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'The most dangerous thing in England'? Detection, deviance and disability in Richard

Marsh's Judith Lee stories

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In August 1911, the *Strand Magazine* introduced its readers to Richard Marsh's latest

fictional female, a sexually and ethnically ambiguous, highly strung and startlingly

independent boundary-crosser with seemingly telepathic ability. Her first name, rather

ominously, was Judith, aligning her with a murderous Jewish femme fatale, while her

surname, Lee, suggested Gypsy heritage. Described by her enemies as a 'black-faced devil's

spawn' and 'the most dangerous thing in England', the globe-trotting, lip-reading,

multilingual martial arts expert Judith Lee has much in common with Marsh's fictional

monsters.[1] Yet she is instead a detective who uses her skills as a teacher of lip-reading to

solve criminal cases ranging from property crime to murder and espionage. Between 1911

and 1916, Lee featured in twenty-two stories, twenty of them narrated by herself and fourteen

of them appearing in George Newnes's *Strand Magazine*, with illustrations by W. R. S. Stott

and J. R. Skelton.[2] The period's foremost fiction paper, the *Strand* enjoyed a 'symbiotic

relationship' with detective fiction, which 'far outweighed any other genre in the magazine',

and Sherlock Holmes's serial adventures had appeared in it since 1891.[3] Lee's association

with the monthly is therefore significant not only because it establishes her place within the

detective canon but also because it points to changing generic boundaries and readerly values

in the early years of the twentieth century.

As Nick Freeman's essay in this volume also notes, Marsh's work evinces a thorough

familiarity with sensation fiction, a genre that issued in multiple directions by the late

nineteenth century, including supposedly conservative detective fiction, potentially

subversive Gothic and provocatively transgressive New Woman writing. Lee's adventures bridge these genres through Marsh's ambivalent construction of his protagonist as a potentially *progenerate* offspring of his earlier Gothic monsters, while also gesturing towards medico-scientific romance in their fascination with science and communication technology. The series is thus indicative of genre instability and hybridity in the popular fictions of the period. Lee is a new liminal heroine attractive not only to Marsh who, as Johan Höglund and Victoria Margree posit in their essays in this volume, struggled to side fully with the judicial system, but also to the supposedly conventional mainstream readership of magazines such as the *Strand* who eagerly consumed her adventures in the 1910s. Lee's popularity points to a middlebrow fascination with transgression and a growing acceptance of the independent woman in an era often seen as conservative in its approbation of Holmes's quest for normativity and its condemnation of suffragette campaigns. Yet Lee can be seen as both resistant to and complicit with the taxonomies commonly associated with detection: while the stories' conformist position as scientifically minded detective fiction is complicated by their apparent tolerance of transgressive identities and Lee's seemingly semi-supernatural communication skills, their very premise – Lee's expertise as a teacher of the deaf – undermines such counter-hegemonic readings because her profession aims to conceal or 'cure' a form of otherness, deafness.

A 'new detective method': Judith Lee and fin-de-siècle detective fiction

After 'Holmes-mania' gripped the reading public, Carla T. Kungl observes, 'detective-anything was guaranteed to sell', and professional writers created competing detective characters distinguished by some novelty, from detective method to the detective's gender.[4] Many of these rival detectives, such as Jacques Futrelle's Professor Van Dusen (the

'Thinking Machine') and R. Austin Freeman's Dr John Thorndyke, appear to share the reassuringly conservative ideology and superior intellectual or professional ability of their famous predecessor. Some, however, such as Guy Boothby's Simon Carne/Klimo and Arthur Morrison's Horace Dorrington, are themselves criminals, while others are constructed as curiosities: Baroness Orczy's grotesque Old Man solves crimes from the corner of a teashop, William Hope Hodgson's Carnacki hunts ghosts, Ernest Bramah's Max Carrados is blind, while Sax Rohmer's Moris Klaw investigates dreams. Nonetheless, feminist critics have tended to see the period's female detectives, including Catherine Louisa Pirkis's thirty-something spinster Loveday Brooke, Baroness Orczy's Lady Molly of the Scotland Yard, Grant Allen's New Woman misfit Lois Cayley and Fergus Hume's Gypsy pawnshop-keeper Hagar, as reactionary creations designed to 'reinforc[e] a conservative ideology' by exposing the ineptitude of professional women who refuse to stay put within the domestic sphere.[5] Kathleen Gregory Klein, for example, argues that the female detective is either 'an incompetent detective or an inadequate woman', while Patricia Craig and Mary Cadogan see fin-de-siècle female investigators as either hyper-feminine creatures whose detective success is due to their feminine intuition and knowledge of the domestic sphere, or as defeminised honorary men.[6]

Marsh was one of the writers who benefited from this detective fever. He had first ventured into the detective genre in the 1890s with his youthful aristocratic detective Augustus Champnell, but his greatest success would come with Judith Lee in the 1910s. Lee's skill-set as a lip-reading female detective rendered her unusual even in the congested market for detective fiction: as the editor of the *Strand* explained, Lee's 'new detective method', the 'fortunate … gift of reading words as they issue from people's lips', was sure to earn 'her a place apart in fiction'.[7] In some respects, her representation confirms the accepted gender politics of the female detective genre: not only is she not a professional investigator –

'I have very seldom set out,' she tells us, 'from the very beginning, with the deliberate intention of conducting an investigation' – but she frequently acts on impulse, relying on a 'sense of intuition' 'so keen' as 'to be the verge of the supernatural'.[8] She even likens herself to an 'eavesdropper' who is 'constantly being made an unintentional confidante of what were meant to be secrets'.[9] Thus, like the 'simultaneously *non-female*, *unfeminine* and *ultra-feminine*' New Woman, Lee could be seen as both too feminine (intuitive, impulsive) and not feminine enough (independent, unromantic); too joylessly professional (as a lip-reader) but not professional enough (as a detective).[10]

