

**UNDRESSING READERLY ANXIETIES: A STUDY OF CLOTHING
AND ACCESSORIES IN SHORT CRIME FICTION 1841-1911**

by

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Abstract

Dress changes the way that we, as readers, perceive and interpret characters within fiction because of the hugely subjective way that it influences individuals. We all have some experiences and opinions of dress because we have all been exposed to it in some way, whether consciously or unconsciously, and therefore the way that we read dress is fraught with ambiguity because our own experiences are so varied. Clothing functions as an indicator of gender, class, identity, aesthetic taste, fashion and social and economic success. It can sexualise and desexualise, entice and repel, reveal and conceal, lead and mislead and thus functions as a useful tool for writers to influence readers. Despite the instability of dress as a stable sign, writers make assumptions that readers understand what is being implied by dress and make conscious decisions to describe dress within their narratives.

In crime fiction, clothing is particularly useful because it allows hiding in plain sight: as an item so mundane it is barely noticed by the reader, yet it can function as compelling clue to reveal the identity of a criminal. There is a tension between what is obvious and what is implied and thus readers are both empowered and frustrated by depictions of clothing in crime fiction. Clothing is deployed by crime writers in a different way from other fiction because the genre encourages close reading in which every detail must count, familiar to readers through Arthur Conan Doyle's Sherlock Holmes stories yet also vital in a range of other texts discussed in this study such as the serialised adventures of C.L.Pirkis's female detective Loveday Brooke and the escapades of Grant Allen's master criminal Colonel Clay. This interdisciplinary study focuses on the anxieties generated by readings of dress in Victorian and Edwardian short crime fiction at a time when sartorial matters constituted a form of language in upper- and middle-class society. Considering short stories by Edgar Allan Poe, Charles Dickens, L.T. Meade, Guy Boothby, Baroness Orczy and George Sims alongside lesser known writers including Mrs George Corbett,

Rodrigues Ottolengui and Mary Wilkins Freeman amongst others, this study examines visual, verbal and haptic considerations of dress to analyse how nineteenth and early twentieth century writers used clothing to enable and disable their readers.

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Undressing Readerly Anxieties: A Study of Clothing and Accessories in Short Crime Fiction 1841-1911

Introduction

“You appeared to read a good deal upon her which was quite invisible to me,” I remarked.

“Not invisible but unnoticed, Watson. You did not know where to look, and so you missed all that was important. I can never bring you to realise the importance of sleeves, the suggestiveness of thumb-nails, or the great issues that may hang from a boot-lace. Now, what did you gather from that woman’s appearance? Describe it.”

Conan Doyle, “A Case of Identity” 476.

Dress and appearance are important in Victorian and Edwardian crime fiction because they tell a story beyond the aesthetic. In a genre deeply concerned with the minutiae of human lives, every garment can be read as clue, as essence of characterisation and as a function of the narrative, simultaneously concealing and revealing vital information. Yet as Dr Watson remarks, the stories that can be read from dress vary from reader to reader and are subjective, nuanced and slippery. This leads to disparate understandings and missed information that can be useful narrative devices for the author but frustrating for the reader as they seek to decipher the mystery of the story. However, the subjectivity of sartorial readings can put the interpretation of dress outside of the writers’ control because readers deduce a huge range of information from clothing, reading below the aesthetic level to the symbolic and metaphorical connotations beneath. After all, clothing oneself is a conscious act. Choosing garments, adjusting the fit, putting clothes on and off and cleaning and maintaining clothing are all personal and quintessentially human acts that vary in degrees from one person to the next. We all have some experience and opinions

of dress because we have all been exposed to it in some way. It is therefore inherently troubling when these sartorial acts are disrupted and when dress does not look or function as we might expect because it makes us question our own behaviours. This leads to the assumption that something is amiss, a culturally conditioned response that, “disordered dress always betrays disordered minds” (Jann 690). Readings of dress are influenced by contemporary concerns about identity, sex, gender, fashion, modernity and crime that change expectations of appearance and the way that a viewer interprets how someone is dressed. Clothing therefore functions not just as material object to add realism to the narrative but also as a signifier of a host of wider concerns. This thesis examines how writers use clothing and dress in short crime fiction between 1841 and 1911, arguing that the ambiguous interpretation of dress and its dual literal and metaphorical meanings disrupt the reader’s quest to discover the ‘truth’ while exposing a myriad of wider thematic anxieties. Clothing is utilised by writers in a particular way in crime fiction apart from other fiction because the genre encourages close reading in which every detail must count. There is a supposition that dress can be clearly defined, as Holmes demands of Watson in the opening quotation, and that there are mutual terms of understanding between readers in the ability to transform sartorial observations into indicators of identity, gender, modernity, social belonging and even criminality. These interpretations make assumptions about the reader’s own sartorial knowledge and their ability to uniformly understand these signs, though, as this thesis reveals, these signs are never stable. Writers make conscious choices about the details they include, using dress in imaginative ways which both enable and disable the reader. Unravelling the signification of dress prompts new readings of the narratives and reinstates the importance of popular culture in understanding fiction in the context of its readers.

Dress signifies a host of cultural and social associations that are read differently by observers according to their own experiences, backgrounds and purpose. For example, in “A Case of Identity” Watson comprehensively describes the dress of a woman who wears

a slate-coloured, broad-brimmed straw hat, with a feather of a brickish red. Her jacket was black, with black beads sewn upon it, and a fringe of little black jet ornaments. Her dress was brown, rather darker than coffee colour, with a little purple plush at the neck and sleeves (477).

From this, he ascertains she is “fairly well-to-do” (477), using her dress as a visual marker of her wealth and social position. Yet he cannot read her appearance without making his own judgements about what her dress implies, concluding that she is “fairly well-to-do in a vulgar, comfortable, easy-going way” (477), without explicitly stating which details of her appearance create this reaction. His interpretation influences the perception of the reader, engendering empathy because Watson indecorously thinks her vulgar but also perhaps encouraging derision because she has chosen to wear dress that generates this reaction. The reader’s sympathies may lie either with the newcomer or with Watson, dependent on the reader’s own thoughts about the description of her dress and the value they attach to Watson’s judgement. Conan Doyle can give all of the particulars of her dress and relate Watson’s reaction, but he cannot know for sure whether the reader will agree with Watson’s viewpoint.

Sherlock Holmes’s deductions are presented as more factual than subjective and he deduces her profession and the haste with which she has left home from the stains on her gloves and her odd, half-buttoned boots. These inferences are obvious to both Watson and the reader once they are pointed out but are not immediately apparent in the initial description as Conan Doyle gives Holmes, but not Watson or the reader, definitive authority to read sartorial codes. The contrast between the observations and inferences

made by these two characters, and the anxieties Watson feels because he does not read in the same way as Holmes, are indicative of the extratextual anxieties of reading generated by crime fiction. These are not only anxieties about *what* we read but about *how* we read and what this tells us as readers about the characters. These readings change over time and from reader to reader. For example, whereas Holmes explicitly reads the lady's employment through her dress, her state of mourning is left implicit in the dark-coloured items and jet ornaments that she wears; inferences that would have been obvious to the contemporary reader, but that may escape the notice of the modern reader.

Perceptions of moral and social value lie at the heart of this thesis. This study explores anxieties that emerge through the presentation of dress in short crime fiction, assuming an interdisciplinary approach that draws together the threads of multiple cultural and scholarly discourses. These include Victorian studies, fashion and material culture, clothing history, genre studies, crime fiction, popular¹ and periodical fiction. Each of these threads has been criticised to some degree as unscholarly, populist and non-canonical. R Austin Freeman remarked that even in the 1920s, crime fiction was “apt to be dismissed contemptuously [...] as a type of work produced by half-educated and wholly incompetent writers for consumption by office boys, factory girls, and other persons devoid of culture and literary taste” (“The Art of the Detective Story” 7). His observation makes clear that it was not just the literature that was commonly denounced, but the readers too. Similarly, Elizabeth Bowen referred to dress as an “apparently frivolous topic [of thought]” (*Collected Impressions* 111) in 1937, reiterated nearly fifty years later when Elizabeth Wilson noted that “because fashion is constantly denigrated, the serious study of fashion has had repeatedly to justify itself” (47). In terms of form, Victorian short stories have long been critically overshadowed by novels. Indeed, a

¹ Popular is taken to mean widely disseminated and openly available.

contemporary critic in the 1880s reported that “in the British magazine the serial Novel is the one thing of consequence, and all else is termed “padding”” (Matthews 372). The perceived triviality of these disciplines is reflected by a value system that sees commercial production as a mass process that diminishes value, a perception that renders the products (crime fiction and clothing) as transient and fleetingly fashionable and which draws parallels between aesthetic and moral worth. However, in recent years increased focus has been placed on the recovery and preservation of material previously disregarded as ephemeral and as Martin Priestman points out “the barriers between ‘high’ and ‘low’ literature [especially in relation to crime fiction] have been progressively dismantled” (1). This study seeks to continue this work through the examination of lesser-known texts through a sartorial focus.

This thesis breaks new ground by examining clothing within Victorian (and some Edwardian) crime fiction and focussing on short stories, assuming an interdisciplinary approach which also considers images alongside words. Though there have been essays on the dress of specific sensation heroines,² chapters on dress in Victorian fiction³ and even articles on the intricacies of Holmes’s sartorial analyses,⁴ there has been no single study that has considered the role that clothing plays within short crime fiction (or even crime novels) in the period. As such, this thesis offers an original contribution to scholarship of benefit to literary and genre studies and cultural historians. In a genre “in which nothing is wasted in terms of narrative (since anything may be significant), but whose practitioners carried an unshakeable suspicion that the genre was [...] a commodity

² Clair Hughes considers the colourful dress of Lady Audley against Anne Catherick’s white uniform in *Dressed in Fiction* whilst Madeleine Seys considers sartorial indulgences in *The Woman in White*, *Lady Audley's Secret*, and *East Lynne* in her study *Fashion and Narrative in Victorian Popular Literature*.

³ Studies of Victorian dress often focus on dress as a signifier of a specific theme such as Rosie Aindow’s *Dress and Identity in British Literary Culture 1870-1914*, Christine Bayles Kortsch’s *Dress Culture in Late Victorian Women's Fiction: Literacy, Textiles, and Activism* and Suzanne Keen’s “Quaker Dress, Sexuality, and the Domestication of Reform in the Victorian Novel.”

⁴ Rosemary Jann’s “Sherlock Holmes Codes the Social Body” regards Holmes’s ability to read dress as analogous to his ability read minds whilst Lawrence Frank considers forensic readings of dress in *Victorian Detective Fiction and the Nature of Evidence: The Scientific Investigations of Poe, Dickens, and Doyle*.

for consumption and disposal” (Pittard 12), references to commodities like dress are rich for analysis and as yet understudied.

