency of female characters to gain interest and power by holding back knowledge, while male characters gain interest and importance by attaining knowledge (Roberts,1997). The second aim of *The Moonstone*, Collins listed is his attempt at creating a novel based on realistic occurrences, and his efforts succeed:

“I have declined to avail myself of the novelist's privilege of supposing something which might have happened, and have so shaped the story as to make it grow out of what actually would have happened - which, I beg to inform my readers, is also what actually does happen, in these pages.” (Collins, 1686:40 from Roberts, 1997:173-174).

Collins' aspiration towards realistic plotlines is one of the well-known attributes of his work, and in *The Moonstone*, it is best showcased in the great attention to detail he pays to his positions in medicine and law when using them in the subplot of the novel (Roberts, 1997).

The Moonstone has been analysed and subsequently critiqued, through different perspectives, from epistemological, which concerns itself with questions of how one can know anything, to imperialist, pertaining to representation of India, either as a critique or corroboration of the imperialistic agenda (Gooch, 2010). One such analysis of *The Moonstone* was done by A. D. Miller, with a focus on the narrative structure of the novel. According to Miller's observation, Collins' use of multiple narrators provides them with particular knowledge possessed by no other means, consequently making the novel monologic (Gooch, 2010). Another reading, done by Adele Wills, presents *The Moonstone's* use of multiple narrators as a staging of judicial contradictions. (Gooch, 2010). *The Moonstone's* highly structured plot was emphasised by these critics' formal approach to its analysis, but Gooch (2010) suggests that the novel's structure implies a connection between storytelling and economics, which can be better understood by observing the way the stories are divided (narrative bifurcation) in the detective genre. Tzvedan Todorov introduced the division of the storyline of the detective fiction into two parts, the first, a story of a crime, functioning as a fabula and the second, the story of inquiry, in the role of sjuzhet (Gooch,2010). The sjuzhet, the tale of discovery in *The*

Moonstone is entangled with the first story since it is the product of the unproductive narrative labour. (Gooch, 2010). Given that the narration was provided by the servant, rentiers, policemen and lawyers proves how unproductive narrative labour constructs the interpretation of the events of the first story and interferes with the events themselves (Gooch, 2010).

5. Cultural significance and contemporary relevance of Wilkie Collins' *The Moonstone*

That Wilkie Collins contributed outstandingly to the development of the detective fiction is a well-known fact, however *The Moonstone* is not his only work to play a part in the emergence of the genre, as mystery and deception are the consistent concepts in most of his work (Ashley, 1951). Several Collins' works, such as *Hide and Seek*, which was his first attempt at detective fiction, a short story called *A Stollen Letter*, and *The Woman in White*, all continuously crossed the line between the mystery genre and detective story (Ashley, 1950). Collins has been praised by critics for his relentless adherence to the so-called fair-play rule, basically equating the reader with the detective in terms of solving the crime, as no information available to the detective is being held back from the reader (Ashley, 1950). Another praise-worthy feature, specific to Collins is his clever use of the least-likely-person motif. According to the critic, Howard Haycraft, the only author who could rival Collins in his masterful use of least-likely-person was Agatha Christie and her novel *The Murder of Roger Ackroyd*, in which the narration is done in the first point from the perspective of the culprit (Ashley, 1950). *The Moonstone* achieves the same element of the surprise by having Franklin Blake's self-biographical narration reveal his role as the culprit in the theft of the Moonstone (Ashley, 1950). However, by using the narrator as the criminal, Collins anticipated Christie by sixty years, simultaneously adding an original twist to the well-known formula, by making Blake unaware of his actions as well as withholding the knowledge of his actions (Ashley, 1950). Another aspect where *The Moonstone* is different than other detective novels, is that it does not end with the solution of the mystery and uncovering of the criminal, but continues until the readers are let in on the knowledge of how the crime came about, and even then, carries on until the Moonstone is traced and returned to its rightful place (Ashley, 1950). The continuation of the mystery, even after the thief's identity is discovered is a great example of Collins' unique ability to continue

extending a seemingly finished narrative, therefore proving the immense importance of the role his epistolary techniques play, by allowing him to shift the point of narration each time a reader gets too close to knowing too much about that particular narrator (Ashley, 1950). Collins created his character of the main detective, Sergeant Cuff, to also differ from fictional detective by characterising him with a love towards roses, therefore giving him an eccentric side, and therefore drawing a pattern for all the future fictional detectives (Ashley, 1950). In other aspects, Sergeant Cuff also fails to reach the standard of the modern-day detective, as he fails to solve the crime and plays quite a trivial role in the novel, but thankfully his absence does not affect the narrative in any majorly negative way, since both Ezra Jennings and Franklin Blake successfully fill in his role of the detective (Ashley, 1950).

Other than fair-play method, the least-likely-person and a softened detective, *The Moonstone* also contains other elements, such as the disagreement between the local police and the main detective, having an amateur solve the crime that a professional failed to solve, problems caused by characters holding back information vital to the plot, the reconstruction of the crime using scientific methods and the expert way of shifting the suspicion between different characters (Ashley, 1950). Collins is particularly skilled in directing suspicion at a character and then proving their innocence, effortlessly balancing motives and alibis so that the reader is left persuaded that no one could have been the one to steal the Moonstone (Ashley, 1950). Some of these characteristics, naturally, are not uniquely connected to Collins, but were possibly taken over from Poe, especially taking into the consideration that Collins acted as a connection between Poe and Conan Doyle, in terms of both style and period of writing (Ashley, 1950). If analysed by modern standards *The Moonstone* would be considered too long and the plot moving too slow, but to anyone willing to overcome the belief that a detective novel is meant to be read all in one sitting will discover that it would be difficult to find a detective novel to rival *The Moonstone* in terms of ingenuity (Ashley, 1950). Taking into an account the list of successes in detective-fiction genre, it is surprising that he rarely wrote pure detective fiction, for the simple reason that he was not aware of the existence of the genre, nor his contribution to it, as he was writing mid-Victorian melodrama, and while attempting to confuse and stimulate his readers he used multiple narrative devices and situations infused with suspense and mystery, which would later become staple characteristics of detective fiction (Ashley, 1950). Collins' ability to manipulate the plot and his characters was influenced by Victorian sensation fiction, resulting in the straying of his mystery narratives away from the main paths of the detective fiction (Ashley, 1950). Particularly, in *The Moonstone*, this results in the detectives reaching completely false conclusions, which leaves them just as surprised

