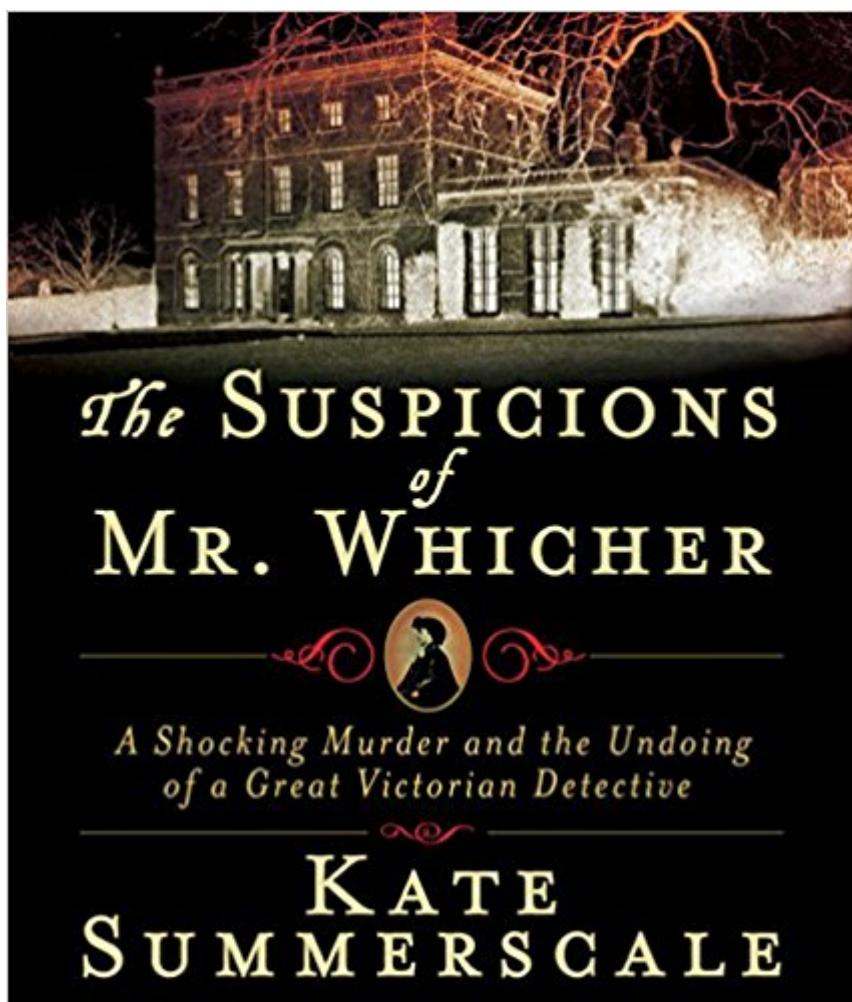


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# The Suspicions Of Mr. Whicher: Murder And The Undoing Of A Great Victorian Detective



## Synopsis

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 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 Sergeant 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 author Kate Summerscale has fashioned a brilliant, multilayered narrative that is as cleverly constructed as it is beautifully written.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

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.) Copyright © Reed Business Information, a division of Reed Elsevier Inc. All rights reserved. --This text refers to an out of print or unavailable edition of this title.

"Mesmerizing. . . . Readers will delight in following every lurid twist and turn in his investigation." •Publishers Weekly [starred review] (Kirkus Reviews)"A bang-up sleuthing adventure." •Kirkus Reviews (BookPage)"Told and interwoven with admirable skill and definition." •BookPage (Library Journal)œTransforms listeners into armchair detectives. . . . Essential for crime and mystery collections. ••Library Journal [starred review]

Excellent non-fiction book. A creepy murder and weird family, and a detective that got it right!!! The book lays out the murder and the clues set in a fascinating time period. The author explains the rise of the position of detective. This a true crime book with the first detective and lets the reader follow the whole story to the very end. Loved reading about the later years of the family and the life of Jonathan Whicher - about all involved. Highly recommended!!!! This book deserves an A++++++