The stories' conservative underbelly is further exposed when they are placed alongside Holmes's investigations. The detective genre emerged out of an anxious age that witnessed the rise of the scientific profession, of statistics and the 'idea of "the norm"', and of various branches of anthropology, including cultural and racial anthropology, which facilitated imperial administration, and criminal anthropology, degeneration theory and sexology, which sought to define a desirable national stock through the classification of deviant physiques and psychologies.[11] In its investment in discourses of normativity, detective fiction is often seen as a conservative genre focused on identifying and apprehending the criminal through the detective's command of 'technologies of vision that could see further and deeper than the untrained eye'.[12] Holmes's 'deductions', while reflective of Conan Doyle's desire to inject scientific vigour into the genre, are also attempts to read physical signs left on bodies by acts of crime, neglect, work or habit. Rosemary Jann notes Holmes's reliance on 'indexical codes of body and behavior', which Stephen Knight equates with 'racist and gendered' stereotyping.[13] While, then, as Catherine Belsey observes, detective fiction attempts 'to make everything explicit, accountable, subject to scientific analysis', its 'project' is not only rationative but also eugenicist.[14]

Like Holmes, Lee uses her eyes to apprehend criminals who exhibit visible stigmata of degeneration. In 'Conscience', for example, Lee's adversary is John Tung, 'an odd-looking man, tall, slender, with something almost Mongolian in his clean-shaven, round face', and unsurprisingly this 'unusual-looking stranger' turns out to be a serial killer (p. 449); while in 'The Restaurant Napolitain', she feels repulsed by 'a short, broad, stout man, with a round, bald head and no neck', who is discovered to be a murderous Mafioso (p. 680). Lee's ability to thwart the plans of these apparent degenerates is unusually dependent on her ocular power, even for detective fiction, as she first notes the stigmata of degeneration and then reads the suspects' lips. Unlike Holmes, who 'reads' human bodies for clues, Lee, in anticipation of emergent spy fiction and later phone-tapping technologies, gets her information straight from the criminals' lips. Indeed, one enemy characterises her as 'a spy on all the world'.[15]

However, Lee's adventures reveal an ambivalence at the heart of detective fiction. As Margree observes in this volume, some subgenres of crime fiction display criminal sympathies, and the reign of the detective was perhaps not as uncontested as Holmes's popularity suggests. Indeed, Holmes owes some of his success to his eccentric personality, and many of his rivals were similarly flawed misfits whose own departures from the norm were key to their ability to fathom the mind of the criminal transgressor. Female detectives' often unconventional behaviour and qualities, and their public positioning and professional earning potential, signal a subversiveness that aligns them with their close contemporary, the New Woman, whom Sally Ledger describes as 'a fictional construct' with 'a multiple identity' as 'a feminist activist, a social reformer, a popular novelist, a suffragette playwright, a woman poet'.[16] The female detective shares not only the New Woman's social status as a young, urban, educated, financially independent middle-class woman but also her textuality, her liminality, her challenge to conventional gender roles and her appropriation of previously male territory.

Despite its interest in apprehending the criminal, therefore, detective fiction is an ambivalent genre in which the detective's affinity with the deviant is a condition of his or her success. Whereas in many detective stories this troubling affinity is seemingly erased by the detective's assured diagnosis of criminality, Lee's adventures articulate a sustained unease with notions of stable identity and visible criminality, suggesting instead that *all* identity is unstable and performed (see also Höglund's essay in this volume). Linden Peach argues that criminality is often 'associated with performance, trickery and a kind of "theatre"', and Martin A. Kayman notes the 'presence' of the 'actress' in the female detective genre.[17] Many of Lee's adventures feature characters who are able to alter their appearance, most commonly for purposes of financial gain or romantic deceit, revealing a troubling slippage between respectability and criminality. In 'The miracle', an objectionable but non-criminal spinster is described as 'tak[ing] all to pieces', the props that improve her appearance acquired through magazine advertisements and thus readily available to the *Strand*'s readers: as her mercenary fiancé explains, 'she gets her hair from one of the persons advertised on the back pages; her complexion from some wretched harridan whose advertisement is to be found a page or two in front; her figure from a person the editor specially recommends … and her teeth from the Lord knows who.'[18] Marianne Tracy, the polygamous identity-switcher of 'Matched' who is to Lee what Irene Adler is to Sherlock Holmes, marries and deserts wealthy men in various guises, her tool kit of clothing, wigs and padding serving her as a '"transformation"' that allows her to assume various identities while remaining elusively un*trace*able herself.[19] Such challenges to accepted notions of stable identity open up what Peach terms 'a cultural space in which passive femininity may be reconfigured'.[20] The criminals' transgressive and mutable bodies signal an unease with degeneration theory's quest for recognisable, unalterable physical stigmata, positing instead a notion of identity as performance.

This performativity is extended to Lee herself. As Peach notes, the detective is often so closely aligned with the criminal that 'the detective's body is itself "criminalised"'.[21] In '"Uncle Jack"', Lee dons a disguise while tracking a group of swindlers. 'It is simply amazing what an alteration is produced in a woman's appearance by a change of hair,' she remarks.[22] In addition to her red wig she 'touche[s] [her] countenance here and there' and 'attire[s] [her]self in [her] most gorgeous robe', only to attract the criminals' attention as 'rather a fine girl' (pp. 557, 560). At the story's climax, Lee 'remove[s] the scarlet transformation' and announces her true identity to the hitherto 'unobservant eyes' of the criminals (pp. 565–6). This adeptness at disguise aligns Lee with the criminal underworld she is engaged in challenging and destabilises any notion of an unalterable, always-detectable identity, subverting the very principles of detective fiction and instead recalling the alterity of Marsh's most famous female character, the Beetle.

A 'black-faced beauty': Lee's otherness

Judith Halberstam reads the Gothic monster as 'an aggregate of race, class, and gender', a conglomeration of threatening traits 'condense[d] … into one body'.[23] Lee, though a detective, is also such an aggregate, a liminal figure dwelling on the borderlines of the proper and the subversive, but one in whom the phobic taxonomies of Marsh's earlier Gothic writing take an essentially positive turn. Such doubling of the detective and the monster reveals the shared roots of detective fiction and the Gothic in the sensation novel of the 1860s, which itself drew on earlier Gothic, Newgate and penny fiction.