by the resolution of the mystery as the reader, only further demonstrating the notion that the detectives are actually minor characters in the novel. According to Ashley (1950), Collins' detective fiction was a happy accident, which makes his substantial contribution to the development of the genre even more surprising. Some of Collins' most notable accomplishments in regard to detective fiction are the first detective, the first female detective, the first use of epistolary narrative in detective fiction, the first humorous detective story, the first British detective story, and the first full-length detective novel in English. (Ashley, 1950).

Conclusion

Detective fiction first surfaced in the middle of the 19th century, and has remained popular up to the present time. Authors, such as Allan Edgar Poe, Wilkie Collins, Emile Gaboriau and Arthur Conan Doyle have significantly contributed to the development of detective fiction. Allan Edgar Poe's *The Murders of the Rue Morgue* earned him the title of the Father of Detective Fiction as it was the first novel to feature a detective. With the publication of *The Murders of the Rue Morgue*, Poe was considered to have created the template for the narrative of detective novels. Inspired by Poe, Arthur Conan Doyle, created one of the most renowned fictional detectives of all time, Sherlock Holmes. Emile Gaboriau is considered the first author whose detective examined the crime scene for clues. Wilkie Collins' *The Moonstone* stands as one of the earliest and most effective of detective fiction stories, setting the stage for its evolution and forming the foundation and establishing main properties of the genre, which continue to shape the genre to this day.

Detective fiction displays several traits which contributed to the articulation of the genre. Two of the most prominent traits are backwards construction of the narrative which enables all the narrative elements within a story to successfully align and lead to the solution of the story, and the art of suspense, which maintains the reader's anticipation, thus keeping them interested and excited to determine the happenings of the end of the story. Other characteristics of detective fiction include pacing, false clues, dialogue, and description.

Usually, the centre of the narrative in detective fiction is a heinous crime, oftentimes a murder. However, *The Moonstone* is the first novel which features an object as the centre of mystery. The Moonstone is a rare, yellow stone, of Indian origins, a sacred gem meant to physically and spiritually decorate a Brahmin shrine in India, but was stolen and unlawfully travelled across England for period of time, leaving misery and trouble in its wake wherever it showed up. In *The Moonstone*, it is also used as a metaphor for British imperialism and its crimes of greed and violence.

The exceptional and innovative use of narrative techniques is another trait of Wilke Collins' *The Moonstone*, with the employment of multiple narrators, where each participant gave their own insight and recount of the events that came to pass throughout the narrative.

The uncommon ending differentiates *The Moonstone* from other novels of detective fiction in that it does not entail the uncovering of the culprit and figuring out the consequences which led up to the committing of crime, but brings forth the description of the stone's safe return to its place of origin, ultimately removing the curse from its previous possessors.

Bibliography

1. Albert D. Hutter, „Dreams, Transformations and Literature: The Implications of Detective Fiction,“ reprinted from *Victorian Studies* 19 (1975) by permission of Victorian Studies and the Trustees of Indiana University.
2. Ashley, Robert P. “Wilkie Collins and the Detective Story.” *Nineteenth-Century Fiction*, vol. 6, no. 1, 1951, pp. 47–60. JSTOR, <https://doi.org/10.2307/3044284>. Accessed 17 Mar. 2024.
3. Collins, Wilkie. *The Moonstone*. 1868. UK, Alma Classics, 2018.
4. Dennis Porter, “Backward Construction and the Art of Suspense,“ reprinted from *The Pursuit of Crime* by permission of Yale University Press, Copyright 1981 by Yale University.
5. Geoffrey H. Hartman, „Literature High and Low: The Case of the Mystery Story,“ reprinted from *The Fate of Reading and Other Essays* by permission of the University Chicago Press, Copyright 1975 by the University of Chicago, and by permission of The New York Review of Books, Copyright 1972, Nyrev, Inc.
6. Richard Alewyn, "Der Ursprung des Detektivromans, " reprinted from *Probleme und Gestalten* by permission of Insel Verlag. Insel Verlag Frankfurt am Main 1974. Helmut Heissenbüttel, "Spielregeln des Kriminalromans," reprinted from *Aufsätze zur Literatur*, by permission of the author.
7. Hennelly, M. M. (1984). Detecting Collins’ Diamond: From Serpentstone to Moonstone. *Nineteenth-Century Fiction*, 39(1), 25–47. <https://doi.org/10.2307/3044820>
8. Joshua Gooch, „Narrative Labour in Wilkie Collins's *The Moonstone*, *Lit: Literature Interpretation Theory*, Volume 21, 2010- Issue 2, published online 19 May 2010, <https://doi.org/10.1080/10436921003773835>.
9. Lewis Roberts, „The 'Shivering Sands' of Reality. Narration and Knowledge in Wilkie Collins's *The Moonstone*, *Victorian Review*, *Victorian Studies*, Volume 23, Number 2, Winter 1997, Association of Northern Canada, pp. 168-183. 10.1353/ver. 1997.0016.
10. Tzvetan Todorov, *The Typology of Detective Fiction*. (1966), Routledge, 2010.