Key Terms

In order to set the parameters for this study, key terms such as the ‘short’ story, ‘crime fiction’, ‘dress’ and ‘clothing’ have been continuously defined and refined in light of every new discovery that came to light. How short is a short story? What constitutes crime fiction? What dates are intended by Victorian? What is the difference between dress and clothing? Is an umbrella/beard/handbag an item of clothing? Looking to anthologised short fiction at the outset of the study, the definition of “short” fell to the editors of the collections and thus the terminology of the study was initially assumed rather than imposed. However, as the research developed to include wider sources of fiction, ‘short’ was taken to mean any crime story published as if to be devoured in a single sitting, whether published in a periodical or as a standalone story in a series. Serialised novels are thus not included but yellowback books, designed to be read on railway journeys, are included (see Chapter Three).

The definition of crime is less straightforward, and critics agree that classification is highly problematic. As Stephen Knight highlights, some writers “use the term ‘detective fiction’ for the whole genre, others call it ‘mystery fiction.’ But as a reader soon discovers there are plenty of novels [...] without a detective and nearly as many without a mystery” (Preface xiii). Dorothy Sayers, on the other hand, defined crime stories simply as “psychological studies of the criminal mind” (*Tales of Detection* vii). Lucy Sussex suggests that crime writing is “structured around the gradual revelation of criminous information (the mystery)” (6) whereas Julian Symons defines crime fiction as literature in which “interest in the nature of, motives for, and results of, a crime are at the heart of the story” (12) rather than a subsidiary plot. The definition of where to draw the line as

to what constitutes crime fiction is, according to Symons, merely a matter of taste (5). This study follows Knight in taking the premise that there is “always a crime (or very occasionally just the appearance of one)” (xiii) and thus includes stories variously categorised as detective, mystery and crime fiction. The study takes a broader definition of crime fiction than some critics to reflect the diversity of fiction available across the Victorian period and beyond and to mitigate retrospective classification into misleadingly precise subgenres.

Though the fiction considered in this thesis is predominantly Victorian by date, the inclusion of texts up to 1911 reflects the transition period into Edwardian fiction in which numerous Victorian writers continued to publish crime short stories. Critics consider the First World War as a crucial period of change for the genre as spy and espionage fiction and locked room mysteries became increasingly popular, replacing fin de siècle detective fiction. Famously, Conan Doyle continued writing the Sherlock Holmes stories into the 1920s despite Holmes’s presumed death in “The Final Problem” (Dec 1893) and his retirement in “His Last Bow” (Oct 1917), though the 1890s is widely considered as the peak of Holmes’s popularity. Other serialised characters such as Arsène Lupin and Raffles also straddled the fin de siècle and into the Edwardian period and beyond, though it is their early conception and appearances that is of most interest to this study. This thesis focuses on fiction conceived in the Victorian era, focussing on the increased popularity of crime fiction and the growth of consumer culture more widely in the period, including the sale of off-the-peg garments for the first time. ‘Victorian’ thus includes selected texts which extend to 1911 but refers more generally to the trends and tropes associated with the earlier period which traditionally finishes a decade earlier.

Critics and writers attempted to define the crime fiction genre and, in the process, constructed formulaic ideals, some of which were recorded as parodic fair play rules in

the Golden Age, as explored in Chapter Five. Though they were created in the late 1920s with reference to the gameplay of detective fiction, the rules are useful in the way that they focus on the reader's perceptions and suggest explanations for what might have made one story more successful than another. This work is continued by Franco Moretti in "The Slaughterhouse of Literature" (2000) in which he analyses crime fiction tropes to identify what makes fiction become canonical or otherwise. Readers lie at the centre of Moretti's analysis as he argues that "readers, not professors, make canons" (209), using Conan Doyle as his example because his stories were "*socially* supercanonical right away, but *academically* canonical only a hundred years later" (209). Moretti argues that "readers must have "discovered" clues" (214) for stories to become popular, implicitly suggesting that the reader must experience satisfaction from reading the clues and therefore must feel anxious or uncertain when clues are unreadable or not present at all. The reader therefore feels cheated when they cannot possibly guess the identity of the culprit from sartorial clues because they are either missing or too specific to be interpreted by an unskilled onlooker (this trope is explored in Chapter One). Moretti's structural approach highlights the tentative way in which the crime fiction short story oeuvre is constructed via trial and error, with writers alighting on successful strategies sometimes without any awareness that it is so. Moretti draws on Tzvetan Todorov's analysis of the narrative strategies of crime fiction in *The Poetics of Prose* (1971) which argues that the crime and the investigation are two separate subplots in which the former relates the facts of the case and the latter explains the proceedings and relates them to the reader. Todorov's analysis places emphasis on the chronological progression of discovery more readily applied to the novel but his theories remain a crucial building block in defining crime fiction, utilised by Knight, Priestman and John Scaggs amongst others.

Dress and clothing are terms used interchangeably in this study. Fashion is used to mean any garment that is worn in accordance with contemporary style, usually in a manner that

is deliberate and obvious. Though, as Clair Hughes points out, “clothes in fiction [...] are rarely described in full” (3), dress is frequently described in accordance with expected styles for the period (such as the dresses of L.T. Meade’s Madame Sara and Madame Koluchy in Chapter One) because crime fiction is typically set in the present time. The study includes any item that may be worn, which includes accessories such as bags, false beards and wigs, unnatural props such as Simon Carne’s papier-mâché humpback and any other item that constitutes an artificial addition or embellishment to the body. Many of these objects are evident in the titles of the stories, demonstrating the dominance of the trope in crime short fiction. For example, Catherine Louisa Pirkis’ “The Black Bag Left on a Door-Step (1892), Sir Arthur Conan Doyle’s “The Story of the Man with the Watches” (1898), Maurice Leblanc’s “The Red Silk Scarf” (1906), and Baroness Orczy’s “The Woman in the Big Hat” (1910). Jewels also make a regular appearance, such as Mrs Henry Wood’s “The Diamond Bracelet” (1874) Grant Allen’s “The Episode of the Diamond Links” (1897), Guy Boothby’s “The Duchess of Wiltshire’s Diamonds” (1897), Rodriguez Ottelengui’s “The Azteck Opal” (1895) and Maurice Leblanc’s “The Queen’s Necklace” (1906). Clothing connects these stories and offers a plausible dimension for the crime narrative as a commodity ripe for theft or as costumes of visibility or invisibility.

Critical Field and Methodology

This study draws on several distinct critical fields—crime fiction studies, dress theory and short story analyses—that, until now, have had no central texts to unite their common theme as ‘popular’ modes. Analyses of crime fiction and especially those that consider ‘unliterary’ forms of crime writing, such as penny dreadfuls, broadsheets, newspapers and periodicals have been crucial in shaping this thesis. These critiques assume a historical approach and offer a thorough account of the development of the crime fiction

genre in relation to real-life crime. Ian Ousby's *Bloodhounds of Heaven* (1976) and Julian Symons's *Bloody Murder* (1972) trace the social history of the police force from thief takers through to the first detectives and the associated influences on fiction. The factual accounts of the establishment of the police force alongside the creation of the detective in fiction were especially useful in shaping the analysis of the female detective in Chapter Three, tracking the deviations of fiction away from reality. Their comprehensive overview of everything from biblical crimes to the cult of Holmes paves the way for more recent studies such as Judith Flanders' *The Invention of Murder* (2011) that meticulously relates the true crimes that inspired crime fiction, particularly in the nineteenth century. The preoccupation with murder that she elucidates draws on well-known earlier critiques by Leslie Stephen in "The Decay of Murder" (1869) and George Orwell in his essay "Decline of the English Murder" (1946). These satirical essays bemoan the loss of fictional ingenuity thanks to the saturation of the crime fiction market and an increased tolerance towards sensation, marking the mass production growth of the genre. The division between tasteful, distasteful, moral, and immoral is shown to be paper thin as the reading public clamoured for the most brutal of horrors, reproduced in fiction for their own entertainment.

"Crime fiction" covers an astonishing amount of writing, as Lucy Sussex makes clear in *Women Writers and Detectives in Nineteenth-Century Crime Fiction*: "a major problem with research is that the corpus of early crime fiction is vast. Hubin⁵ lists approximately 6000 titles published between 1800 and 1900" (3) in a list that includes only novels published in English. Analysing the volume of crime fiction published in periodicals is even more difficult because of the proliferation of publications and the duplication of material among them. Moreover, the survival rate of original complete copies for

⁵ Sussex refers to the extensive bibliography in Allen J Hubin's *Crime Fiction, 1749-1980* (1984).

scholarly research is low due to the cheap paper on which they were printed and their status as ephemeral mass-produced entertainment. The academic disregard of popular literature has also reduced the number of earlier critical studies and bibliographies of original sources on which to build. Modern studies traditionally categorise crime fiction by subgenres such as detective fiction, sensation fiction, police procedural and golden age fiction. Priestman's *Cambridge Companion to Crime Fiction* (2003), Knight's *Crime Fiction Since 1800: Detection, Death, Diversity* (2004) and Scaggs's *Crime Fiction* (2005) approach crime fiction from a chronological perspective and apply these categories largely retrospectively with the result that the development of the genre seems to have a clear trajectory from one subgenre to the next. Though a useful way to compartmentalise such a huge volume of fiction, the categories risk portraying crime fiction as routinely displaced by a new fashion every decade or so, producing new subgenres that cleanly supplant the modes that preceded it. This categorisation privileges certain styles of fiction over others. For example, the sections given over to Victorian crime fiction tend to focus on sensation novels of the 1860s and the Sherlock Holmes short stories of the 1890s as those most worthy of critical attention, discrediting the diversity of crime fiction available during this long period. There is also limited account of the transition from the triple-decker novel to the short story or the significance of form. Unusually, recent crime fiction critiques still draw largely on much older sources for theoretical accounts and fiction stories because these sources tended to be comprehensive and include obscure texts long since forgotten or written off as unworthy of critical attention. Howard Haycraft's *The Art of the Mystery Story* (1946) contains more than fifty essays that, contrary to the title, focus largely on detective fiction and its popularity with the reading public. Largely written during the Golden Age of crime fiction in the 1920s and 30s, the essays provide a useful insight into popular and critical receptions of the genre and the intersection of detective fiction with earlier types of crime fiction.

Contributors highlight the public appetite for “intellectual satisfaction” (Austin Freeman 11) as distinct from earlier sensational horrors in which “the writer’s object is to make the flesh creep” (Austin Freeman 9), clearly demonstrated by the early fiction of Joseph Sheridan Le Fanu, considered in Chapter Two. The anthology is important because it marks the increased focus placed upon the reader and the desire to engage the reader in a game, a trend that first appears in the Victorian fiction considered in this thesis and continues into the Golden Age. Ellery Queen’s contribution “The Detective Short Story: The First Hundred Years” (1945)⁶ is especially relevant to this study because it focuses on the short story as “the original, the “legitimate” form” (477), estimating that at the time of publication more than 135 anthologies of crime fiction short stories were in existence. Queen’s arguments for the legitimacy of anthologies underpins the methodology with which texts were selected for this thesis:

- a) it [the anthology] often contains short stories which never saw book publication and are taken directly from periodicals and manuscripts,
- b) it keeps alive the best work of the older authors, whose books have long been out of print and would not therefore be available to present-day readers [...] and c) it memorializes the best stories of modern authors (490).