Lee's adventures witness her development from a prepubescent girl to a young professional. From the beginning of the series, she is a curiously independent and restless character whose first-person voice affords her narrative control. While Lee's class position

appears relatively privileged, her gender identity is ambiguous. 'The man who cut off my hair', the first story in the series, situates the origins of Lee's detective career in the 'rage' and 'fury' she feels towards two burglars who brutally cut off her hair, the *Strand*'s illustration of this 'outrage' (figure 4.1) emphasising her anger rather than fear at this 'symbolic rape' that, as Joseph Kestner notes, bears a close resemblance to Marjorie Lindon's experience in *The Beetle*.[24] Unlike the permanently traumatised would-be investigator Marjorie, the thirteen-year-old Lee overcomes her ordeal swiftly enough to rush to London to apprehend the criminals. As she puts it herself, she has 'seldom been afraid of anything', and later stories confirm her ability to recover, indeed to defend herself (p. 218). In 'The Restaurant Napolitain', Lee traces Sicilian mafiosi to a Soho restaurant, where she teams up with an Italian girl to confront the killers (figure 4.2). In 'Isolda' and 'Mandragora', she shows her attackers 'what an extremely ugly customer a woman can be' by displaying her skills in 'jiu-jitsu – the Japanese art of self-defence'.[25] 'I am a woman,' she declares in 'Mandragora', 'but no weakling. I have always felt it my duty to keep my body in proper condition, trying to learn all that physical culture can teach me' (p. 186). In a reversal of the stock Gothic plot, Lee refuses victimhood, assuming instead the persona of the crime-busting urban detective. The stories set Lee's unconventional behaviour against the seemingly ladylike decorum of criminal women, prising open a discursive space for a reassessment of acceptable femininity. Lee's professional dedication, fearlessness, vitality, skill in self-defence and public positioning align her with the period's masculine rather than its feminine ideals, and she conspicuously avoids romance, vowing '[n]ever, never, never' to marry and at one point deploring a suitor's 'preposterous notion' that she was in love with him.[26] Yet her winning first-person voice secures readers' approval for her unconventional behaviour.

[FIGURE 4.1]
W. R. S. Stott, '"He got hold of my hair, and with that dreadful knife sawed the whole of it from my head."' Illustration, 'The man who cut off my hair', *Strand*, 42 (August 1911), 217.
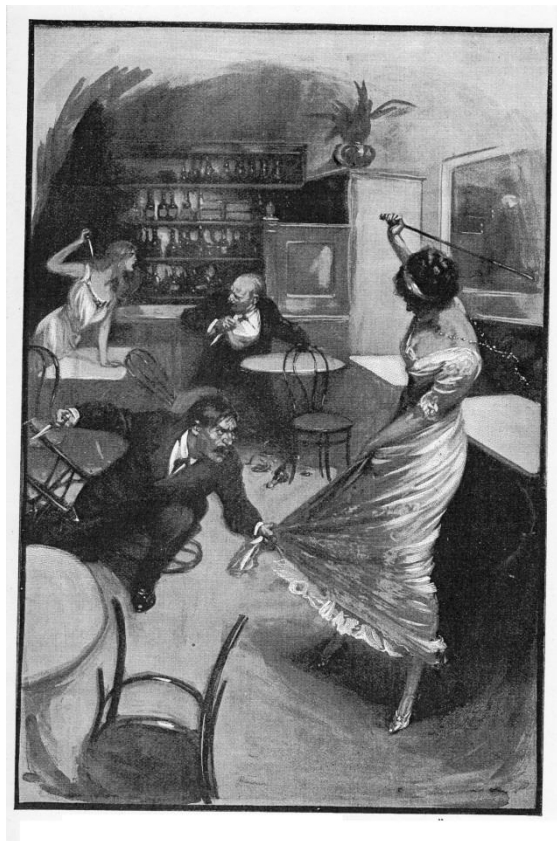
[FIGURE 4.2]
J. R. Skelton, '"I lifted the poker and struck him again and again."' Illustration, 'The Restaurant Napolitain', *Strand*, 43 (June 1912), 689.

Instead of heterosexual romance, Lee is repeatedly attracted to young women. In 'The miracle', she falls 'in love … at sight' with Margery Stainer, 'quite the prettiest girl [she] had seen for ages, with a face … which had character and strength, as well as being good to look at' (p. 742); the eponymous Lady Beatrice strikes her as 'one of the most beautiful girls [she] had ever seen' (p. 74); and in 'The Restaurant Napolitain' she describes her Italian companion as 'an extremely pretty, fair-haired girl', noting that '[w]hen an Italian girl has fair hair she is nearly always worth looking at – this one was lovely' (p. 680). While short of expressing overt same-sex desire, these raptures at feminine beauty, coupled with Lee's rejection of masculine attentions, hint at lesbianism, by then pathologised as deviant and, indeed, represented as monstrous in *The Beetle*. In the Lee stories, the question of sexual orientation is left unresolved despite the detective genre's supposed hostility to uncertainty. Instead, Lee's ambiguous sexuality, negative response to matrimony and dedication to her career align her with the New Woman, who similarly refuted the ideal of marriage as woman's true profession. Indeed, Lee's self-reliance, her dedication to her work and the international recognition of her abilities make her a fitting role model for an aspiring female readership.

Residing in affluent Chelsea and making frequent use of the West End's cultural facilities, Lee is inextricably connected to London. Her forays into London's public spaces are, of course, opportunities for her to *see* things. This privileged urban spectatorship from a distance characterises not only the detective but also the *flâneur*, a spectator of the sights of the city who in fin-de-siècle Gothic fictions such as *Dracula*, *Strange Case of Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde* and *The Picture of Dorian Gray* assumes a predatory form. Lee combines the *flâneur*'s voyeurism with what Ana Parejo Vadillo characterises as the New Woman's use of 'mass transport to enter, enjoy, and critically observe the public sphere'.[27] Women, Vadillo posits, used public transport, available to both sexes and all classes and thus 'connected with

democracy and transgression', 'as an optical apparatus' that enabled them to study London's

geographical and social strata so that public transport became a veritable 'female school of

the visual … the place where women learned how to look'.[28] However, in many New Woman

fictions, Patricia Murphy argues, the 'disturbingly illegible' 'labyrinth of London' represents

'sexual menace' to the New Woman who is forbidden by rules of gendered conduct from

'wielding the gaze'.[29] Far from displaying the profound anxiety of such fictions, Lee is

admirably poised to negotiate the 'babel' of London because of her linguistic ability (Italian,

