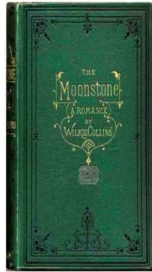


The Popular Gothic Novel
Lecture No. 42
The Moonstone
Plotting and the Female Gothic

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Week 9: The Moonstone

Lecture 9B: Plotting and the Female Gothic

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Hello and welcome to week 9's lectures on the Moonstone. In today's session, I will be discussing the plot in detail and I will finish off by talking a little bit about the idea of the Female Gothic.

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The Moonstone



- "To reinforce his role as editor, not to say curator, of the narratives, Blake appends a series of footnotes to the text. In a memorable exchange Clack takes umbrage with him within these notes, about the difficulty of narrating without providing the benefits of her insights and her natural wish to "improve" the reader. Her hindsight is eventually silenced but not before she "affectionately reminds Mr Blake that she is a Christian, and that it is, therefore quite impossible for him to offend her". ([Keren Levy](#))
- <https://www.theguardian.com/books/2014/jan/27/100-best-novels-moonstone-wilkie-collins>

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Now, let me complete the line of thought that I was discussing with you in the previous lecture. These ideas are from the writer, Keren Levy. And the ideas I talk about give a greater perspective on the kind of narrative that is in the novel *The Moonstone*.

“To reinforce his role as editor, not to say curator, of the narratives, Blake appends a series of footnotes to the text. In a memorable exchange, Clack takes umbrage with him within these notes, about the difficulty of narrating without providing the benefits of her insights and her natural wish to “improve” the reader. Her hindsight is eventually silenced but not before she “affectionately reminds Mr. Blake that she is a Christian and that it is, therefore quite impossible for him to offend her”.

In the previous session, we were talking about Miss Clack and how Collins was very proud of that characterization. Now, Blake has taken his role as editor very very seriously. In fact, he often provides footnotes to the text. In one of these footnotes, we see that Clack is not very happy with the kind of advice that Blake provides her, that is he asks her not to assess events in hindsight and she responds by saying that he cannot really offend her because she is a Christian and therefore she has such a broad mind and is extremely tolerant.

So, what is important here is the fact that the narratives are documents and there are notes to these documents indicating that everything has been collected and put together in a scientific method.

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The Moonstone



- “As if to reverse the narrator/suspect relationship, the light of suspicion falls on Franklin himself in the last part of the novel. An unspoken love surfaces in the story of Rosanna Spearman, a former servant within the Verinder household who nursed a hidden affection for Franklin. Seeking to protect his good name and to avoid his implication in the theft of the diamond, she changes the course of events, introducing a new direction”. ([Keren Levy](#))
- <https://www.theguardian.com/books/2014/jan/27/100-best-novels-moonstone-wilkie-collins>



“As if to reverse the narrator suspect relationship, the light of suspicion falls on Franklin himself in the last part of the novel. An unspoken love surfaces in the story of Rosanna Spearman, a former servant within the Verinder household who nursed a hidden affection for Franklin. Seeking to protect his good name and to avoid his implication in the theft of the diamond, she changes the course of events, introducing a new direction”.

Franklin himself is suspected in the final section of the novel and we are also told that there is an ex-servant in the Verinder household who was in love with Franklin. And apparently, in order to protect him, she offers information very subtly in such a way that the suspicion does not fall on Franklin.

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The Moonstone



- “As the story draws to a close and we learn the true journey of the diamond, bit-part characters emerge to entertain and make revelations, against a background of the continuing presence of the Indian men in London. The conduct of an experiment, carried out by Ezra Jennings (Lady Verinder’s doctor) and involving the use of opium (a further theme) permits the re-enactment of the evening of Rachel’s party and the disappearance of the stone”. ([Keren Levy](#))
- <https://www.theguardian.com/books/2014/jan/27/100-best-novels-moonstone-wilkie-collins>



“As the story draws to a close, we learn the true journey of the diamond, bit-part characters emerge to entertain and make revelations against a background of the continuing presence of the Indian men in London. The conduct of an experiment, carried out by Ezra Jennings, Lady Verinder’s doctor, and involving the use of opium, a further theme, permits the re-enactment of the evening of Rachel’s party and the disappearance of the stone”.