Modern anthologies drawn upon as the starting point for this project include Michael Cox’s *Victorian Detective Stories* (1993), Michael Sim’s *The Penguin Book of Victorian Women in Crime* (2011) and *The Dead Witness: A Connoisseur’s Collection of Victorian Detective Stories* (2012). Anthologies of the 1970s were also consulted, including Michelle Slung’s *Crime on Her Mind: Fifteen Stories of Female Sleuths from the*

⁶ This essay, reprinted in Haycraft’s anthology, was a revision of a 1941 essay that appeared as the introduction to *101 Years’ Entertainment: The Great Detective Stories, 1841-1941*. Ellery Queen was a pseudonym adopted by the American critics and authors Frederic Dannay and Manfred Bennington Lee.

Victorian Era to the Forties (1975) and the similarly named *The Rivals of Sherlock Holmes* (1970) edited by Hugh Greene and *Rivals of Sherlock Holmes* edited by Alan K. Russell (1978). Stories were chosen in which emphasis was given to dress and that relied on some aspects of clothing to further the character development or plot of the narratives. That is not to say that clothing performs a vital plot function in all Victorian crime short stories. On the contrary, many short stories, particularly the later spy/espionage stories make no references to dress whatsoever, usually because the central characters are all male and because the development of character is distinctly secondary to the technical convolutions of the plot.⁷

Stories were traced back to their original place of publication to contextualise fully their readership and to discover new stories that may not have been revived since their original publication. Through this research process, some additional stories were discovered, such as the book forms of the *Old Man in the Corner* stories and some more obscure texts such as the anonymous Scotland Yard edition of "The Lady Detective" discussed in Chapter Three. However, it was not always possible to define the original publishing source, or to track down a copy of the source publication and the items identified in the library catalogues were not always as expected when delivered. Archival searches in the British Library revealed many incorrectly bound and miscellaneous articles, missing pages or duplicate copies and similarly, digital copies were not always accurately numbered or complete. The Internet Archive Online provided vital remote access to periodicals and sometimes included the original advertisements. In many cases, stories were read in multiple editions and formats, usually starting with the anthologised modern copy and

⁷ For example, Arthur Morrison's short stories such as "The Case of Laker, Absconded" (1896), "The Affair of the 'Avalanche Bicycle and Tyre Co. Ltd'" (1897) and the Martin Hewitt detective stories revolve principally around business affairs and financial loss in male figures of similar social class and backgrounds. Consequently, references to dress are sparse and inconsequential because business acumen takes precedence. Morrison's novel *A Child of the Jago* (1896) contains, on the other hand, many more references to dress as illustrative of wealth and poverty and as an indication of the development of the principle characters. His short stories have therefore been deliberately omitted from this thesis.

then online scans of periodicals and finally hard copy editions. This highlighted the many differences in styles and appearance between original and modern publications but also the huge variations in publishing styles and techniques even within the space of a few years (see the covers of *Revelations of a Lady Detective* in Chapter Three as a clear example).

Online databases by ProQuest and Gale and websites such as Project Gutenberg and Golden Age of Detection Wiki also signposted a wealth of long forgotten stories, contemporary articles and periodicals. These were initially summarised and categorised on a large spreadsheet which was created to differentiate the stories, to highlight the most relevant and to build a corpus for study. Ascertaining which stories constituted crime was particularly difficult in periodicals because genre was not defined and thus many stories were read in anticipation of being crime stories, but which actually turned out to be didactic tales or domestic dramas. Stories were selected which were both representative, such as stories from a long-running series, and diverse, such as “The Long Arm” which features all the hallmarks of a classic detective tale but with a very different criminal focus. The stories which made for inclusion in this thesis are those with detailed physical descriptions which show clothing clearly represented.

Periodicals offer a dense repository of images which are crucial to understanding the original Victorian reading experience since “many of the runaway publishing successes of the first half of the nineteenth century were books conjoining text and illustration” (Sillars *Visualisation* 3). This emphasis on popular rather than canonical fiction may have contributed towards the relative critical neglect of the study of illustrations and the sense that “mainstream literary study has resolutely refused to accept the visual dimensions of such texts” (Sillars *Visualisation* 2), though this omission has been partly redressed in recent years. This thesis broadly agrees with Sillars’ point of view that illustrations create

a mixed discourse in which images add another, mostly complimentary, dimension to the crime fiction text. There is however, also evidence of J Hillis Miller's counter-argument that illustrations are in conflict with the text, as in the illustration from "The Ripening Rubies" in Chapter One, though a fully theorised approach to the multitude of illustrations which accompanied the crime short stories in their original publication formats is beyond the scope of this project. Illustrations are herein discussed sparingly as a reminder of the added visual dimension in understanding texts and to signify that the original Victorian reader may have very different images in mind than the modern critic. Archival research into the crime fiction stories for this thesis highlighted the proliferation of images that were often missing from modern reprints and infrequently mentioned in critical essays on crime fiction. Visual images are central to the way that a reader might read clothing because the dress must always be visible (in that the characters are not drawn as naked) whereas the text allows the reader to make their own assumptions and may choose to omit details of dress. Moreover, Victorian periodicals revelled in illustrations and advertisements, while collected volumes habitually featured glossy frontispieces. Christopher Pittard's *Purity and Contamination in Late Victorian Detective Fiction* (2011) showcases the importance of these intertextual relationships, focussing in the introduction on an advertisement for Hudson's soap featuring a policeman and the optimistic promise that criminal misdeeds can be washed away. However, the illustrations and advertisements in fiction varied with each reprint and stories published multiple times or in numerous formats would be subject to a fresh aesthetic and shifting versions of how characters and scenes appeared, such as the modernised female detectives featured in Chapter Three.

This study also comprises critiques of dress, consisting of analyses of dress in fiction, fashion history and studies of material culture. Critical approaches to dress in fiction are uncommon with Clair Hughes's *Dressed in Fiction* (2006) and Cynthia Kuhn and Cindy

Carlson's collected essays on *Styling Texts: Dress and Fashion in Literature* (2007) arguably the seminal works in this field. More recently, Madeleine Seys's *Fashion and Narrative in Victorian Popular Literature* (2018) builds on these studies and incorporates a nineteenth-century standpoint, but her focus is on novels and specifically on female characters. This thesis, by contrast, looks at short fiction and encompasses both male and female characters, considering not just fashion but everyday clothing too. Sartorial narrative studies of texts and textiles operate in precisely the opposite way to the crime fiction analyses of Flanders, Symons and Ousby in that they seek to distance the fiction from reality, arguing that the clothing in literature can never be fully reflective of reality because the reader is not constantly told all of the details of dress, though the reader is fully aware that characters must be wearing something. The details that are given are therefore reflective of a specific construction of 'reality' at a given point in the story. By this rationale, agency is significant because dress operates "as the author's sign-system, conscious or unconscious" (Hughes 3) in that the writer chooses exactly what to describe and when with a view to creating a given effect. Hughes argues that this means that dress is therefore only described when it constitutes something different from the expected normal. However, this thesis finds that this is not always true in crime fiction because this would make clothing too obviously a clue, suggesting that crime fiction utilises clothing in a rather different way than Hughes proposes. Rather, items of dress appear to normalise the scene, to add verisimilitude and to make characters fit in with the world in which they inhabit, even though their behaviour proves to be far from ordinary. Moreover, Hughes's proposal that "references to dress must be read with the understanding that the general effect is usually 'naturalized', [that is] an understood image [between] the writer and a contemporary reader, who knows more or less what is intended without being told" (3) is wide of the mark in crime fiction because it does not take into account deliberate attempts

to confuse the reader. The reader often *is* being told something, even if they are not fully conscious of the inference.

This thesis draws on the seminal work of Cecil Willett Cunnington and his wife Phyllis in *Fashion and Women's Attitudes in the Nineteenth Century* (1936), *English Women's Clothing in the Nineteenth Century* (1937) and *Handbook of English Costume in the Nineteenth Century* (1959) which illustrate both literally and figuratively how dress styles changed year on year and decade on decade. Particularly useful are the multitude of images that allow comparison with illustrations in periodical fiction and make clear the differences between garments that seem similar to the modern reader. Aside from the complex descriptions of fashion changes, there are subjective opinions offered by the authors, though often derogatory and made with hindsight, (and some very evident 1930s sexism). Contemporary newspapers and journals offer a useful intermediary to mediate their views, though they too are prone to exaggeration for comic effect.⁸ The roots of this cynicism, it may be argued, lie in Thomas Carlyle's novel *Sartor Resartus* (first published in *Fraser's Magazine* in 1833-34). The story foregrounds sartorial codes as a means of philosophical exploration in both England and Germany, ostensibly the contexts of a fictional book entitled "Clothes, their Origin and their Influence." Though the digressive narrative alternately satirises and hyperbolises the theme of dress, the mixture of fact and fiction questions where ontological truth is located and suggests that meaning can be derived from sartorial codes, taking a "view of the costumes of all mankind, in all countries, in all times" (30) to chart the progression of civilisation. The editor's inability to complete the review of the book on clothes insinuates that there can be no distinct resolution, that the project is too large, too diverse, too changing, and too futile to reach a conclusion. Yet despite this inconclusiveness, *Sartor Resartus* highlights the ideological

⁸ See the description of décolleté in Chapter Two as an example of the tendency towards comic exaggeration of dress.

functions of dress and within its fictional subtext demonstrates that the origin of clothes is inextricably linked to their influence, however transient this may be. The process of the creation of dress expressed in the fictional metanarrative provides a device for the narrator and for Carlyle himself to express difficult truths about the nature of society more widely, many of which become lost in translation and further diluted because the narrative self-consciously draws attention to its own artifice. Yet moments of narrative lucidity within this disorientating text show that sartorial allegories can tell us something about social behaviours and concepts across geographical boundaries, as Carlyle implies that civilising institutions including religion, government, commerce and empire need to be re-tailored if they are to remain fitting in contemporary society. Carlyle's philosophy of clothes is an early analysis of material culture in that it attempts to understand cultural contexts through the analysis of physical objects.