French, German and Sign are mentioned) and her cosmopolitan sympathies.[30] Her most

characteristic setting is the railway, a transitory space 'crowded with that miscellaneous

assemblage which is the peculiarity of such places', and the liminal, semi-private space of the

first-class compartment features repeatedly as the site of her detective encounters.[31]

Significantly, Lee shares this association with London and its transport network with the

Beetle, whom Julian Wolfreys terms 'the most typical London inhabitant' because of its

hybrid identity.[32]

Indeed, the small and dark Lee is not only multilingual and cosmopolitan: she is also

nomadic. In her reading of the poetry of Amy Levy, Vadillo argues that urban mobility could

evoke not only 'cultural modernity' but also diasporic 'racial identity'.[33] Lee's ethnicity is

ambiguous but her rootlessness spotlights her affinity with the diasporic communities of Jews

and Gypsies, both subject to xenophobic prejudice in the nineteenth century as itinerant

agents of reverse colonisation.[34] In 'Curare', she lays claim to Gypsy roots by informing her

audience that 'the Lees are the greatest family of gipsies in England, perhaps in the world –

the purest Romanies still surviving are Lees'.[35] Where 'Curare' plays on Gypsies' romantic

associations with performance, palmistry and spiritualism, in 'Eavesdropping at Interlaken'

Lee is, seemingly inexplicably, accused of theft, a charge that only makes sense in the context

of the common perception of Gypsies as thieves.[36] Nonetheless, Lee's Gypsy heritage is

never securely established, and her first name 'Judith' in fact aligns her with the similarly diasporic but urban and professional Jewish community.[37] The biblical Judith, a common figure in fin-de-siècle art, is simultaneously a seductress, freedom-fighter and murderer, embodying the 'incoherence' and 'doubleness' that Bryan Cheyette associates with discursive constructions of Jews, who 'were at the centre of European metropolitan society and, at the same time, banished from its privileged sphere by a semitic discourse'.[38] Like her biblical namesake, Lee is just such 'an internal other', an alien dwelling amidst English culture, simultaneously integral to its functioning and a foreign presence.[39]

Lee's darkness and possible ethnic otherness render her liable to derogatory remarks and xenophobic encounters. In Marsh's earlier Gothic fictions, the sticky ends of ethnically ambiguous and sexually transgressive women had been narrated by eugenicist heroes and traumatised victims. By contrast, while Lee may be described derogatively as a 'half-bred gipsy-looking creature' and a 'black-faced beauty', she is the likeable narrator of her own adventures, and we thus experience xenophobic prejudice from her perspective.[40] As a number of essays in this collection note, Marsh's fictions often implode dominant discourses, confronting readers with an unsettling 'discursive discord'.[41] Ironically, given the period's eugenicist prejudices against undesirable aliens and non-reproductive urban sexualities, Marsh's crime-fighter embodies the very devious, degenerate or monstrous elements that supposedly threatened the national stock in the years preceding the First World War.

'What do you take me for …? A professional detective, or what? I am a teacher of the deaf and dumb': lip-reading and disability

Beginning with 'The man who cut off my hair', Lee repeatedly reminds her audience that her primary business is the teaching of lip-reading:

I am a teacher of the deaf and dumb. I teach them by what is called the oral system –
that is, the lip-reading system. When people pronounce a word correctly they all make
exactly the same movements with their lips, so that, without hearing a sound, you
only have to watch them very closely to know what they are saying. (p. 215)

Lee is one of the period's many 'scientific detectives' who relies on 'specialised knowledge,
technology and method'.[42] As an activity that demands the piecing together of partial visual
evidence – for Oliver Sacks a 'complex art of observation, inference, and inspired
guesswork' – lip-reading bears some similarities to detective work.[43] Lee, however,
emphatically denies being a 'professional detective':

I am a teacher of the deaf and dumb; I take the profoundest interest in my profession.
My interests in it are so wide that they occupy all my time. I pass not only from city to
city, but from country to country, engaged … in a perpetual propaganda. Last month I
was in Madeira, last week in Paris; next month I go to New York, then to Chicago –
instructing people how to teach the dumb to speak.[44]

Her professional standing as an expert educator is established in the series by references to
her teaching, desk work and conference attendance. In 'Two words', she is invited to attend
an 'exciting' international conference in Berlin, while in '"Auld Lang Syne"' and 'The
Restaurant Napolitain' we hear about her assistance in setting up 'institution[s] for the
education of deaf-mutes' in Prussia and Italy.[45]

Lee could, then, be seen as an admirable model of twentieth-century professional
femininity: a woman whose hard work has provided her with financial independence, a

comfortable lifestyle and professional recognition. As Lennard J. Davis notes, finding one's voice carries notably positive connotations of personal and political agency and full subjecthood, whereas 'silence' suggests a lack of 'humanity' and 'a form of political repression'.[46] Lee's role as a restorer or provider of speech to the previously mute could, therefore, be linked to her potential New Woman status, while enabling the deaf to 'pass as hearing' again spotlights the performativity of identity central to the series.[47] However, this positive assessment of Lee's professionalism is somewhat undermined by her employment as 'some governess kind of creature', as one commentator derogatively puts it in '"Uncle Jack"' (p. 558). Lee's at times residential role questions her apparent independence, associating her with the class limbo and poor pay of governessing, one of the few employments traditionally available to middle-class women. Marsh's fictions frequently evince an awareness of women's difficult economic position, and deaf education, particularly the time-consuming one-to-one tutoring involved in teaching the oral system, was largely a task passed onto women, who were supposedly more patient and certainly more cost-effective than male teachers.[48] Lee's professional success could also be seen to be undermined by her passing references to nervous strain caused by overwork, with many of her seaside holidays necessitated by near-exhaustion. 'Conscience' is one of many stories in which she tells us that she has been so thoroughly 'occupied' with her work that she has 'nearly broken down' (p. 451). In 'Lady Beatrice', she reluctantly assists a friend while 'nearly overwhelmed by the work which had come crowding in on [her], demanding [her] immediate attention' (p. 84). While, then, Lee's narrative emphasises her professional authority and comfortable lifestyle, this nervous fragility questions her ability to shoulder her responsibilities. Such doubts over women's capacity for brainwork were used at the time to attempt to stall the tide of women's higher education, with medical men claiming that the delicate balance of energies within the

female body would be disturbed by over-exercise of the brain.[49] Ironically, then, Lee's nervous strain could be used to argue *against* the education of girls.