What we need to remember here is that the Indian men constantly haunt the streets of London in an attempt to recover that stone. And further, there is an experiment that is carried out to prove the way in which the crime had happened, to recreate the incident of the crime.

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The Moonstone



- “The selection of characters chosen to tell the story of the diamond can feel arbitrary but also gives the book its charm, spinning out the mystery. The forensic exploration is as much into "society" and human weaknesses as it is into the loss of the diamond.” ([Keren Levy](#))
- <https://www.theguardian.com/books/2014/jan/27/100-best-novels-moonstone-wilkie-collins>



“The selection of characters chosen to tell the story of the diamond can feel arbitrary, but also gives the book its charm, spinning out the mystery. The forensic exploration is as much into society and human weaknesses as it is into the loss of the diamond”. The charm about Moonstone is, it is a ray of characters who are entrusted with this massive responsibility of telling the tale. In fact, the choice of the characters may seem arbitrary, without apparent kind of logic into their choice. But that is what gives this novel its great effect.

And the novel does have a forensic examination into the values and into the ethos of the society. Human weakness is lead pair as much as the loss of the diamond and attempts to recover it.

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The Moonstone



- “The Moonstone is a magnificent yellow diamond 'large as a plover's egg'. It was looted at the siege of Seringapatam in southern India in 1799 by Colonel John Herculastle, who seized it from the forehead of a Hindu god. On his return to England he was ostracised by his family and society, and in revenge for a slight he leaves the diamond, said to carry a curse, to his niece Rachel Verinder. Rachel's cousin, Franklin Blake, is to deliver the diamond to the Verinder house near Frizinghall on the Yorkshire coast.”

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Now, so far we have seen the importance of Moonstone from a very general but also a very particular perspective that is the point of view of narrative style. The critics that I have mentioned so far have emphasized on the narrative structure of this novel. Now, I am going to give you a detailed plot summary of the Moonstone.

“The Moonstone is a magnificent yellow diamond large as a plover’s egg. It was looted at the siege of Seringapatnam in southern India in 1799 by Colonel John Herculastle, who seized it from the forehead of a Hindu god. On his return to England, he was ostracized by his family and society, and in revenge, for a slight, he leaves the diamond, said to carry a curse, to his niece Rachel Verinder. Rachel’s cousin, Franklin Blake is to deliver the diamond to the Verinder house near Frizinghall on the Yorkshire coast”.

Some of the details here are already familiar. We know that John Herculastle stole the diamond from the forehead of a god during the fall of Seringapatnam in southern India. And because he was slighted and ostracized, excluded from his family and society, he wanted to take revenge on them. And what he does is, he gifts it to his niece Rachel Verinder, and the cousin Franklin Blake is to give it to her. The important point here is that this diamond carries a curse and will affect anybody who possesses it.

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The Moonstone



- “The Moonstone is presented to Rachel at a dinner party for her eighteenth birthday. The guests include Godfrey Ablewhite, another cousin; Mr Candy, the family doctor; Mr Murthwaite, a celebrated traveller in India; and Drusilla Clack, an interfering evangelist. The party goes badly. Rachel and Franklin Blake have become fond of each other while decorating her sitting room door and Rachel had earlier refused a marriage proposal from Ablewhite.”

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So, there is an attempt at the engagement between Rachel and Ablewhite, and it does not come through. But we also realize that romance is budding between Franklin Blake and Rachel Verinder. So, these are some of the events that initiate the plot of The Moonstone.

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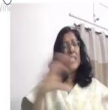
The Moonstone



“In addition, Blake quarrels with Mr Candy about the competence of doctors. Blake had been followed in London and Murthwaite identifies three Indians seen near the house as high caste Brahmins. Rachel places the diamond in her bedroom cabinet but the next morning it is missing.”