The relationship between people and their things forms a part of the methodology of this project in the attempts to define integral human characteristics through dress, such as identity, gender and social values. Asa Briggs's *Victorian Things* (1988) profiles the Victorian obsession with material goods and makes clear the methods of production, including needlework and dressmaking, and the intense labour required. He states that clothing workers may be susceptible to criminal lifestyles because of the poor rates of pay, poor working conditions and lack of legal protection from dishonest customers. He also acknowledges the social power that successful dress workers may yield, arguing that "women who 'had the credit of dressing well' depended entirely upon their milliners for advice as to what they might, or might not, wear" (226), a social power seen taken to the extreme in "The Long Arm" (1895) examined in Chapters One and Five. Contemporary analyses of sartorial culture provide the basis for an examination of 1890s modernity in Chapter Four, drawing on Thorstein Veblen's "The Theory of the Leisure Class" (1899) and Georg Simmel's "Fashion" (1904). Both theories provide a material culture approach

in the way that they examine the role of dress as a crucial tool in formulating class constructs and social relationships. Considered alongside Elaine Freedgood's *The Ideas in Things* (2006), these material culture studies attempt to make sense of the metonymical cacophony of objects on a cultural basis, providing insight into the way that dress functions in crime fiction. However, there are difficulties with the use of material culture in that it tends to look at 'real' objects rather than fictional representations. More complex theories around this idea of representation such as Jean Baudrillard's "Simulacra and Simulation" (1981) and Walter Benjamin's ideas of facsimiles in "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction" (1936) were considered in the early stages of this thesis. However, such theories are outside of the scope of this project because the short stories are too fragmented for sustained or comprehensive analysis and because this deviates from the consideration of crime fiction as a distinct genre away from realist novels.

Modern studies of fashion history and cultural studies provide insight into the function of clothing as social tools, working as objects and as language that may have changed and developed over time but retain common factors that can be traced in Victorian crime fiction. Jennifer Craik's *The Face of Fashion: Cultural Studies in Fashion* (1994) considers fashion as a Western term aligned to industrialised processes of clothing production that reflects economic changes pertinent in the nineteenth century. She acknowledges that "fashion is often thought of as a kind of mask disguising the 'true' nature of the body or the person. It is seen as a superficial gloss" (1), a view shared in many of the short stories considered here and especially in relation to the portrayal of women. These are brought to the forefront in the analysis of the body and sex in Chapter Two of this thesis that supports Craik's argument that

clothing does a good deal more than simply clad the body for warmth, modesty or comfort. Codes of dress are technical devices which articulate the relationship between a particular body and its lived milieu, the space occupied by bodies and constituted by bodily actions (4).

Craik's work draws on Elizabeth Wilson's seminal study *Adorned in Dreams* (1985) which traces sartorial fashions as illustrative of their relative modernities through psychological and sociological lenses. Wilson's predominantly feminist standpoint reiterates the importance of sartorial analysis as a legitimate field of study but also highlights how clothing could be used by women, as oppressed beings, to express themselves. This notion of clothing as language is not new, with Roland Barthes defining the semiotics of fashion in *The Fashion System* in 1967 but Wilson's gendered approach opens up a wealth of studies in which the woman's body takes centre stage. Joanne Finkelstein's *The Fashioned Self* (1991), Joanne Entwistle's *The Fashioned Body* (2011), and Christine Bayles Kortsch's *Dress Culture in Late Victorian Women's Fiction* (2009) all acknowledge women as principle sartorial consumers who use dress to establish gendered social groups. This is keenly relevant to the late Victorian period in which shopping is marketed as a strictly female occupation of the middle-classes which, Krista Lysack argues, gave them some grounds for resistance for the first time. In *Come Buy, Come Buy: Shopping and the Culture of Consumption in Victorian Women's Writing* (2008) Lysack suggests that "women's uses of consumption (including such practices as window-shopping, shoplifting or even setting up shop themselves) became the basis for their formation as active and resisting subjects within the Victorian marketplace" (8), highlighting the populist overlap between clothing and crime as potentially immoral sources. This immorality reaches its logical conclusion in the kleptomaniacs briefly considered in Chapter Two and highlighted by Tammy Whitlock in *Crime, Gender and*

Consumer Culture in Nineteenth-Century England (2005), though tangential to the central focus of this thesis because dress functions obviously as the object of desire with limited other functions. This thesis necessarily focuses on both men and women because crime fiction readily features both genders and because there is no desire to continue to focus on dress as more significant to one gender than another in texts where both are present and visible. This does not assume that male and female dress are portrayed in the same way, however, nor does it deny that there is greater cultural emphasis on dress and fashion as a primarily female occupation. Indeed, as mentioned earlier, crime stories with all male characters rarely divulge details of dress because they tend to be immersed in masculine plots in which action dominates over description. Rather, this thesis focuses on stories with clear descriptions or images of dress, irrespective of the character's gender.

The distinction between realist fiction and crime fiction is also a key point in this thesis. On the one hand, Victorian crime fiction is overtly realist in the sense that characters, situations and places would have been plausible if not recognisable to the original readership and thus their dress appears so too. Yet the stories must always preserve the sense of originality and the feeling that something unexpected could happen any moment in order to engage the reader. This readerly engagement and the thematic conventions of crime fiction are what distinguish it from any other type of fiction in the way that the reader looks at dress as both social and cultural sign and as clue. In crime fiction the reader is actively looking for visual indications, whether at the time of reading or in hindsight once the genre of the story is clear, and the whole genre hinges upon looking and interpreting. Dress and appearance function as visual indicators to all readers, whether interpreted consciously or unconsciously, thus it follows that they are also read as clues by characters within the stories and the reader outside of the text. Dress is both a definitive sign and a tool to be manipulated for those with the desire and agency to do so, destabilising the notion of the visual as an absolute truth, a truth which is strongly

implied by the hawk-eyed detective characters in crime fiction who convey the sense that the 'truth' will always be revealed. The formulaic structure of crime fiction and the numerous attempts to critically construct and deconstruct the crucial components of a good crime story also throw greater focus on the minutiae included within a single story. These details are more likely to be infused with resonance in a crime story than within a romance or historical story for example because there is a readerly expectation that such details matter to the final outcome of the story.

The final critical field that is integral to this study is that of genre studies, considering how the theories of crime fiction and dress fit within the short story. Much of the theory already discussed here naturally turns to novels to elucidate the ideas expressed, however the nature of the short story as a standalone protracted narrative makes it much more difficult to follow these ideas to a convincing conclusion in terms of developing a single character. Rather, short stories must be more precise in the way that they convey action or express characterisation. As Branders Matthews explains in his "Philosophy of the Short-Story"⁹ in 1885, "a true Short-story differs from the Novel chiefly in its essential unity of impression. In a far more exact and precise use of the word a Short-story has unity as a Novel cannot have it" (Matthews 366). For example, as Dorothy Sayers points out in "Tales of Detection" (1936), short story characters do not age, "they are static figures, after forty years they have not aged or developed in any essential manner" (introduction x), whereas novels tend to chart a much longer period in which the character must physically develop. It is therefore often difficult to chart the changing sartorial fashions of a single character or draw parallels between changes of behaviour and dress and there is increased reliance on the narrative voice to interpret a moment in time.

⁹ Matthews notes, "I have written Short-story with a capital S and a hyphen because I wished to emphasize the distinction between the Short-story and the story which is merely short. The Short-story is a high and difficult department of fiction. The story which is short can be written by anybody who can write at all" (367). The same distinction applies in this study though the more grammatical lower-case is applied.

The short story has been critically neglected by comparison with the novel because it is often regarded as frivolous and shallow against its denser counterpart. However, there are common factors which occur irrespective of the length of the narrative in crime fiction, especially in the use of realism, for which the short story may arguably be better suited. Crime fiction in all forms offers a unique mode of realism in which scenes need to be believable but not overly familiar because the reader does not want to make themselves analogous to either the victim or the criminal. This unconscious separation is easier to achieve in the short story than the novel because the form offers a snapshot of time with much less emotional involvement with the characters. Characters rarely age and substantial changes in appearance or behaviour must be overtly declared rather than subtly developed. These observations serve literal and metaphorical functions and appear loaded with resonance in a narrative in which every word counts, providing an original basis for clues and red herrings. It is notable that many of the 1930s critiques of crime fiction include short stories as standard while later analysis of the form broadens the thematic focus to include all types of fiction. Florence Goyet's *The Classic Short Story, 1870-1925: Theory of a Genre* (2014) and *The British Short Story* (2010) edited by Emma Liggins, Andrew Maunder and Ruth Robbins provide insightful readings into the development of the short story genre in all its forms and particularly the overlap between crime short stories, sensation fiction, colonial tales, New Woman fiction and mystery stories. Their analyses highlight the difficulty in defining short stories by content and suggest that there is limited benefit of doing so because the genre foregrounds what Goyet calls "paroxystic characterization" that is symbolic, representative or antithetical characters who always fall secondary to the convolutions of plot. Though such generalisations are difficult to substantiate, this thesis draws in part on Goyet's argument in that characters' dress can be symbolic or representative and thus extended to the person. "The Woman in the Big Hat" is emblematic of this idea because the subject is defined by

object from the outset. However, these characters must be realistic enough to make the plot believable. Critics agree that this tension between plot and narrative is characteristic of the short story genre, whilst Todorov contends that the same distinction is key to crime fiction, rendering the form doubly suitable.

There are notable differences in the critical reception of crime short stories as opposed to novels and the way that readers received them, not least in the limited number of reviews that seem to have been written. There are almost no contemporary critical reviews of short stories in periodicals and the lambasting that sensation fiction authors faced for their novels¹⁰ is entirely missing in relation to short stories, perhaps because short stories did not subject their readers to any perceived immorality for a sustained period of time.¹¹ However, it may well be the case that critiques of periodical fiction appeared as letters or short articles in magazines and publications now lost or simply uncatalogued and therefore difficult to identify. It may be that readers did not invest in the lives of fictional characters in the same way as novels because short stories focus on a short period of time and provide limited backstories or prologues to their characters. Generally, short stories were designed to stimulate rather than satiate and thus characters are rarely fully developed, and threads are left unfinished. Trial and conviction scenes are rare and punishments still rarer because the solution to the mystery is prioritised over criminal or social justice. This does not seem to have negatively affected the reading public judging by the volume of crime short stories that continued to be published throughout the

¹⁰ Anne-Marie Beller notes that Margaret Oliphant's criticism of Mary Elizabeth Braddon's sensation fiction was directed at her novels rather than the numerous penny bloods she wrote, even though the latter were arguably more sensational. "Not only do they exaggerate the physicality of her more 'respectable' circulating-library fiction through a heightened emphasis on violence, rape, murder, suicide, and seduction, but Braddon's penny bloods proliferate bodies" ("You're obliged to have recourse to bodies" 277).

¹¹ An article in *The Academy and Literature* "Yours A. C. D." applauds Conan Doyle for creating stories which solved the mystery in one sitting, "a mystery which never keeps you awake worrying about the whys and wherefores" (444) and in which the reader maintains control over how often they pick up and put down a story.

Victorian period. Whatever the cause, it is fair to say that short stories seem to have escaped critically unscathed even when broaching potentially scandalous subject matter.

Chapter Breakdown

The following chapters focus on items of dress in short crime fiction published over a period of about seventy years from 1841 to 1911, with the largest proportion of texts published in the 1890s, at the peak of the popularity of the form. The stories are predominantly written by English writers, but the thesis also considers American, Irish and French writers since their works were all published in England in the period. This diversity reflects the simultaneous growth of crime fiction in England, America and France in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth century through the sensationalised tales of the Newgate calendar, the detective stories of Edgar Allan Poe and the ghost-written memoirs of criminal turned detective Eugene Vidocq.