The patriarchal dynamics of Lee's profession are further emphasised by the 'hereditary' and patrilineal nature of her lip-reading ability, as revealed in 'The man who cut off my hair':

> My father was a teacher of the deaf and dumb – a very successful one. His father was … one of the originators of the oral system. My mother, when she was first married, had an impediment in her speech which practically made her dumb; though she was stone deaf, she became so expert at lip-reading that she could not only tell what others were saying, but she could speak herself. (p. 215)

As Carol Thomas notes, 'disability is always gendered.'[50] In Lee's account, speech therapy passes down the male line (with Lee herself a potentially defeminised figure), while deafness and voicelessness are associated with femininity. While, then, Lee teaches silent women to speak, she uses a method associated with a dominant social group, men.

Lee's expertise in teaching the 'oral system' should be situated within a wider debate on deaf education. The eighteenth century had witnessed the establishment of schools for the deaf, using Sign, but in the mid-nineteenth century the very success of these schools led to a radical rethinking of deaf education, as a distinct Deaf community began to emerge.[51] In a 'Darwinist and eugenicist' climate, scientists argued that the creation of Deaf linguistic communities could lead to the development of a Deaf variety of humankind.[52] This could be avoided by the abolition of Sign as a method of instruction and the enforcement of orality in deaf education. As a gestural means of expression, Sign was seen as inferior to 'highly-evolved' spoken languages, and educators argued that the '"deaf-and-dumb"' person using Sign was not only mute but also unintelligent, an '"oral failure"' who could not integrate into

'normal' (hearing) communities.[53] Following the International Congress of Educators of the Deaf in Milan in 1880, deaf education increasingly enforced 'pure oralism', a system that is unnatural to the congenitally deaf.[54] These 'normalizing strategies', Jan Branson and Donald Miller observe, 'ensured … the ongoing cultural construction of deaf people … as "disabled"'.[55] The system in which Lee is an expert is therefore complicit in 'linguistic imperialism' – or, as Davis chillingly argues, in 'a political attempt to erase an ethnic group', the Deaf, 'defined by language difference'.[56] Intriguingly given Lee's contested ethnicity, the Deaf community could be seen as another distinct 'ethnic group in the midst of the nation' that was increasingly construed as alien and degenerate.[57] While, then, Lee's character has the potential to unsettle conventional binaries, her professional activities as lip-reader and detective reinforce them, investing the series with a profound ideological ambivalence.

For Davis, disability, like other forms of socially constructed deviance, is a means of 'regulation of the body' in keeping with the 'concept of normalcy'.[58] The deviant, abnormal, disabled body is feared as the 'unknown' and 'rarely centrally represented' in literature.[59] Indeed, one of the few literary genres to give disabled bodies visibility is Gothic, which abounds with deformed monsters: one could think of the powerfully liminal, grotesque bodies of the Beetle or *The Joss*'s Benjamin Batters, for example. The Lee stories, while confirming Jennifer Esmail's assessment of 'the relative absence' or even 'effacement' of deaf characters in the fiction of the period, do provide at least one positive depiction of a deaf pupil, Netta Hastings, in '"Uncle Jack"': 'extremely intelligent … and by no means ill-looking', the congenitally deaf Netta 'could speak quite well when she chose – although she had never heard a sound in her life' – but uses Sign 'for convenience' sake' to communicate secrets (p. 554).[60] Although this brief mention hardly puts the deaf character in a narrative driving seat, it nonetheless represents deafness as *enabling* in giving Netta an additional means of communication rather than focusing on her impairment. The series could thus be seen as

creating a discursive opening for the discussion of disability in popular fiction; indeed, the *Strand* ran a feature on lip-reading in conjunction with Lee's adventures.[61] This assessment is supported by the fact that reading is, for most, a silent activity – as Davis puts it, 'readers are deaf' – and reading thus temporarily places the reader in the silent world of the deaf.[62]

'Unexpected messages': science and the supernatural

The advocates of the oral system saw themselves as progressives bestowing the gift of communication on the deaf.[63] Lee's ability as a lip-reader and speech therapist is intricately connected to her use of the latest communication technologies, and the stories arguably owed some of their success to the multiple ways in which Marsh harnessed his readers' interest in science and modes of sound and communication technology. The criminals Lee encounters use noticeably innovative methods, attempting murder by bombs concealed in chocolates, disposing of corpses through medical dissection, distributing photographs of Lee worldwide, hypnotising victims to commit daring thefts and compressing time and distance by aerial flight. Indeed, Lee's primary identity as a lip-reader provides her investigations with a scientific rigour that would have appealed to the *Strand*'s technologically minded readership.

However, this fascination with science also enables a reading of the series as an early type of science fiction, understood not so much in keeping with Darko Suvin's influential notion of cognitive estrangement but as 'a *popular* genre' exploring the possibilities of modern science and with a 'grounding … in the material rather than the supernatural'.[64] Science fiction, Roger Luckhurst explains, 'is a literature of technologically saturated societies' that explores 'the impact of Mechanism … on cultural life and human subjectivity' and 'shades into horror or Gothic'.[65] The conditions for the genre's development, Luckhurst argues, only emerged in the late nineteenth century and are also partly the conditions that

enabled Marsh's success: 'mass literacy; new print vectors; a coherent ideology and emergent profession of science; everyday experience transformed by machines and mechanical processes.'[66] Among the inventions of the period were various types of sound technology and electric innovation: the telephone, the phonograph, the microphone, electric lighting, electric trams, steam-driven omnibuses, the X-ray and wireless telegraphy (see also essays by Freeman and Hultgren).[67] These 'technologies of action at a distance', Robert MacDougall observes, inspired both 'enthusiasm and unease' by appearing to 'alter spatial categories and boundaries', challenging social boundaries of gender and class.[68] Lee makes frequent use of these teletechnologies during her adventures, her ability to 'hear' or 'see' speech across distance matched by her use of the telephone and the telegram to communicate 'unexpected message[s]' to the police, the intended victims of crime or unsuspecting criminals.[69] These technologies function as extensions of her ability to hear remotely, enabling her to reach a listener without revealing her person. In relying on what April Middlejans terms 'an imbalance of power between caller and answerer', her use of teletechnologies is subversive: since 'caller hegemony' typically rests with the male caller, Lee's confidence with teletechnologies troubles what MacDougall describes as the period's 'equation of technological mastery and masculinity'.[70]