In England in the early 1860s the detective, as profession and as fictional hero, was just coming into vogue. A series of sensational cases in the 1850s had captured the imagination of the British public, which, more literate than ever before, was enthralled by reports carried in an ever-increasing number of newspapers and magazines. Stories of fictional crime-solving heroics were provided by writers like Willkie Collins, further whetting the public appetite. Then, in the summer of 1860, a shocking murder took place. In a country house occupied by a wealthy family and its servants, a child was taken from its bed and brutally killed. Jonathan Whicher, one of the finest detectives of the day, was dispatched to solve the case. Mr. Whicher quickly narrowed his suspects down to one, and a huge furor broke out. Whicher was accused of jumping the gun, of publicity-seeking, and of

an unseemly arrogance. His suspect was arrested, questioned, then released, and Whicher's career came to an end in disgrace shortly thereafter. Five years later, Whicher's suspect made a surprise confession, vindicating the detective after all. Kate Summerscale has done a marvelous job of recapturing the world in which these events took place, especially in identifying elements of this true crime which influenced the writers of detective and mystery fiction over the next many years, so that the theme of a crime which takes place in an isolated location with a limited number of potential suspects remains a staple of the genre to this day. She traces the protagonists' lives far and wide and into some surprising places. Most interestingly, she points out the many inconsistencies in the final confession and indicates that there was probably much more to the story than was ever publicly told. Mystery and true crime story fans will enjoy this book, as will historians, sociologists, and anyone who likes a good, solid conundrum.

Really creative and addictive to read. Summerscale wrote in such a way as to inform on Victorian manners, especially between the "upper" class and the law, without making me feel like I was being bombarded with facts. This one definitely stuck with me. What a crime!

A fascinating description of Britain during Victorian times. The book makes references to publications describing the crime at the time and to other authors being inspired by Mr Whicher's very professional handling of the assignment. Ms Summerscale presents a clear picture of a society where rules of justice differed according to the stratum one belonged to.

This is a story of both mystery and intrigue. The author brings to life the characters and times of almost 150 years ago to a vivid reality. Any lover of crime will enjoy this book, about the tragic murder of an innocent child and the detective who seeks to solve the mystery. It also delves into the beginnings of the detective role in the British police force, and how both the judiciary and public view the role with scepticism.

My review is based on the Audio CD version: "The Suspicions of Mr. Whicher" has a lot going for it. The mystery at the center of the story is enthralling. This book is definitely a "whodunit?" A child is murdered in cold blood, with family members, servants, and strangers all suspected. There are so many possible suspects that I really had to pay close attention in the first third of the story to keep track of each character. The author introduceS the murder story line very near the beginning of the book and soon after follows it with the detective story line. She does a very good job of running both

parallel one to another. (Think similarly to Dan Brown's "The da Vinci Code," which had a parallel structure also.) The author keeps the reader moving along, jumping back and forth between the Kent family and the Detective Mr. Whicher, and the plot eventually focuses on the interaction of these characters. At times, both story lines get bogged down in too much detail. This is true about the infancy of detective work in Britain, how it developed, how the public became fascinated and then obsessed with detective work, etc. However, the author does a wonderful job of vividly describing London in the 1860s. Mr. Whicher comes off as both smart, caring, and sympathetic. When the Kent family storyline gets bogged down in detail, the family comes off as somewhat uninteresting, privileged, and lacking substance. (Not a reflection on the author, this is just my opinion of the family members.) This is true until later in the text when the father, one son, and one daughter are described in greater detail regarding the adult years of their lives. This opens up each character into broader description and into more humanity, especially the son who became a renowned scientist. The first 3/4 of the book covers a time period of about 1860-1865. About 3/4 of the way through, a main character confesses to the murder and gets incarcerated. Up to this point, the book held together tightly and listening to it was engrossing. The last 1/4, though, seemed disjointed and fragmented, covering a time period from 1865-1974. Characters that were central to the story, both family members and detectives, start to die off in rapid succession. I felt like I was looking at a broken dish on the floor: I could see all the pieces, but they no longer fit together. And while the 20th century plot is interesting, aspects of it felt like an afterthought. I do not regret buying and listening to the audio CDs, but when the last sentence was read, I was left with an unsettling "Hmmm?" in my mind. I wanted a more concrete resolution. Overall "The Suspicions of Mr. Whicher" was worth my time and money.

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