The thesis begins with a more literal approach to dress in the opening chapters and culminates in the study of clothing through metaphorical threads in the final chapter. Chapter One introduces the most obvious connection between crime fiction and clothing in the examination of identity, considering how clothing is used to complicate the ‘whodunnit.’ There is a readerly expectation that the criminal is visually recognisable in some sense, but this is undermined by short crime fiction in which the perpetrator is undetectable as in Edgar Allan Poe’s “Murders in the Rue Morgue (1841) and Grant Allen’s “The Great Ruby Robbery” (1892); in stories in which the criminal has a double as in Israel Zangwill’s “Cheating the Gallows” (1893) and Baroness Orczy’s “The Fenchurch Mystery” (1901); or in tales in which judgements of appearance are confused by personal feelings of revulsion or attraction as in L.T. Meade’s *The Brotherhood of the Seven Kings* (1898) and *The Sorceress of the Strand* (1903). The reader’s attempts to

identify the criminal are continually frustrated, creating an anxiety that runs contrary to the scientific suggestion that criminals could be physiognomically determined as implied in Charles Dickens's "Hunted Down" (1859).

Chapter Two considers the relationship between clothing and the body, investigating how dress codifies sex to generate a thrilling stimulus to the reader. This is apparent in Joseph Sheridan Le Fanu's "The Murdered Cousin" (1851) in which an undressed body is central to the narrative. The chapter argues that dress engenders a haptic sense, intensifying the physicality of the narrative to create a guilty excitement, evident in the bloody murder featured in Mary Eleanor Wilkins Freeman's "The Long Arm" (1895). A less gory but more physically suggestive depiction of dress features in Rodrigues Ottolengui's "The Azteck Opal" (1895) whilst Maurice Leblanc's "The Red Silk Scarf" (1911) uses dress as a sexual metaphor. The fine border between sex and crime, the intersections of physicality and the unique way that clothing signifies the body creates an anxiety in the way that it may generate a forbidden pleasure for the reader.

Chapter Three interrogates the female detective, a character constructed in crime fiction before she existed in real-life. Starting with Andrew Forrester's *The Female Detective* and William Stephens Hayward's *The Revelations of a Lady Detective* both published in 1864, progressing through the unattributed "*The Lady Detective*" (circa 1880s) and the amateurish tales of Elizabeth Burgoyne Corbett in "Behind the Veil or, Revelations of a Lady Detective," the chapter concludes with the multitude of female detectives who emerged in the 1890s. C.L. Pirkis's *The Experiences of Loveday Brooke, Lady Detective* (1893), George R. Sims's *Dorcas Dene, Detective* (1897) and Matthias McDonnell Bodkin's turn of the century lady detective, *Dora Myrl* (1900) are analysed with reference to the New Woman. Dress plays a crucial role in shaping the believability of the female detective and her acceptance by the reading public, factors keenly linked with perceptions

of gender and associated expectations of dress. This chapter argues that writers used dress to create likeable, believable characters who could be aspirational role models to the middle-class readership because they looked and dressed (for the most part) just like any other respectable women. However, there is a tension between text and image as discrepancies between visual and written depictions evidence the way that publishers used sartorially provocative images to sell their wares, undermining the texts. Readers were subject to concerns about indulging in textual fantasies while writers were caught up in the anxiety of creating a character that was simultaneously realistic, engaging and not overtly immoral. Most importantly, writers aimed to write stories that would sell and secure their livelihoods without jeopardising their literary reputations.¹²

Chapter Four engages with the fears of modernity through the 1890s, examining commodity culture through the critical lens of Thorstein Veblen's *The Theory of the Leisure Class* (1899) and Georg Simmel's *Fashion* (1895). Juxtaposing the contrasting central characters in Arthur Conan Doyle's *The Adventures of Sherlock Holmes* (1892) and *The Memoirs of Sherlock Holmes* (1894), Grant Allen's *An African Millionaire* (1897) and Guy Boothby's *A Prince of Swindlers* (1898), highlights the way that dress can be used to manipulate and deceive. Emulation and imitation are exposed as key factors in the success of the criminals' deceptions, for which dress is a vital constitutive part. As long-running and popular periodical characters, the stories are analysed in the context of their original publication against a backdrop of advertising images and glossy illustrations that expose a material culture of aesthetic anxieties.

Chapter Five looks specifically at the semantic overlap between clothing and crime to consider how and why dress is decidedly suited to an examination of the genre. Semantically linking the notion of threads in Mrs Henry Wood's "The Mystery at Number

¹² Established authors like Mary Braddon, George Eliot and Wilkie Collins contributed short stories to periodicals to provide a regular income requiring less labour intensity than serialised novels.

Seven" (1877), Mary Wilkins Freeman's "The Long Arm" (1895), Baroness Orczy's "Old Man in the Corner Stories" (first published 1901) and her Edwardian tale "The Woman in the Big Hat" (1910), the chapter argues that the device creates a material and linguistic link that draws the reader into the stories. The reader is not consistently able to follow the threads and must persevere in untying the knots of narrative if they are to follow the ends of the thread to conclusion. Using Franco Moretti's essay "The Slaughterhouse of Literature" (2000), SS Van Dine's "Twenty Rules for Writing Detective Stories" (1928) and Ronald Knox's "A Detective Story Decalogue" (1929) to establish the 'rules' behind successful detective fiction, the chapter argues that Victorian writers used threads and clothing to guide the reader through a myriad of cultural signifiers to stimulate, if not satiate their appetite for crime fiction.

These chapters illustrate how clothing is used as a physical object to reveal and conceal identity, how it functions as a metaphor for sex, shapes the perception of the female detective and is exploited to sell books, how it is used to enable elaborate frauds and to create lively, engaging criminal characters and how it functions as metaphor for the reading process. The simultaneous literal and metaphorical functions of dress allow writers to deploy parts of clothing, single garments or an entire outfit in ingenious ways as clues, narrative embellishments, to enhance realism, construct character traits, to criticise social customs, to guide and misguide the reader and to make implicit suggestions. The uniquely human aspect of clothing in its relationship to the body but also its status as both necessity and commodity imbues it with a narrative significance that allows unobtrusive presence in a story while it suggests multiple interpretations to the reader. Dress is reflective of personal and cultural identities and offers a language through which writers interrogate social concerns and project anxieties on to the reader. Moreover, it offers a connection between characters, between readers and even as

intratextual tool such as the Old Man's relentless piece of string, discussed in Chapter Five.

To return to Watson, there is a good deal to be read from clothing which may be invisible to the modern reader but, as Watson demonstrates, which could easily have been missed by the Victorian reader too. However, dress can tell the reader much about the setting of a story and characterisation, which can build the sense of realism and help solve the mystery, if only the clues are interpreted consistently. Therein lies the principal source of anxiety for the reader as sartorial details embrace a multitude of conflicting ideas, allowing the writer to introduce uncertainty into the narrative. From concerns about identity and how to recognise a criminal, to worries about salacious attire, false appearances and indulging in textual fantasies, this thesis expands the ways in which we interpret dress in Victorian fiction to argue that dress acts as the perfect vehicle for illuminating cultural anxieties including and beyond the criminal focus of the narratives.

Chapter One: Whodunnit? Anxieties of Criminal Identification

“This large and subtle and (in the ordinary course) most profitable crime, was built on the plain fact that a gentleman's evening dress is the same as a waiter's.”

G.K. Chesterton “The Queer Feet” (1910).

Chesterton’s observation, spoken by detective Father Brown, highlights the difficulties of relying on dress as a stable marker of identity and the ways in which this ambiguity could be utilised for criminal misdeeds. It is suggestive of a recurrent anxiety that arises in crime fiction in the Victorian period and beyond: the problem of distinguishing a degenerate, uncivilised criminal from a law-abiding, civilised member of the public. In the nineteenth and early twentieth century these anxieties were heightened by a host of social and cultural factors such as concerns over the individual’s invisibility in a rapidly increasing population, fears of rising crime rates¹³ and worries about the way in which identity could be retained in a world of mass-produced garments and ever more industrialised processes.¹⁴ Crime fiction writers exploited these anxieties (and contributed towards them) to establish a genre which relied on the successful identification and pursuit of the criminal to overcome the fears produced by the crime and thus provide satisfaction to the reader. The successful denouement is held at bay by using dress and appearance to confuse, influence and undermine the reader’s attempts to establish the ‘truth’ behind the crime. This chapter explores how crime fiction writers use visual clues to invite readers to form moral judgements, both consciously and unconsciously, concluding that the

¹³ The increased circulation of newspapers and cheap publications that sold sensation for profit exacerbated public concerns about falling victim to crime. See Judith Flanders’ *The Invention of Murder* for more on Victorian attitudes towards crime and the sensational criminal cases of the period.

¹⁴ Elizabeth Wilson provides a comprehensive context of nineteenth-century concerns about dress, individuality, population shifts and the marriage market in *Adorned in Dreams*. See pages 122-142.

ambiguous interpretation of dress and appearance in crime fiction make it an unreliable, but nevertheless persistent, gauge of criminality.

Though the term ‘whodunnit’ did not enter the English language until the 1930s, the concept of tracing the identity of the perpetrator can be found consistently at the heart of crime fiction since its inception.¹⁵ Identity is usually developed through clues that build up a picture of the criminal and their crime, enriched by descriptions of physical appearance and clothing. As Clair Hughes notes in *Dressed in Fiction* “dress is part of the ‘seen’ from which we may ‘guess the unseen’, where we may trace the ‘implication of things’” (115) and crime fiction is a genre in which the reader is particularly on the alert for visual indications. Sartorial clues are especially relevant to developing this picture in that they are often ordinary everyday items, befitting the realist nature of the fiction, that may subtly develop the plot without drawing the reader’s attention to the mechanics of the narrative. Though this may be true of all types of clues, clothing is distinctively suited to revealing a unique body, being specific to a wearer, sometimes custom made, often bearing the physical outline of body parts in patterns of wear or sweat marks. The reader is invited to piece together these clues, to imagine, for example, the shoes that make a footprint and the feet that wore the shoes, or to consider the absent owner of a discarded mask or a dropped glove, to construct an image that will reveal the identity of the criminal. The reader is simultaneously entertained and perplexed by the machinations used to conceal and reveal identity and is encouraged to read and misread appearances to preserve the enigma for as long as possible. Clues may be deliberately misleading; red herrings that make the reader suspect an innocent party like the gaping pockets of the innocent Sir Justin in Grant Allen’s “The Great Ruby Robbery” (1892). They may ambiguously point

¹⁵ Critics debate the first crime fiction narrative, suggesting the story of Cain and Abel in the Bible, Daniel Defoe’s *Moll Flanders* (1722), William Godwin’s *Caleb Williams* (1794) or even *The Newgate Calendar*, a collection of sensational criminal biographies from the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries.

towards multiple suspects as in the case of the discarded nightdress in Wilkie Collins' *The Moonstone* (1868). On the other hand, they may be so suggestive of one individual as to lead the reader to question if the clue is so obvious as to be a double bluff, like the distinctive footprints in R Austin Freeman's "The Man with the Nailed Shoes" (1909). These slippery traces play an integral part in developing the mystery element of the plot, building suspense for the reader by prolonging the discovery of the real criminal. They also cause surprise by highlighting unlikely figures as criminals, encouraging mistaken identity or emphasising unusual events. A single shoe for example illustrates disorder, possibly with sinister undertones, an allegorical marker that all is not as it should be. The use of these visual clues in the crime narrative is linked to originality of plot, as each story attempts to deviate from those that precede it for fear of revealing the villain too easily by obvious clues or predictable plot twists.