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You can see why the party has gone wrong. Ablewhite is not able to secure an engagement with Rachel. And Blake quarrels with the doctor Mr. Candy. And there is also information that Blake had been followed by 3 Indians who are high caste Brahmins. And the next day, the diamond which is secured in Rachel’s cabinet goes missing.

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The Moonstone

- “The local police superintendent, Seegrave, is a bungling incompetent so Blake calls in the celebrated Sergeant Cuff of the detective police. He rules out the suspicious Indians but realises the importance of smeared paint on Rachel's sitting room door. The smear has been made by an article of dress, whose owner is almost certainly the thief. Rachel behaves inexplicably, obstructing the investigation and refusing to have anything more to do with Franklin Blake.”

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“The local police superintendent, Seegrave, is a bungling incompetent, so Blake calls in the celebrated Sergeant Cuff of the detective police. He reels, he rules out the suspicious Indians but realizes the importance of smeared paint on Rachel’s sitting-room door. The smear has been made by an article of dress, whose owner is almost certainly the thief. Rachel behaves inexplicably, obstructing the investigation and refusing to have anything more to do with Franklin Blake”.

The initial police superintendent is dismissed and in his place Sergeant Cuff, the very famous and celebrated detective is brought to the household to throw light on the mystery. He does not think the Indians have stolen it, but there is a clue left on their room door. There is a smudge made by paint, and that paint is most likely to have come from an article of dress. They assume that the person wearing that outfit would have most likely stolen the diamond.

And what is most interesting is the fact that Rachel behaves in a very illogical, unreasonable and inexplicable manner, and she does not want to assist in the investigation. She also does not want to do anything with Franklin Blake. They have been very friendly during the party, but now she does not want to do anything with him.

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The Moonstone



- “Cuff concludes that she has stolen her own diamond assisted by Rosanna Spearman, a deformed housemaid fascinated by the local quicksand. Rosanna is a reformed thief who is acquainted with a dubious London moneylender, Septimus Luker. She is also in love with Franklin Blake and after acting strangely drowns herself in the Shivering Sand. Cuff is dismissed from the case by Lady Verinder but correctly predicts future developments.”

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Cuff assumes that it is Rachel herself who has stolen her own diamond and she had been assisted in that act by her housemaid, Rosanna Spearman. Rosanna had once been a thief, but she is reformed now and she also has associations with a dubious London money lender called Luker. We also realize that Rosanna Spearman is also very much in love with Franklin Blake, and she knows that it cannot come to anything and therefore she drowns and kills herself. Cuff is dismissed by Lady Verinder.

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The Moonstone



- “In London, both Ablewhite and Luker are attacked and searched, Luker losing a receipt for a great valuable. Lady Verinder dies of a heart condition and Rachel reluctantly agrees to marry Ablewhite whose father has become her guardian. They move to Brighton where they are visited by Mr Bruff, the family solicitor. The engagement is broken off when he reveals that Ablewhite is in debt and is marrying Rachel for her money”.

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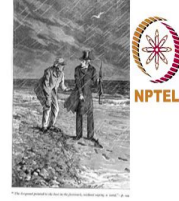


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Ablewhite if you remember is also one of the cousins to Rachel. Ablewhite and Luker, the moneylender, were attacked and searched in London and Luker in the process loses a receipt for a great item, a priceless item. Lady Verinder is no more and Rachel is forced to get engaged to Ablewhite whose father is her guardian now. And they move to Brighton. In Brighton, they are visited by the family lawyer called Mr. Bruff and he tells her that Ablewhite is in great debt and he is marrying Rachel not for love but for her money.

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The Moonstone



- “Blake returns from travels abroad but Rachel refuses to see him. Determined to restore her good opinion, he revisits Yorkshire where Rosanna Spearman's only friend, Limping Lucy, gives him a letter from the dead housemaid. This leads him to the Shivering Sand where Rosanna has hidden his nightgown, smeared with paint, with a confession that she concealed the nightgown and killed herself out of love.”

