

***The Moonstone* (2018-2019), by Screen 14 Pictures**

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*The Moonstone* has a proud lineage of adaptations to look back upon, with the BBC's five-episode offering of 2016 last bringing the story to TV audiences. In spite of the (relatively) numerous adaptations it has received over the years, the novel has only recently been adapted for the screen as a vlog. This adaptation of Collins's classic by Screen 14 Pictures, released in instalments and now available to binge on YouTube, allows us to gain a new and fresh perspective on the story, transposing much of Collins's plot to a modern, tech-savvy setting. The use of a vlog is well chosen; the format itself offers viewers perhaps a closer experience to the novel's original serialisation than even a multi-episode televisual adaptation can provide, complete with mini cliffhangers that would be equally at home in the late 1860s or 2019. This particular *Moonstone* also uses its multi-part, multi-vocal roots to advantage as it slips into a pre-existing online world created by Screen 14 Pictures. This environment contains a backstory and a large house full of characters, some of whom stay on to become characters in the events of this new, Collins-inspired series. The audience familiar with Screen 14 Pictures' earlier series *Jack Marshall Can't Do This* are carried smoothly into Collins's tale, while at the same time viewers who know the source text can appreciate the subtle reworking of various characters and situations without having watched the previous vlog series.

The scene is set at a large house and school in which all the residents act very much like a family. There are hierarchies – some are students at the school, and one particularly memorable hired man fills Gabriel Betteredge's servant role – but the overall atmosphere is one of harmony until the moonstone is taken the night of a New Year's Eve gala. The stolen stone was to have raised millions for the school when sold, and at this point the familiar detective story begins in earnest. The vlogs retain Collins's multiple narrators, with each narrator demonstrating an ease (or otherwise) with the recording technology, including self-effacement or interjections very much in keeping with the novel. The modernisation works effortlessly and will be of particular interest to readers fascinated by Collins's narrative structures. The series is also knowing in how it adapts the text, dotting very small neo-Victorian nods to the canon throughout. When 'detective fever' sets in, a Sherlockian pipe and deerstalker are

quickly and playfully adopted, placing the old Collins, the Victorian illustrated and televisually adapted Holmes and the new *Moonstone* all in the same tradition of detective narrative. The intertwining of the whodunnit plot and Collins's carefully conceived structure is also evident in the way the series makes the most of its format. When detective fever sets in, it infects not only the household but also the viewers. The 'collective detective' (the viewer) is asked for help in solving the mystery when a central character reaches an impasse, and viewers are able to leave comments on the YouTube page for each vlog. This decision on the part of the writers incorporates an even greater number of voices into the broader context of *The Moonstone* than the novel, and scholars interested in paratexts will find much to study.

At the same time that this adaptation brings Collins to a new audience, there is much to enjoy for long-standing readers. Characters are interpreted very much in the spirit and frequently in the letter of the originals. The character based on Betteredge does not bear the same surname, but he does share a love of *Robinson Crusoe*, an unshakeable sense of rectitude and loyalty to the people he serves. He also gives voice to some of the lines taken directly from the novel, which is subtly and sometimes amusingly done. Supporting characters are similarly given full scope in this adaptation, with one of the most memorable being Andrea Clack. This thoroughly modern, digitally minded Miss Clack chases viewers and sales, not souls, and her faith, resolute at all times, is placed in essential oils rather than scriptural texts. While other characters are thoughtfully updated, this would-be influencer offers an excellent example of how the writers have retained the personalities and quirks of Collins's characters even as those characters are perfectly contemporary. She is funny, self-important, often overbearing and always in keeping with her predecessor as she eavesdrops, informs people that it is her "duty to let you know" something before dispensing unwelcome information and shows herself to be a poor judge of character.

Importantly, this adaptation does not avoid the postcolonial aspects of the source text. While some aspects of the stone's history, particularly the nature of the familial connection to the stolen item, are altered, the moonstone's origin story remains rooted in a violent colonial past that includes the Siege of Seringapatam and numerous instances of theft, murder and betrayal as a means of possessing the stone. The moonstone's fate helps in some small measure to redress the balance inherent in its

violent imperial history and grapples directly with issues that some postcolonial readings have raised. It diverges from the book's last glimpses of the stone but envisages a different form of attempted restitution. After its recovery, the moonstone will be donated to the National Museum of India, which will generously give money to the school that was to be the original recipient of the money realised from the moonstone's sale. In this interpretation, the moonstone is restored, and education in the form of an Indian museum and an American school are the beneficiaries. In watching the next instalment in the long and proud history of the text, keen readers of Collins will find much to interest them in this production. This series highlights both the ingenuity of the writers in so seamlessly updating a novel more than 150 years old and the skill of the Victorian originator of *The Moonstone*, sending readers back to the text and settling in for repeat viewing.