This chapter argues that although clothing and appearance vary considerably from character to character, the methods by which their looks are read, and the deductions gleaned by the reader or viewer may share common characteristics, despite the very different times and cultures in which these stories were published. The analysis considers how crime writers use clothing, grouping texts into four distinct areas to illustrate how appearance is used to judge morality and criminality. Charles Dickens exposes anxieties about reading in "Hunted Down" (1859) through reference to contemporary theories of physiognomy and visual identification as tools to measure morality. Edgar Allan Poe's "Murders in the Rue Morgue" (1841) and Grant Allen's "The Great Ruby Robbery" (1892) feature criminals who debunk these methods of identification because they are not identifiable to the reader by dress and appearance. In these stories, the reader is refused the ability to interpret appearances to allow the narrator the privilege of revealing the culprit. Meade's mastermind female criminals challenge conventional attitudes towards fashion and femininity, hiding criminality behind an attractive façade of social conformity

in *The Brotherhood of the Seven Kings* (1898) and *The Sorceress of the Strand* (1903). Israel Zangwill and Emma Orczy rely on moral judgements about appearance to construct dissociative identities from a single character in “Cheating the Gallows” (1893) and “The Fenchurch Mystery” (1901) respectively. In all the stories, dress projects an image of social conformity but also a sense of ‘otherness,’ a monstrous self or an alter-ego which is difficult, sometimes impossible, for the reader to decipher from the clues. Nevertheless, by adding sartorial details in some places but not in others, the writer encourages the reader to infer something from these ‘clues’ with the result that dress is persistently read and interpreted as a measure of character and an expectation remains that the reader can ‘see’ the criminality of the perpetrator.

Central to the use of dress as a marker of criminal identity is the conflation of a person’s moral character with their appearance, invariably complicated by concerns of class, gender and fashion, which render the relationship unreliable and arbitrary. As Hughes affirms, “dress in descriptions, in general, is over-determined, polyvalent, restless, but one of its most consistent and most treacherous uses in fiction is to suggest the moral state of a character” (“Realism” 232). Even in stories where the felon is known and visible from the outset, clothing and appearance form part of the reader’s evaluation of moral and judicial codes as the reader attempts to understand the reasons why a person may commit an illegal act, such as the narrator’s evaluation of Slinkton in “Hunted Down.” Dress may be used as a yardstick by which to measure social conformity and to reveal characteristics of a person’s motivations, as in the case of Meade’s female criminals. Alternatively, it may be used to contrast appropriate and inappropriate behaviours as in the split characters created by Orczy and Zangwill. These sartorial and aesthetic descriptions are particularly notable in short stories (as opposed to novels) where character development is limited because they imply that the writer is inferring something about the character or building a crucial part of the plot. The writer artfully

constructs appearance, but its interpretation can never be securely defined because the reader's perceptions vary according to his or her own backgrounds and experiences. As Cynthia Kuhn and Cindy Carlson point out in *Styling Texts: Dress and Fashion in Literature*; "fashioning is a mindful effort to construct an identity, and the dressed body engages with a network of cultural codes in performing a text" (3). Of course, it is not possible to ascertain criminality from the clothed body alone, else there would be no mystery in the plot, rather there are more complex discourses at work in the reader's perception of dress than a simple distinction between criminal and non-criminal. Indeed, seeing and judging are entangled; they are culturally conditioned responses often unknowingly deployed, reading practices which are multivalent, interconnected but fraught with anxieties as shown throughout this chapter and across the thesis more widely.

Profiling the Criminal: The Science of Identity

There has been comparatively little scholarly analysis of the criminal's physical profile in Victorian crime fiction,¹⁶ perhaps surprising given the focus placed upon detectives. There are several reasons why this may be. Firstly, the problematic definition of the term criminal which semantically suggests legal conviction, though few of the short stories consider the arrest, prosecution and trial of the suspected felon and therefore the characters are not technically criminal in this sense. Secondly, the desirability of featuring a villain who *cannot* be easily recognised demands that writers are increasingly original in their depictions of criminals to preserve the whodunnit. Thirdly and relatedly, there is no clear chronological trajectory of criminal 'type' and the offender is not fabricated on

¹⁶ Scholarly discussion of the criminal as other, particularly from a postcolonial perspective, is abundant as is scientific physiological profiling but there are few, if any, attempts to chronologically plot the changing appearance of the criminal through the progression of the genre.

an aesthetic pathway that can be aligned to class, fashion or historical events but varies according to the nature of the crime and the setting. For instance, financial frauds tend to rely on mixing with the upper classes and thus the criminal must fit in with the sartorial and aesthetic codes of the intended victims at that moment in time. Finally, the volume of crime fiction produced across the period means that a huge variety of criminal characters was created, some of whom featured in just one story and were therefore not robustly described.

Distinguishing criminals from ordinary citizens was a serious concern in Victorian society from around the mid-nineteenth century, when national policing was established, and the cultural focus shifted from crime to criminal.¹⁷ Various methods of criminal anthropology were pioneered in an effort to ascertain a biological basis for rising criminality and to develop a definitive profile of a criminal's physical characteristics. In *History and Crime*, Barry S Godfrey, Paul Lawrence and Chris A. Williams propose that Henry Mayhew developed an early theory of criminology¹⁸ in his multi-volume 1850s study of *London Labour and the London Poor*. Mayhew saw crime as a moral failing, "a weakness in the character of those who fell into gambling, drunkenness, prostitution and theft because they lacked the will to lead an honest working life" (Godfrey et al 11-12). This weakness suggests the susceptibility of any individual to be drawn into crime if they lacked the moral capacities that Mayhew deemed so critical. Godfrey et al argue that Mayhew's social commentary helped to "cement the idea of a criminal 'class'" (12) an uncivilised group operating beyond the laws of conventional society, notably immortalised by Charles Dickens in his Newgate novel *Oliver Twist* in 1838. This

¹⁷ Foucault suggests in *Discipline and Punish* that the shift from act to defendant begins in the late eighteenth century (99). The increased popularity of crime fiction from the mid-century onwards, Darwin's publication of *The Origin of the Species* (1859) and the appearance of the first detectives in fiction, Dupin in "Murders of the Rue Morgue" (1841) and Inspector Bucket in *Bleak House* (serialised 1852-53) all encouraged this focus on the criminal.

¹⁸ The OED has the earliest use of the term criminology, as a study of crime and criminals, from 1872.

classification marks an early phase of a science of criminology, “socio-historical processes of identification and categorisation” (Godfrey 12) that demarcated the criminal as ‘other’ and looked for visual means to determine a criminal from a respectable member of Victorian society. There was an increasing expectation that science would allow the recognition and definition of ‘the criminal’ as a stable identity with obvious visual characteristics but dress undermined this stability through the disguise of these features and through the instability of its interpretation. Indeed, the gang of criminal boys in *Oliver Twist* pickpocket rich men in broad daylight because their inferior status, slight statures and their shabby, ill-fitting dishevelled garments render them virtually invisible to their victims.

Mayhew’s study was not the first consideration of criminal identity as Havelock Ellis explains in his 1890 study *The Criminal*. Ellis’s anthropological study explores the “chief varieties” (Ellis 7) of criminal, documenting his labours over the previous fifteen years. His studies drew on many earlier sources, citing the work of Greek and Roman physiognomists, medieval law, seventeenth and eighteenth-century pseudo-scientists and the highly influential work of his contemporary, Cesare Lombroso, in the 1870s. Many of these early criminologists perpetuated the theory that criminality was a sign of physical degeneration with a direct link between the size and shape of a persons’ head and the ‘moral matter’ contained within.¹⁹ Ellis supports these scientific observations as indisputable empirical pathology though he does point out limitations, arguing for example that “the *average* size of criminals’ heads is probably about the same as that of ordinary people’s heads” but “thieves more frequently have small heads; the large heads

¹⁹ Criminal anthropology fed into and was influenced by Darwinian theories such as social Darwinism and eugenics that encompassed a range of political and ideological positions. From the 1850s through to the turn of the century, there was a scientific vogue for classification that attempted to explain human behaviour as a product of both social and biological factors. Lombroso’s biological theories were discredited in the light of later sociological theories.

are usually found among murderers” (49).²⁰ He goes on to discuss receding foreheads as a sign of low mental capacity, developed lower jaws as indicative of an individual prone to violence and voluminous ears as a sure indication of criminality.

Although science was seen as a useful tool by which criminality might be estimated, emphasis still lay on instinctive feelings of suspicion that may be aroused by unfamiliarity or negative stereotypes. Physical attributes corresponding to criminal profiles could be used to affirm long-held notions of criminality, supporting a mixture of bias, racism and personal feelings of suspicion towards individuals or social groups. As Pittard summarises in his examination of *Purity and Contamination in Late Victorian Detective Fiction*, “underpinning the new criminology was the belief that people recognised the features of the criminal, and that popular culture solidified these instinctive responses” (109). Clothing, however, could be deliberately appropriated to disguise these physiognomic markers, hiding, for example, a large chin behind false whiskers or a pronounced forehead under a large hat. However, these garments brought with them their own set of responses, unintentional judgements about fashion and dress since “the act of reading the sartorial frame is inescapable, as viewers formulate judgements based on their own interpretations” (Kuhn 3). Identifying criminality therefore fluctuated from reader to reader, according to their experiences, knowledge and personal viewpoint.

There is a readerly vulnerability (both by the characters inside and the reader outside of the text) to be misled by dress because often the action is so mundane that one does not realise the interpretation as a conscious act. Charles Dickens’s “Hunted Down”²¹ (1859)

²⁰ The reference to head size appears as late as 1892 in Arthur Conan Doyle’s Sherlock Holmes story “The Blue Carbuncle” in which a lost hat of large size is interpreted as belonging to a man of above average intellect on this account. The owner is, however, not a criminal.