As Luckhurst notes, turn-of-the-century culture was not only 'anxious' but was also characterised by *excitement* about the possibilities technological advance provided for 'a utopian future in technology, science, and human sensitivity'.[71] Communication technologies, Mara Mills observes, were seen as 'prosthetics that augment human sensory capabilities' in ways that seemed bordering on the supernatural.[72] With their ability to bridge distances, sound technologies appeared 'uncanny, otherworldly', even 'haunted', overlapping with the psychic phenomena investigated by the scientists who in 1882 founded the Society for Psychical Research.[73] The SPR, too, took an interest in otherworldly communications,

coining the word 'telepathy' to suggest 'an oxymoronic distant (*tele-*) intimacy or touch (*pathos*)'.[74] While the links between science, speech therapy, telecommunications, psychical research and pseudo-scientific degeneration theory may now seem far-fetched, turn-of-the-century scientists were preoccupied by the 'proleptic *promise*' of 'an electrical future' and of 'previously inconceivable forms of interpersonal connection'.[75] A particularly striking example is provided by Alexander Graham Bell, one of the period's leading scientists, who began his career as a speech therapist, lectured against the intermarriage of the deaf, invented the telephone, dabbled in spiritualism and had a deaf mother and wife who both denied their condition.[76]

Women were seen as particularly sensitive conduits for the reception of psychic messages.[77] Lee's nervous fragility points to this supposed feminine psychic hypersensitivity. While Lee may put her lip-reading down to practice, she also describes her 'curious gift' or 'power' as 'equivalent to another sense', 'border[ing] on the marvellous' or the 'supernatural'.[78] Her friends and adversaries see her as 'some strange and amazing thing', 'a miracle-worker' who wields 'a very uncanny power' and practises 'strange magic'.[79] In 'The Barnes mystery', she teasingly describes herself as 'a thought-reader' who is able to know people's minds 'without hearing' (p. 410). If her lip-reading equates to telepathy, then her eerie telephonic voice appears disembodied. In 'Curare', Lee takes advantage of this perception of her as 'a witch, a magician, a kind of hereditary dealer in magic and spells' and 'a repository of Romany wisdom' by staging a hoax spiritualist séance to stall attempted murder, 'produc[ing] some very singular results' during a table-turning session at which she calls on 'spirits' to answer her questions (pp. 60–1). Indeed, Lee's fake séance but real ability to read people's 'thoughts' are contrasted with the 'tawdry' and 'silly' tricks of bogus palmists such as the eponymous 'fortune-telling Johnny, chiromancer, palmist' Isolda, 'a tall, narrow-chested, thin-faced, large-lipped, big-eyed, long-haired, dandified individual' whom

Lee suspects of 'freely us[ing] perfume', and the 'disreputable' and 'fool-snaring' palmist Clarice in 'Lady Beatrice'.[80]

While Lee exposes dubious practitioners in the uncanny as hoaxers, her ocular power again aligns her with Marsh's previous mesmerist figures including the Beetle and *The House of Mystery*'s Svengali-like Aaron Lazarus, with Gypsies, who were traditionally associated with palmistry and fortune-telling, and with Jews, who were seen as 'odious alien fixer[s]' capable of unsettling stable identities with their 'piercing', 'intense' and 'hypnotic' gaze.[81] As Daniel Pick notes, the 'evil eye had long been associated with the Jews', although the doubled perception of the Jew as 'healer and killer' led to uncertainty over whether Jews were 'benign or malign'.[82] Despite her ambivalence, Lee is undoubtedly a benign figure. Indeed, the association of psychic phenomena and hypersensitivity as 'markers of evolutionary *advance*, rather than symptoms of reversion', enables us to read Lee as a *pro*generate woman of the future.[83] Science and the supernatural, teletechnologies and psychic communications, degeneracy and progeneracy are two sides of the same coin in the Lee stories, which repeatedly trouble accepted binaries and boundaries.

Conclusion: 'the most dangerous thing in England'?

The Judith Lee stories' persistent troubling of accepted binary oppositions of identity and of genre speaks powerfully to the 'discursive discord' that characterises Marsh's oeuvre, and which he articulated with growing confidence towards the end of his life.[84] Lee's adventures show how early-twentieth-century popular fiction made use of, and synthesised, seemingly disparate discursive frameworks drawing on criminology, eugenics, science, communications technology and psychical research. However, the voice of the independent, multilingual jiu-jitsu expert Lee, a cosmopolitan *flanêuse* equally at home in high society and the slum,

disturbs accepted notions of gender, class, ethnicity, criminality and disability. The series repeatedly introduces binary oppositions between acceptable and transgressive femininity, Englishness and Otherness, able-bodiedness and disability, degeneracy and progeneracy, science and the supernatural, only to challenge and unsettle them. Lee's first-person narrative creates a positive perception of her not as the 'most dangerous thing in England' but as an internal other crucial to the success of Britain's domestic and international project. The stories could therefore be read as indicative of an urban readership's gradual acceptance of the professional woman – even one as unconventional as Judith Lee.

That the hybrid, the non-normative, even the subversive should have found favour with the readers of a middlebrow magazine such as the *Strand* suggests that an ideological shift was in process amongst the consumers of early-twentieth-century popular fiction. At first sight examples of the female detective genre, Lee's adventures persistently undermine genre boundaries. Lee's insistence on her primary occupation as a teacher of the deaf-mute spotlights the stories' medico-scientific credentials; her liminality and alterity borrow from the Gothic mode; and her gender politics could be read as representative of New Woman fiction. The series thus offers a powerful example of the cross-fertilisation of seemingly mutually contradictory popular genres, which nonetheless had shared roots in 1860s sensation fiction, in the early twentieth century. Not only should such generic hybridity caution against the attribution of a simple ideological agenda to any particular genre, it also indicates the inadequacy of approaching the period's fictions through the conventional high–popular cultural divide.