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Franklin Blake who is back in England wants to see Rachel but she refuses to see him. He is determined to make up for any slights or any offence that he had caused unwillingly. He visits Yorkshire where he meets with Limping Lucy another person who is specially challenged. Limping Lucy gives the letter from the now-dead Rosanna to him and that letter leads him to the Shivering Sand, where he realizes that his own nightgown is hidden by Rosanna Spearman and that nightgown has a smudge of paint. He also finds a letter in which he confesses that she had killed herself because of love towards Franklin Blake.

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The Moonstone



- “The confused Blake returns to London and contrives a meeting with Rachel at Mr Bruff’s house in Hampstead. There she tells him that she knows he had financial problems and with her own eyes saw him take the diamond. Her own actions have been to protect his reputation”.
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We now see that somehow there is a meeting contrived between Franklin Blake and Rachel at the solicitor’s house in Hampstead. She declares to him that she saw with her own eyes that Blake stole the diamond. She also tells him that she is aware that he had financial problems and therefore his actions seem logical. And in fact, she had been trying all along to protect his reputation by not actively assisting in the investigation.

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The Moonstone



- “Blake meets Mr Candy's assistant, Ezra Jennings, who saved Candy's life from a fever caught after the birthday dinner. Jennings had recorded Candy's delirium which revealed that Candy had secretly given Blake opium to prove his point in their argument. Blake therefore unknowingly 'stole' the diamond under the influence of the drug, in order to keep it safe.
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Now we have come to the point where we get further revelations in the story. Blake meets Ezra Jennings who is assistant to Mr. Candy, the doctor, with whom Blake had an argument during the birthday party.

And Jennings had helped Ezra Jennings recover from a fever, and during that fever, Candy had been delirious and he confessed to, or he let out that he gave opium to Blake. Under the effect of opium, Franklin Blake stole the diamond. So, we realize that Blake was in fact the one who took the diamond, but he did not know it himself, because he was under the influence of the drug. And he did it to keep it safe.

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The Moonstone



- “Jennings explains to Blake that if he takes opium again under similar conditions he may repeat his actions of the previous year and reveal where he placed the diamond. Blake agrees and the experiment is conducted with Mr Bruff as an observer. Blake takes a substitute gem but fails to reveal the Moonstone's hiding place. Rachel, really in love with him, is also present and has already forgiven him.”
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“Jennings explains to Blake that if he takes opium again under similar conditions, he may repeat his actions of the previous year and reveal where he placed the diamond. Blake agrees and the experiment is conducted with Mr. Bruff as an observer. Blake’s takes a substitute gem but fails to reveal the Moonstone’s hiding place. Rachel, really in love with him is also present and has already forgiven him”.

So as you can see, there is a reconstruction of that day, the night after the birthday dinner and Blake is given opium again and under the observation of Mr. Bruff, the drugged Blake successfully takes a replacement gem from the cabinet, but he is unable to tell where he had hidden it. And Rachel now realizes that Franklin Blake is guiltless and is in love with him again and she has forgiven him.

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The Moonstone



- “Bruff in the meantime has Luker's bank watched. The moneylender is observed passing the diamond to a sailor who is followed to a dockside inn. Later the same night he is murdered. Cuff, brought out of retirement by Blake, discovers that the sailor is Godfrey Ablewhite in disguise. He was the real thief and stole the gem to save himself from financial ruin. He has been killed by the Indians who have now recovered the diamond. In a religious ceremony witnessed in India by Murthwaite, the Brahmins return the diamond to the god of the moon”.
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Mr. Bruff, the lawyer has the bank of that money lender Lucker watched. The moneylender gives the diamond to a sailor who is followed to an end and we realise a sailor is murdered on the same night. Cuff comes back to the scene. He is brought back from his retirement by Blake and we realize that the sailor is none other than Godfrey Ablewhite in disguise.