²¹ The story was originally published in three instalments in the *New York Ledger* and was subsequently published in Britain in two consecutive weekly editions of *All the Year Round* in August 1860. Both magazine issues featured an instalment of *The Woman in White*, with volume two beginning in the same

draws on the instinctive gut feeling of criminality, implicit judgements of dress and a pseudo-scientific visual analysis in the depiction of the villain, Slinkton. The story makes explicit reference to physiognomy to read the criminal character, but this does not singularly expose his criminality. Rather he falls under suspicion because of his overall appearance (including his clothing) and because he evokes an instinctive dislike that the first-person narrator (and the reader) equate with his morality. Science is presented as a reliable measurement of character by the narrator Mr Sampson who attempts to read facial characteristics to assess the nature of strangers, though he admits that the readings are swayed as soon as an individual is given the opportunity to “explain themselves away” (48). He declares that “there is nothing truer than physiognomy” (48) and that his “first impression of [...] people, founded on face and manner alone, was invariably true” (49). Yet his statement is undermined because the first character he meets is defined not by face and manner alone but also by his dress, signifying that Sampson’s interpretation of clothing is so instinctive that he fails to recognise that it forms part of his visual judgement. The interpretation is further hindered by the unreliability of Sampson who chooses to omit certain details and is “less than honest” (Allingham 89) with the reader and other characters in the story. The anxiety of establishing exactly who is the criminal is deliberately confused by the narrator’s revelations and the way in which he relates his observations to the reader.

The repeated mentions of Slinkton’s hairstyle and fastidiousness of dress render him as a two-dimensional figure whose appearance is calculated to generate a sense of suspicion that Sampson cannot explain. Respectably dressed in mourning and removing his hat with a deft hand clad in “a particularly well-fitting black kid glove” (Dickens 49), Slinkton

edition as the first instalment of “Hunted Down.” Dickens’s story is said to be based on poisoner Thomas Wainwright whom Dickens met just before his arrest and trial. See Allingham, Philip V. “Dickens’s Unreliable Narrator in ‘Hunted Down.’”

initially appears to exemplify social and sartorial propriety. It is his “elaborately brushed and oiled hair” (49) that causes consternation, however, and which Philip Allingham argues renders Slinkton “somewhat effeminate” (90). His appearance provokes “a very great aversion” (49) from Sampson encouraging the reader to suspect (correctly) that Slinkton is likely to be the criminal of the story. Allingham suggests this aversion is grounded on “presumed common distaste for an unmanly, affected man” (90) though the excessive neatness could equally be construed as a monomania indicative of a cold, almost psychopathic precision. Sampson’s reaction is understandable because as Joanne Finkelstein highlights “the least incongruity in appearance could be detected as a tell-tale detail that warned others of a lurking barbarity, a monstrous self only partially contained, which could erupt into society and destroy the fabric of civilization” (65). Slinkton’s dress and appearance now become not so much an illustration of neatness and order, the conformity to social expectation, as something more sinister, indicative of the potential for moral disorder.

Though the story uses a contemporary pseudo-scientific approach to judging criminality in Sampson’s reliance on physiognomy,²² it is the much older tradition of instinctive response that takes precedence in Sampson’s belief in Slinkton’s criminal identity. Sampson asks rhetorically why, “because a man happens to part his hair straight up the middle of his head, [he] should permit [him]self to suspect, and even to detest him?” (53). The implicit answer here, as per Pittard’s contention, is because the man is morally ‘other,’ he is a criminal, and the other characters instinctively feel it. Sampson’s question is significant since it equates the feeling of detestation with physical appearance and exposes the anxiety of reading character through visual signs, an act of which Sampson

²² As Jeanne Fahnestock notes, “writers and readers shared a system of meaning, a code for translating descriptive terminology into aspects of personality. Readers from the 1850s to the 1870s could be relied on to understand something of the code of *physiognomy*, the ‘science’ of reading the character through the face” (325). Sampson’s response is thus typical of the period.

is aware but cannot explain. This privileging of the visual is repeatedly justified throughout the story as the narrator asserts: “an observer of men who finds himself steadily repelled by some apparently trifling thing in a stranger is right to give it great weight. It may be the clue to the whole mystery” (53). This statement is a self-reflexive defence of the crime fiction genre that relies on trifling details to reveal its secrets, advising the reader to be alert for such devices and defending the use of apparently trivial objects or occurrences. Moreover, it is also a vindication of the importance of feeling alongside observation as a means of assessing character and as a method of estimating criminality.

The ambiguity of Slinkton’s appearance and the multiple (physiognomic and instinctive) interpretations suggested within the narrative generate doubt as to the true identity of the unknown criminal (at this point in the story) and his motives, reflecting wider anxieties about dress as a moral signifier. The visual detection process is clearly complicated by ‘trifling’ things, such as the murderer’s hairstyle, that produce discomfort in the observer without any obvious cause. This discomfort can be explained in part by the nonconformity of his looks and the possession of features that are unfamiliar or that are difficult to interpret by normal aesthetic standards. Introducing a new sign to the aesthetic code that is not understood by the responders creates hostility because of the uncertainty of interpretation. It is impossible to accurately judge a character by garments or affectations that have never been seen before and that have no points of reference within the usual parameters of social interactions. The lack of cultural reference points generates a distance between subject and reader but also creates anxieties in what constitutes a criminal sign and what it says about the reader if they can interpret a sign that others consider to be criminal. Slinkton appears ‘shifty’ (highlighted by his name) because his peculiar hairstyle eludes sartorial and aesthetic codes though his dress conveys traditional respectability.

Within fiction, criminal identity could be elaborately disguised by writers, subverting the cultural expectation of instinctively feeling or knowing criminality. However, the reverse is also true, that where a character creates a feeling of aversion, their visual description contains some sense of non-conformity that affirms this feeling even if the reader/viewer cannot pinpoint the source of anxiety, as evinced by the perception of Slinkton. The science of physiognomy is partially vindicated in “Hunted Down” as a means of interpreting and establishing criminal identity because the unusual character turns out to be just as villainous as his looks and dress suggest.²³ Superficial embellishments such as hairstyles and clothing are utilised as a method of judging criminality as long as they are supported by the ‘sense’ that the character is in some way ‘other,’ different from the law-abiding normal characters in the story. Thus, Dickens indicates that science did not and could not exist in isolation as a means to aver criminal identity but coexisted alongside personal judgements dependent on cultural factors, individual experiences and feelings.

Unfair Play: Unlikely Criminals and Unreadable Clues

While Dickens relies on an age-old feeling of suspicion alongside visual description to enhance the sense of criminality in “Hunted Down,” Edgar Allan Poe and Grant Allen deliberately keep the reader in the dark as to the appearance of their criminal protagonists, preventing any link between looks and morality. Removing the reader’s ability to interpret character reduces the sense of satisfaction of resolving the crime since there is no possibility in outwitting either the criminal or the detective. In the Golden Age of crime fiction (the 1920s and 30s) much was made of the reader’s participation in detective fiction as if embarking on a game in which the author tries to keep one step ahead of the

²³ Physiognomy continued to be used to read morality throughout the period. Catherine Louise Pirkis also refers to physiognomy in “The Redhill Sisterhood” (1892) in which female detective Loveday Brooke suspects a repulsively ugly but innocent man instead of the good-looking young man who has committed the crime.

reader. Dorothy Sayers, Ronald Knox, G.K. Chesterton and others conceived tongue-in-cheek rules for these games and set-up the Detection Club whereby writers had to swear solemnly never to conceal a vital clue from a reader.²⁴ Prior to this, no such considerations existed, with the formula for the successful crime story depending on the place of publication and readership, authorial reputation and originality. In the interests of ingenuity, the offender might be revealed as any number of unlikely characters such as a deviant clergyman, an innocently intentioned child, an animal or even the detective, none of whom would be suspected by the reader, who might not be aware of the genre of the fiction they read. This diversity was understandable if unrealistic, since crime fiction authors could not have retained the air of mystery in their plots had they applied the criminologists' findings uniformly to their stories and thus fiction moves away from reality in the way that criminals were visually presented. Implicitly there is a recognition that certain types of dress and appearance would overtly reveal the culprit.

Stories clearly defined as detective fiction rely on visible clues to unravel the plot and reveal the perpetrator and the reader is alert for visual signs from the outset. Readers of anthologised crime fiction were acutely aware of the genre in which a story is placed.²⁵ So too might be avid readers of well-known crime authors (or serialised characters) such as Arthur Conan Doyle or Arthur Morrison. Moreover, by the end of the nineteenth century a nomenclature had developed that might easily identify a crime story from its title, such as "The Case of..." or "The Adventure of..." But in earlier crime fiction (pre-1890s) the reader did not necessarily expect a crime to unfold at all, particularly if the story featured within a periodical comprised of a mixture of factual and varied fiction

²⁴ See Chapter Five for more on these rules.

²⁵ Ellery Queen states in "Detective Short Story: The First Hundred Years" that "the earliest legitimate anthology was published by Chapman & Hall in London in 1895. It was called *The Long Arm & other Detective Stories*" (489). The definition of 'legitimate' in this context is undefined and the claim is unsubstantiated. Nevertheless, it indicates that anthologies existed in the Victorian era.

articles. In these earlier stories, the reader is thus not engaged in solving the mystery of identity from the outset. For the keen-eyed reader, there may be hints of criminal identity along the way but, as in “Hunted Down,” writers often relied on building a *feeling* of uneasiness, almost sensing the criminal, rather than visually identifying the perpetrator.²⁶ Accordingly, there are fewer mentions of dress within early Victorian crime stories. Rather, writers focused on creating an atmosphere of fear and a sense of alienation between reader and criminal that was enhanced by fewer common points of reference to reduce the level of empathy that a reader may feel. The most obvious example of this is Edgar Allan Poe’s “The Murders in the Rue Morgue” published in the American periodical *Graham’s Lady’s and Gentleman’s Magazine* in 1841.²⁷ The story is widely considered as a forerunner of detective fiction and the opening paragraphs self-consciously recognise detection as primarily a visual science. Nevertheless, there is an awareness that observations are subjective:

He [the detective Dupin] makes, in silence, a host of observations and inferences. So perhaps, do his companions; and the difference in the extent of information obtained, lies not so much in the validity of inference as in the quality of observation. The necessary knowledge is that of *what* to observe (143).

Interpreting the visual is key to the analytical skills of a successful detective and yet the perpetrator is revealed to be an orangutan that the reader has neither seen nor heard of prior to the detective’s revelation. The clues to the unlikely identity of the murderer lie in the violence of the crime requiring strength beyond that of an average human: a series

²⁶ This is perhaps a vestige from the sensational *Newgate Calendar* and penny dreadfuls that preceded Victorian crime fiction, in which gore and horror were signature tropes.

²⁷ The magazine catered for a mixed gender readership, claiming to embrace “every department of literature” and each edition was “embellished with engravings, fashion, and music” (i). The magazine featured coloured fashion plates showing the fashions for each month. A bound 1841 edition has been digitised via Hathi Trust.

of witness accounts testifying to hearing a shrill voice speaking an undetermined language, and the means of entry to the murder scene via a fourth-storey window. Visually, the only clues are a tuft of non-human tawny-coloured hair found in the clutched fingers of one of the victims and bruises on the body that show the impressions of fingers anatomically different to those of a human.