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[1] R. Marsh, 'The Restaurant Napolitain', *Strand*, 42 (October 1911), 680–90 (p. 687); subsequent references to this story are given in the text. 'The Finchley puzzle', in *The Adventures of Judith Lee* (London: Methuen, 1916), pp. 108–43 (p. 113).

[2] Of Lee's twenty-two cases, eleven deal with property crime and eleven with violent crime. Of the property-crime cases, five are to do with theft and burglary and the remaining six with fraud and swindling. Three murder cases are centred on Lee's scrapes with international crime – anarchism, spies and mafia – and the remaining eight stories feature various types of murder or attempted murder. Lee also featured in two short story collections published by Methuen: *Judith Lee: Some Pages from her Life* (1912) and *The Adventures of Judith Lee* (1916).

[3] C. Pittard, '"Cheap, healthful literature": *The Strand Magazine*, fictions of crime, and purified reading communities', *Victorian Periodicals Review*, 40:1 (2007), 1–23 (pp. 4–5).

[4] C. T. Kungl, *Creating the Fictional Female Detective: The Sleuth Heroines of British Women Writers, 1890–1940* (Jefferson, NC and London: McFarland, 2006), p. 2.

[5] K. G. Klein, *The Woman Detective: Gender & Genre*, 2nd edn (Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1995), p. 72.

[6] Klein, *Woman Detective*, p. 5; P. Craig and M. Cadogan, *The Lady Investigates: Women Detectives and Spies in Fiction* (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 1986), p. 12.

[7] Editorial comments, *Strand*, 42 (August 1911), 215; *Strand*, 42 (October 1911), 449.

[8] Marsh, 'Lady Beatrice', in *Adventures of Judith Lee*, pp. 74–107 (p. 77); subsequent references to this story are given in the text. 'On two trains', in *Adventures of Judith Lee*, pp. 271–314 (p. 283).

[9] Marsh, 'Eavesdropping at Interlaken', *Strand*, 42 (September 1911), 292–304 (p. 292); 'Conscience', *Strand*, 42 (October 1911), 449–60 (p. 449); subsequent references to this story are given in the text.

[10] L. Pykett, *The 'Improper' Feminine: The Women's Sensation Novel and the New Woman Writing* (London and New York: Routledge, 1992), p. 140. Emphasis in the original.

[11] L. J. Davis, *Enforcing Normalcy: Disability, Deafness and the Body* (London and New York: Verso, 1995), p. 24.

[12] Pittard, '"Cheap, healthful literature"', p. 10.

[13] R. Jann, 'Sherlock Holmes codes the social body', *English Literary History*, 57:3 (1990), 685–708 (p. 686); S. Knight, *Crime Fiction 1800–2000* (Houndmills: Palgrave, 2004), p. 61.

[14] C. Belsey, *Critical Practice* (London and New York: Methuen, 1980), p. 111.

[15] Marsh, 'My partner for a waltz', in *Adventures of Judith Lee*, pp. 1–38 (p. 2).

[16] S. Ledger, *The New Woman: Fiction and Feminism at the Fin de Siècle* (Manchester and New York: Manchester University Press, 1997), p. 1.

[17] L. Peach, *Masquerade, Crime and Fiction: Criminal Deceptions* (Houndmills: Palgrave, 2006), p. 2; M. A. Kayman, 'The short story from Poe to Chesterton', in M. Priestman (ed.), *The Cambridge Companion to Crime Fiction* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), pp. 41–58 (p. 52).

[18] Marsh, 'The miracle', *Strand*, 42 (December 1911), 735–48 (p. 737); subsequent references to this story are given in the text.

[19] Marsh, 'Matched', *Strand*, 42 (November 1911), 482–94 (p. 490).

[20] Peach, *Masquerade*, p. 29.

[21] Peach, *Masquerade*, pp. 2, 10.

[22] Marsh, '"Uncle Jack"', *Strand*, 43 (May 1912), 554–66 (p. 557); subsequent references to this story are given in the text.

[23] J. Halberstam, 'Technologies of monstrosity: Bram Stoker's *Dracula*', *Victorian Studies*, 36:3 (1993), 333–52 (p. 334).

[24] Marsh, 'The man who cut off my hair', *Strand*, 42 (August 1911), 215–24 (pp. 218, 220); subsequent references to this story are given in the text. J. A. Kestner, *Sherlock's Sisters: The British Female Detective, 1864–1913* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2003), pp. 199, 210–11.

[25] Marsh, 'Isolda', *Strand*, 43 (March 1912), 242–54 (p. 252); 'Mandragora', *Strand*, 44 (August 1912), 176–86 (p. 186); subsequent references to this story are given in the text.

[26] Marsh, 'Miracle', p. 748; '"Uncle Jack"', p. 566.

[27] A. P. Vadillo, 'Phenomena in flux: the aesthetics and politics of traveling in modernity', in A. L. Ardis and L. W. Lewis (eds), *Women's Experience of Modernity, 1875–1945* (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2003), pp. 205–20 (p. 210).

[28] Vadillo, 'Phenomena in flux', pp. 209–11.

[29] P. Murphy, *The New Woman Gothic: Reconfigurations of Distress* (Columbia, Missouri: University of Missouri Press, 2015), pp. 105–28 (pp. 112, 110, 114).

[30] Marsh, '"Auld Lang Syne"', *Strand*, 43 (January 1912), 3–13 (p. 5).

[31] Marsh, 'Mandragora', p. 176.

[32] J. Wolfreys, 'The hieroglyphic other: *The Beetle*, London, and the abyssal subject', in L. Phillips (ed.), *A Mighty Mass of Brick and Smoke: Victorian and Edwardian Representations of London* (Amsterdam and New York: Rodopi, 2007), pp. 169–92 (p. 181).

[33] A. P. Vadillo, *Women Poets and Urban Aestheticism: Passengers of Modernity* (Houndmills: Palgrave, 2005), p. 43.

[34] A. R. Bardi, 'The Gypsy as Trope in Victorian and Modern British Literature' (PhD thesis, University of Maryland, College Park, 2007), pp. 4–5, 10; D. E. Nord, *Gypsies and the British Imagination, 1807–1930* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2006), pp. 5–6. On xenophobia, see M. Tromp, M. K. Bachman and H. Kaufman (eds), *Fear, Loathing and Victorian Xenophobia* (Columbus, Ohio: Ohio State University Press, 2013).