Ablewhite is the one who was really in financial distress and he had been the one who had stolen the gem to save himself from debt. He had been killed by the Indians when they tried to recover the diamond from him. We realize that the Brahmins have returned the diamond to its rightful place, they have given it back to the god of the moon.

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TAMAR HELLER, *Dead Secrets: Wilkie Collins and the Female Gothic*.



- “The critical model that Tamar Heller develops in her study of Wilkie Collins might be called one of reverse anxiety of influence. Her scenario for his career depicts the best-selling male author, routinely dismissed by contemporaries as a popular sensationalist, struggling to come to grips with a disreputable matrilineal inheritance.”

- Rev. by WINIFRED HUGHES
- JSTOR



Now let us talk about the idea of the Female Gothic. Now from this point on, I am going to talk about the ideas of Doctor Tamar Heller, from her book ‘*Dead Secrets: Wilkie Collins and the Female Gothic*’. The actual quotations are from her review by Winifred Hughes.

“The critical model that Tamar Heller develops in her study of Wilkie Collins might be called one of reverse anxiety of influence. Her scenario for his career depicts the best-selling male author, routinely dismissed by contemporaries as a popular sensationalist, struggling to come to grips with a disputable matrilineal inheritance”.

What Winifred Hughes in her review of the critical work points out is that there is a reverse anxiety of influence according to Tamar Heller’s assessment, that is contemporaries of Wilkie Collins had dismissed Collins saying that he was just a sensationalist and we are reminded of Wilkie Collins’ *The Woman in White*, the best sensational novel of all times. What she is arguing is that Collins is trying to come to terms with the matrilineal inheritance of the mode of Gothic and crime narrative. So, one can see him struggling with that plot that had been handed to him by writers such as Ann Radcliffe.

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TAMAR HELLER, Dead Secrets: Wilkie Collins and the Female Gothic.



- "In Heller's reading of Collins's fiction it is the recurrent image of women's buried writing-most famously Rosanna Spearman's transgressive love letter, sunken beneath the quicksand in that encodes the submerged tension between Collins's allegiance to the genre of female Gothic and his desire for the prestige of literary professionalism and masculine authority"

- Rev. by WINIFRED HUGHES
- JSTOR



“In Heller’s reading of Collins’ fiction, it is a recurrent image of women’s buried writing- most famously Rosanna Spearman’s transgressive love letter, sunken beneath the quicksand in that encodes the submerged tension between Collins’ allegiance to the genre of Female Gothic and his desire for the prestige of literary professionalism and masculine authority.”

In other words, the essence here is that there is a conflict between literary professionalism associated with male authority, male supremacy and the genre of the Female Gothic.

In fact, what is clear from this kind of criticism is that Collins is resisting the Female Gothic, but individually the power of the Female Gothic resurfaces in his writing. The key event that is pointed out by Tamar Heller is the suicide of Rosanna Spearman, particularly the submergence of the transgressive love letter. It is a transgressive love letter because a servant is not supposed to fall in love with a master figure, with a man from the nobility. And Rosanna Spearman does that and, therein lies the transgression.

So, that transgression is submerged literary and metaphorically in the narrative by Collins and it resurfaces, it is, the idea comes back to the surface to be read by the reader. So, there is a transgression there. So, there is a Gothic element there in relation to Rosanna Spearman. She is the lower class character and a reformed thief. Her courage in falling in love with Franklin Blake is extraordinary and it makes sense to put on the logic of the Female Gothic narrative.

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T A M A R H E L L E R, Dead Secrets: Wilkie Collins and the Female Gothic.



- “What emerges most unmistakably from Heller's account is Collins's unresolved, and ultimately unresolvable, ambivalence. No matter how hard he may have tried to contain the troublesome Gothic influence, literally locking up and hiding away his female characters' subversive texts, it kept resurfacing in his fiction and undermining, or at least qualifying, his attempts to legitimate the position of the male artist”

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We see that the detective fiction where we have a male detective as essentially a male’s domain. The detective can also be perceived as a male artist. He is in control of his ground. He explains things logically. He harnesses the clues and explains, and throws light on every mystery. So, that is one way to look at the detective narrative. However, there is also resistance to this kind of detection in *The Moonstone* and that comes through in the figures of even Rachel Verinder.

