



The Suspicions of Mr. Whicher: A Shocking Murder and the Undoing of a Great Victorian Detective

By Kate Summerscale

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In June of 1860 three-year-old Saville Kent was found at the bottom of an outdoor privy with his throat slit. The crime horrified all England and led to a national obsession with detection, ironically destroying, in the process, the career of perhaps the greatest detective in the land.

At the time, the detective was a relatively new invention; there were only eight detectives in all of England and rarely were they called out of London, but this crime was so shocking, as Kate Summerscale relates in her scintillating new book, that Scotland Yard sent its best man to investigate, Inspector Jonathan Whicher.

Whicher quickly believed the unbelievable-that someone within the family was responsible for the murder of young Saville Kent. Without sufficient evidence or a confession, though, his case was circumstantial and he returned to London a broken man. Though he would be vindicated five years later, the real legacy of Jonathan Whicher lives on in fiction: the tough, quirky, knowing, and all-seeing detective that we know and love today...from the cryptic Sgt. Cuff in Wilkie Collins's *The Moonstone* to Dashiell Hammett's Sam Spade.

The Suspicions of Mr. Whicher is a provocative work of nonfiction that reads like a Victorian thriller, and in it Kate Summerscale has fashioned a brilliant, multilayered narrative that is as cleverly constructed as it is beautifully written.

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The Suspicions of Mr. Whicher: A Shocking Murder and the Undoing of a Great Victorian Detective By Kate Summerscale Bibliography

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Editorial Review

From Publishers Weekly

Starred Review. Summerscale (*The Queen of Whale Cay*) delivers a mesmerizing portrait of one of England's first detectives and the gruesome murder investigation that nearly destroyed him. In 1860, three-year-old Saville Kent was found murdered in the outdoor privy of his family's country estate. Local police scrambled for clues, but to no avail. Scotland Yard Det.-Insp. Jonathan Jack Whicher was called in and immediately suspected the unthinkable: someone in the Kent family killed Saville. Theories abounded as everyone from the nursemaid to Saville's father became a suspect. Whicher tirelessly pursued every lead and became convinced that Constance Kent, Saville's teenage half-sister, was the murderer, but with little evidence and no confession, the case went cold and Whicher returned to London, a broken man. Five years later, the killer came forward with a shocking account of the crime, leading to a sensational trial. Whicher is a fascinating hero, and readers will delight in following every lurid twist and turn in his investigation. (Apr.)

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Review

"[A] fastidious reconstruction and expansive analysis of the Road Hill murder case...Summerscale smartly uses an energetic narrative voice and a suspenseful pace, among other novelistic devices, to make her factual material read with the urgency of a work of fiction." *New York Times Book Review*

"A terrific book." *Nicholson Baker*

"A brilliant reconstruction of the obstacles facing detectives long before the advent of forensic technology." *L.A. Times Book Review*

"Not just a dark, vicious true-crime story; it is the story of the birth of forensic science, founded on the new and disturbing idea that innocent, insignificant domestic details can reveal unspeakable horrors to those who know how to read them." *Time*

"One eloquent doozy of a true-crime thriller. A-" *Entertainment Weekly*

"*The Suspicions of Mr. Whicher* combines a thumping good mystery yarn with fine social and literary history." *Fresh Air*

"This is a great biographical fiction of an interesting real life mid nineteenth century detective working a shocking homicide case." *Mysterylovers.com*

"Fascinating." *Denver Post*

"If you are a mystery lover, or if you have ever wondered how the modern love of the genre began, you'll enjoy Summerscale's tracing of the early days of the profession and the fascination it exerted...a fascinating look at Victorian life, death and detection." *Associated Press*

"In crime annals, it's right up there with the Lindbergh trial or the mystery surrounding JonBenet Ramsey: In 1860, one of Scotland Yard's finest was sent to solve the murder of a little boy at an upscale address near London. It turned out Jack Whicher's hunch was right, and his footwork fed the public imagination as well as

writers such as Charles Dickens. Sadly, failure to clinch the case in court upended Whicher's career.”
?Minneapolis Star-Tribune

“Takes you back to a specific place and time with all the imagination and skill of a top-tier historical novelist. You hang on every word, flipping pages faster than you can read them....If you like your murder mysteries wrapped up in a neat little package, this isn't the book for you. But if you're looking for a complex, intellectually stimulating thriller that will leave you breathless, well, this mystery is well worth inspecting.”
?Fairfield County Weekly

“Summerscale's clean writing makes *The Suspicions of Mr. Whicher* so dynamic that she can't be accused of "freezing" the past--instead, she has done a masterly job of reviving it, with all its curiosities and contradictions. But, most strikingly, she has created an enthralling mystery by overlaying the fictional tools of misdirection and suspense onto a nonfiction narrative that, in its day, helped inspire writers to create a new fictional genre--a strange and very impressive feat.” ?*American Scholar*

“Told and interwoven with admirable skill and definition.” ?*Bookpage*

“A bang-up sleuthing adventure.” ?*Kirkus Reviews*

“A mesmerizing portrait of one of England's first detectives and the gruesome murder investigation that nearly destroyed him...Whicher is a fascinating hero, and readers will delight in following every lurid twist and turn in his investigation.” ?*Publishers Weekly*, (starred review)

“Summerscale organizes the book like a period novel, with a denouement that suggests that full justice was never done. Erik Larson (*The Devil in the White City*) fans will be enthralled.” ?*Library Journal*

About the Author

Kate Summerscale is the former literary editor for the *Daily Telegraph* and author of *The Queen of Whale Cay*, which won the Somerset Maugham Award and was shortlisted for the Whitbread biography award. Summerscale lives in London.

Users Review

From reader reviews:

George Harvey:

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Patricia Thomas:

Information is provisions for those to get better life, information nowadays can get by anyone on everywhere. The information can be a information or any news even a concern. What people must be

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