[35] Marsh, 'Curare', in *Adventures of Judith Lee*, pp. 39–73 (p. 60); subsequent references to this story are given in the text.

[36] Bardi, 'Gypsy as Trope', p. 15.

[37] Nord, *Gypsies and the British Imagination*, p. 6.

[38] B. Cheyette, *Constructions of 'the Jew' in English Literature and Society: Racial Representations, 1875–1945* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), pp. 9, 12.

[39] Nord, *Gypsies and the British Imagination*, p. 3.

[40] Marsh, 'Conscience', p. 460; 'Restaurant Napolitain', p. 687.

[41] J. Höglund, 'Black Englishness and concurrent voices in Richard Marsh's *The Surprising Husband*', *English Literature in Transition*, 56:3 (2013), 275–91 (p. 277).

[42] Kayman, 'Short story', pp. 46–7.

[43] O. Sacks, *Seeing Voices: A Journey into the World of the Deaf* (1989; London: Picador, 1991), p. 2n4; E. Godfrey, *Femininity, Crime and Self-Defence in Victorian Literature and Society: From Dagger Fans to Suffragettes* (Houndmills: Palgrave, 2012), p. 138; Kungl, *Fictional Female Detective*, p. 3.

[44] Marsh, 'Two words', in *Adventures of Judith Lee*, pp. 144–79 (p. 146).

[45] Marsh, 'Two words', p. 151; '"Auld Lang Syne"', p. 8.

[46] Davis, *Enforcing Normalcy*, p. 109.

[47] R. A. R. Edwards, *Words Made Flesh: Nineteenth-Century Deaf Education and the Growth of Deaf Culture* (New York: New York University Press, 2012), p. 184.

[48] Edwards, *Words Made Flesh*, p. 195.

[49] Murphy, *New Woman Gothic*, p. 174.

[50] C. Thomas, *Female Forms: Experiencing and Understanding Disability* (Buckingham and Philadelphia: Open University Press, 1999), p. 84.

[51] 'Deafness' has been capitalised here to indicate a distinct community, as opposed to 'deafness', a sensory impairment.

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about of the 'tendency among deaf-mutes to select deaf-mutes as their partners in marriage' (quoted in Davis, *Enforcing Normalcy*, p. 32).

53 Sacks, *Seeing Voices*, p. 9; Edwards, *Words Made Flesh*, p. 168.

54 J. Branson and D. Miller, *Damned for their Difference: The Cultural Construction of Deaf People as 'Disabled': A Sociological History* (Washington, D. C.: Gallaudet University Press, 2002), p. 145; Sacks, *Seeing Voices*, pp. 27, 30.

55 Branson and Miller, *Damned for their Difference*, p. 122.

56 Branson and Miller, *Damned for their Difference*, p. 124; Davis, *Enforcing Normalcy*, pp. 84, 78.

57 Davis, *Enforcing Normalcy*, p. 83.

58 Davis, *Enforcing Normalcy*, pp. 2–3.

59 C. Barnes, 'A legacy of oppression: a history of disability in western culture', in L. Barton and M. Oliver (eds), *Disability Studies: Past, Present and Future* (Leeds: Disability Press, 1997), pp. 3–24 (p. 4); Davis, *Enforcing Normalcy*, p. 41.

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61 C. Sibley Haycock, 'Lip-reading: the art of Judith Lee', *Strand*, 43 (January 1912), 14–19.

62 Davis, *Enforcing Normalcy*, p. 4.

63 Sacks, *Seeing Voices*, p. 26.

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65 R. Luckhurst, *Science Fiction* (Cambridge: Polity, 2005), pp. 3, 5.

66 Luckhurst, *Science Fiction*, p. 29.

[67] Luckhurst, *Science Fiction*, p. 25.

[68] R. MacDougall, 'The wire devils: pulp thrillers, the telephone, and action at a distance in the wiring of a nation', *American Quarterly*, 58:3 (2006), 715–41 (pp. 716, 718).

[69] Marsh, 'Conscience', p. 457.

[70] A. Middlejans, 'On the wire with death and desire: the telephone and lovers' discourse in the short stories of Dorothy Parker', *Arizona Quarterly*, 62:4 (2006), 47–70 (pp. 48, 55); MacDougall, 'Wire devils', p. 722.

[71] R. Luckhurst, *The Invention of Telepathy, 1870–1901* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), p. 5.

[72] M. Mills, 'Media and prosthesis: the vocoder, the artificial larynx, and the history of signal processing', *Qui Parle*, 21:1 (2012), 107–49 (p. 124).

[73] N. Yablon, 'Echoes of the city: spacing sound, sounding space, 1888–1916', *American Literary History*, 19:3 (2007), 629–60 (p. 641); Luckhurst, *Science Fiction*, p. 27.

[74] Luckhurst, *Invention of Telepathy*, p. 1.

[75] Luckhurst, *Science Fiction*, p. 26; emphasis in the original. J. N. Galvan, *Sympathetic Medium: Feminine Channelling, the Occult, and Communication Technologies, 1859–1919* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2010), p. 2.

[76] Sacks, *Seeing Voices*, pp. 26–7.

[77] Luckhurst, *Invention of Telepathy*, pp. 131, 214; Galvan, *Sympathetic Medium*.

[78] Marsh, 'Man who cut off my hair', pp. 215, 218; 'Eavesdropping at Interlaken', p. 302; 'Was it by chance only?', *Strand*, 43 (April 1912), 433–44 (p. 442).

[79] Marsh, 'Man who cut off my hair', p. 222; 'Isolda', p. 253; 'The Barnes mystery', *Strand*, 52 (October 1916), 407–17 (p. 415); subsequent references to this story are given in the text; 'Matched', p. 494.

[80] Marsh, 'Isolda', pp. 252, 243; 'Lady Beatrice', pp. 93, 101.

[81] D. Pick, *Svengali's Web: The Alien Enchanter in Modern Culture* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2000), pp. 3, 182.

[82] Pick, *Svengali's Web*, pp. 172, 177, 129.

[83] Luckhurst, *Invention of Telepathy*, p. 184; emphasis in the original.

[84] Höglund, 'Black Englishness', p. 277.