She resists investigation for reasons of her own and she uses Rosanna Spearman. She also has her own reasons for resisting detection. So, all these are very important events and tendencies on the part of the female characters. So, there is a lot of subversion to a male reading of narratives and events.

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T A M A R H E L L E R, Dead Secrets: Wilkie Collins and the Female Gothic.



- “No matter how hard he may have tried to quell the impulse of rebellion and to silence the primarily female voice of protest, he could not help identifying with his outcast and marginalized characters. As Heller sees it, Wilkie Collins's own secret, in novels obsessed with secrets, is the unacknowledged but informing presence of the female Gothic.”

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“No matter how hard he may have tried to quell the impulse of rebellion and to silence the primarily female voice of protest, he could not help identifying with his outcast and marginalized characters. As Heller sees it, Wilkie Collins’ own secret, in novels obsessed with secrets, is the unacknowledged but informing presence of the Female Gothic”.

There is a tendency on the part of detective fiction to quell a rebellion, to make rebellion be disciplined and destroy the nature of rebellion. We can see rebellion especially as I pointed out earlier in Rachel Verinder. She resists Blake, she resists Ablewhite as well to a certain extent. This female voice of protest is pushed into a corner by detective fiction in this kind of narrative, and that female voice of protest can be seen as a Gothic tendency. There is an attempt on the part of Collins in *The Moonstone* to silence that voice of protest nevertheless, even though he is attempting to silence that he is also sympathizing with his outcast and marginalized characters. We can see that coming through in his characterization of Rosanna Spearman. All these minor characters do get their moment in limelight.

We see Rosanna Spearman’s letter where she confesses, and that letter is brought to the surface, is read by everybody. And we have the Limping Lucy speak with the Franklin Blake. So all these marginalized characters do come to the surface in Collins’ fiction. Collins as we know is obsessed with secrets. Secrets are a key attribute of Gothic fiction and when secrets proliferate in

the state of fiction, we realize that Wilkie Collins is masculine indebted to the tradition of the Female Gothic which celebrates this kind of plotting.

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TAMAR HELLER, Dead Secrets: Wilkie Collins and the Female Gothic.



- “Behind Collins's radical social themes and his critique of bourgeois ideology Heller finds an underlying anxiety about the ambiguous class and even gender status of the Victorian writer. Focusing on the self-reflexive dimension of Collins's fiction, Heller reads his preoccupation with artist-figures as a working-out of his own protracted search for both masculine and artistic identity”.

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“Behind Collins’ radical social themes and his critique of bourgeois ideology, Heller finds an underlying anxiety about the ambiguous class and even gender status of the Victorian writer. Focusing on the self-reflexive dimension of Collins’ fiction, Heller reads his reoccupation with artist-figures as a working out of his own protected search for both masculine and artistic identity”.

Several things are illustrated in this set of ideas. Firstly, we realize that Collins’ task deal with radical social themes in his own way through the narrative of crime, through a gothic exploration of certain ideas and he does criticize bourgeois ideology. What Heller finds in her assessment of Collins is that he has an ambiguous attitude or a complex response to class and gender status of the Victorian writer. The Victorian writer is a professional but he also makes money out of his writing.

So, you can see that ambiguity in that position of the writer. Collins also does criticize the stifling tendencies of class regulations. For example, we can think about the suicide of Rosanna Spearman and what we understand is that Collins himself is in contrary in terms of his own position as well as in terms of the artist figures that we see in his fiction because both the artist

figures and Collins himself are in search for an identity that is both masculine and artistic. He wants to repel and get away from anything that has a feminine aura to it.

What is interesting is that the crime narratives that he produces have that tendency to be associated with women. In fact, it is a matrilineal inheritance that he is working with, in his writings which are about crime, secrets, mystery and gothic attributes. Thank you for watching. I will continue in the next session.