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## We need your input for our Holiday Issue !

Have you read a good book ? Has your favorite author just released a book you want someone to gift to you ?

Then, let us know what your Holiday Gift Recommendations are – send an email to your editor at the address in the footer.

For example, three of my favorite authors have released new books:

*The Peripheral* by William Gibson

*Police* by Joe Nesbø

*The Last Kind Words Saloon* by Larry McMurtry

## Wilkie Collins

While not exactly a household name, Wilkie Collins is the father of the modern detective story. Born in London in 1824, Collins wrote *The Woman in White* (chapters of which were published monthly by Charles Dickens in his periodical *All the Year Round*) in 1860. It was our first sensational novel, and it received a very welcome reception. The Brits were obsessed with it: William Thackeray stayed up all night to finish the story; future Prime Minister William Gladstone cancelled a theater engagement to read it.

The book's overwhelming success was due in large measure to the creation of two memorable characters: the mesmerizing Napoleonic villain, Count Fosco; and the resourceful heroine, Marian Halcombe. A few critics, however, found Collins's new literary style shockingly avant-garde. Granted, his literary technique had its roots in 18th century Gothic novels, but his stories took place in everyday homes, not ancient, brooding castles. Evil didn't arise from the occult or the supernatural, it festered in the hearts of respectable people. And his tales dealt with topics like insanity and drug abuse, things a Britisher normally concealed behind correct propriety.

In 1868 Collins wrote *The Moonstone*, a well plotted, technically brilliant mystery. (Also serialized in *All the Year Round*.) Its sleuth, the innovative Sergeant Cuff, was our first fictional detective. (Even today's mystery stories occasionally have their investigators assume Cuff's quirky habits.) Collins had little use for the ostentatious piety demonstrated by his fellow Victorians, and he sincerely admired women. So much so that he lived for thirty years with a widow, Caroline Graves (the model for his 'woman in white'), while maintaining a separate household with Martha Rudd, the mother of his three children. Although Collins refused to marry either woman, he always treated both with honor and respect. (That's more than we can say for his longtime friend Charles Dickens. Although openly steadfast in his defense of the married state, Dickens left his wife (and ten children) for a younger woman.) Also, bucking the trend then in fashion, Collins treated his minority characters—such as the natives of India in *The Moonstone*—with approval and admiration. Later in life he suffered from rheumatic gout, and became addicted to the laudanum prescribed for its treatment. Wilkie Collins died in London in 1889.

-Essay by Bill Lounsbery

*KRL has the books referenced in this essay, in several formats.*