Figure 1: White horse hair queue tied with black ribbon, 1850-1899. Museum number T.1017-1913. Courtesy of V&A Collection Online, 2 Nov 2015.

The inhuman culprit renders the use of dress impossible as a means of identifying criminality, but the story does rely on sartorial knowledge, known only to the detective, to solve the case. The detective can ascertain some clue as to the identity of the orangutan's owner through the discovery of "a small piece of ribbon, which from its form, and from its greasy appearance, has evidently been used in tying the hair in one of those long *queues* of which sailors are so

fond" (Poe 170) [Figure 1]. From this small piece of cloth, the detective can ascertain that the sailor has connections with Malta, the knot being distinctively Maltese in form. He places an advertisement containing these details, asking the owner to come forward and claim his escaped orangutan and successfully apprehends the man inadvertently responsible for the atrocities. The detective thus identifies the pseudo-murderer through a specific knowledge of dress to which the reader cannot possibly be party, whilst the witnesses describe the killer only in terms of unfamiliarity. Neither of the 'criminals' (the orangutan or his owner) can be seen by the reader in this early text; nevertheless, the story illustrates the significance of dress in revealing characteristics of identity, in

this case connecting the ribbon with a hairstyle associated with a particular profession and a knot with a specific country of origin. Dupin is of course a male reading another male's dress, perhaps a clue that might be especially unreadable to a female reader. In any case, it is only through his interpretation that the reader can access the solution to the mystery. Dupin's reading of the ribbon is given as the *only* possible deduction, empowering the detective over the reader and unequivocally leading to the solution to the murder.

If Poe's orangutan was an unlikely criminal contender in 1841, then the thief in Grant Allen's "The Great Ruby Robbery" published in *The Strand* in July 1892 was hardly more obvious. Like Poe, Allen renders his criminal culprit invisible to the reader and uses dress merely as a distraction technique to lend suspicion to other characters in the story. The story charts the loss of a priceless ruby necklace from the bedroom of an American heiress who has been flirting with an Irish nobleman, Sir Justin. Allen leaves hints as to the events that follow and lays red herrings to influence the reader, such as this observation from Sir Justin:

'Is that your room with the light burning, Miss Remanet?' He went on, in a fairly loud official voice, as the servant came to answer. 'The one with the balcony, I mean? Quite Venetian, isn't it? Reminds one of Romeo and Juliet. But most convenient for a burglary, too! Such nice, low rails! Mind you take care of the Remanet rubies!' (219).

Sure enough, the rubies are stolen that night, though Sir Justin is presented as a handsome but blundering Lothario rather than a potential burglar. Allen increases suspicion of the baronet as the story progresses using dress not as an indicator of criminality, but as a means by which the theft could have been enacted, suggesting that "Sir Justin may have carried the rubies away by mistake, entangled in his clothes" (225).

Later, the reader sees Sir Justin look “hard at the dress coat he had worn on the eventful evening. Things may cling to a sleeve, don’t you know – or be entangled in a cuff- or get casually in a pocket! Or someone may put them there” (227). Here Allen consciously draws attention to dress as another red herring to tease the reader as to the identity of the thief. The focus on Sir Justin’s dress as a possible excuse or explanation for the crime draws attention away from the real criminal, deliberately misleading the reader by inference.

The resolution to the case is even more incredible, however, as the culprit is revealed to be the detective Mr Gregory. While searching the room, the detective realises that the jewels are in the most obvious location, laying on the dressing table covered by a handkerchief, and utilises a more deviant rationalisation than is usual for detectives to take advantage of the situation:

knowing it was a safe case he had quietly pocketed them before her very eyes, all unsuspected. He felt sure that nobody could accuse him of a robbery which was committed before he came, and which he had himself been called in to investigate (231).

Throughout the story the reader is invited to look but not to interpret, though the



"THE DETECTIVE WAS LIFTING A LACE HANDKERCHIEF."

Figure 2: "The Detective was Lifting a Lace Handkerchief." Illustration of the Detective by Sidney Paget from *The Strand Magazine*, Volume IV, July-Dec 1892.382. Via Internet Archive Online, 3 Dec 2018.

accompanying illustrations undermine the narrative, such as Figure 2 which seems to show the rubies underneath the handkerchief, a fact left implicit in the text. The story merely hints at the location of the rubies, as the detective is seen "lifting a lace handkerchief on the dressing-table" (222) but the reader is not told what lays underneath either in the text or in the caption which accompanies the image.

Allen's use of the most obvious

hiding place plays with established conventions of crime fiction to confuse the reader and suggest a double-bluff.²⁸ There is no possibility of the reader interpreting the clues from the text and no hint of the detective's criminality from his appearance, which is not described in the text and only vaguely depicted in the illustration, which shows Gregory dressed unremarkably in a dark-coloured lounge coat of the period.²⁹

Unlike "Hunted Down," instinctive responses to appearance in "Ruby Robbery" are shown to be inaccurate and unfair because they are embroiled with questions of class and social position and their erroneous equations with morality. Instead, the story offers a satirical reading of the character types contained within, who consider themselves to

²⁸ Hiding the missing item in the most obvious place is a notable trope of Poe's "The Purloined Letter" (1844) whilst searching the boxes of the servants and the suspicion of upper-class members of the family is evocative of Wilkie Collins's sensation novel *The Moonstone* (1868).

²⁹ There is one other illustration that depicts Mr Gregory after his arrest amongst a group of policeman/guards; however, it is not explicit which of the men is the detective.

be above suspicion because of their advantageous social position. The only person to have correctly deduced the perpetrator is the maid Bertha, to whom the heiress had “taken an unaccountable dislike” (227). Again, Allen is using the feeling of criminality discussed earlier to hint that she may be the perpetrator. The lower-class character alone has the insight to read through the superficial façade of the detective. Allen’s lack of visual clues and his avoidance of using dress as a moral signifier is the result of the inability of the main characters (or the narrator) to interpret the clues even if they were present – they are simply too shallow to look beyond their own lives, the very fact that results in the loss of the rubies.

Piecing together the criminal’s identity is impossible in “Ruby Robbery” because the crime takes place in *media res*, leading the reader to suspect innocent parties of the crime (made obvious in the title of the story) even before it happens. Typically, in crime fiction, and especially detective fiction, the crime does not unfold in real time but has already taken place by the time the reader enters the story and thus the narrative is constructed to help the reader visualise what is not actually there, but what might have been, a carefully balanced dichotomy between absence and presence. Allen explodes this notion because the crime has not taken place but occurs during the story, even though the reader is unaware that this is the case. The detective is an opportunist thief and clothing is not used to conceal or reveal his identity because he is clearly defined to the reader as the detective without the use of visual clues, an identity that absolves him of suspicion. Though the family are all worried as to the identity of the thief, they are not anxious as to the identity of the detective, trusting circumstantial evidence and his behaviour as testament to his character. His appearance evidently does not arouse suspicion and there is no sense that his criminality has been felt by any characters other than Bertha, the subtext suggesting that these upper-class characters are unable to see through the superficialities of appearance or recognise immorality, including their own.

This also translates into an anxiety for the reader who is equally incapable of deducing the identity of the criminal and who may therefore feel 'cheated' by the revelation of the perpetrator. The reader's failure to detect the criminal is shared by the majority of the other characters and notions of criminal identity are challenged, and charged at, the characters in the story rather than the reader.

Both Poe and Allen play with the reader's anxieties by creating criminals who could not be predicted, read from clues or estimated through any scientific knowledge. They use criminals who do not require visual definition and to whom dress are inconsequential despite the invitation to the reader to look closely at the characters and events in the narrative. The lack of references to clothing illustrates that not all crime writers utilised sartorial and aesthetic ambiguity to reveal criminality and that this is not a failproof method to deduce morality. However, readerly anxiety is still generated because the characters are made deliberately unreadable and where signs exist, such as the ribbon and the handkerchief, they are interpreted explicitly within the narrative with no room for an alternative explanation. The reader looks for clues which are not there and ultimately the denouement comes at the cost of the reader's satisfaction because they are told of criminality rather than piecing it together for themselves.

Female Criminals: Beautiful Fiends

Poe and Allen were not the only writers to depict criminals that could not be identified by readers, as a new wave of unreadable criminal 'type' emerged in fiction of the 1890s in the form of the kleptomaniac. These were typically well-to-do female criminals who succumbed to impulsive petty theft, particularly of clothes and jewels. Aesthetically, they appeared well-dressed, fashionable and attractive but because they were not portrayed as criminals in the conventional sense, they could not be recognised as such by the reader

and dress functions merely as object of desire rather than as a measure of morality. Appearing in “The Mystery of Mrs Dickinson (1889) by ‘Nicholas Carter,’³⁰ “Kleptomaniac and Thief” (1892) (part of Mrs George Corbett’s *Recollections of a Lady Detective*) and L.T. Meade and Clifford Halifax’s “The Posenby Diamonds” (1894) amongst other stories, kleptomaniacs were portrayed as victims of a sudden psychological malady³¹ rather than criminals and therefore could not be anticipated within a text. Like Allen’s detective, they were opportunist thieves overcome by an immoral desire outside of their control, usually linked to weaknesses of gender. Their affliction with a chiefly feminine condition linked to the fripperies of fashion, shopping and being “the undoubted victim of over-culture and little to do” (Meade “Ponsonby” 83) was indicative of growing anxieties about women’s place in late Victorian society. These were women who were not part of “the marching army of women, in the advancing education and culture of their sex” (Meade “Ponsonby” 83) but bored women who turn briefly to crime to satisfy transient desires. However, they manage to maintain their respectability because the crime is given a medical explanation, removing any sense of agency. There is no anxiety about identifying the criminal in the text because there is no sense that they pose a threat to anyone other than shopkeepers and the thefts are always repaid by apologetic male family members before police involvement. The reader has no real chance of deducing the criminal from the women’s visual appearance unless the kleptomania is evident in the story’s title, because their clothing is not used as a disguise or indicator of morality. Moreover, as women, they were much less likely to be suspected as criminals than men because of traditional expectations of women to be passive and obedient and because male criminals dominated factual and fictional contemporary accounts. Indeed, there is a

³⁰ A ‘house name’ used by many writers to chart the exploits of fictional sleuth Nick Carter from 1886 to the 1940s. “The Mystery of Mrs Dickinson” appeared in the *New York Weekly* on November 10, 1894.

³¹ An article by Bramwell, “Insanity and Crime” confirms that “a great number of madnesses have been invented in modern times—homicidal mania, suicidal mania, kleptomania, dipsomania, and, for aught I know, others. These are called monomanias” (897).

surprisingly high number of female criminals in short crime fiction given that statistically, according to Lombroso, “women committed fewer crimes than did men” (quoted in Horn 53).

Though Ellis and Lombroso considered female criminals in their studies,³² Elizabeth Carolyn Miller argues in *Framed: The New Woman Criminal in British Culture at the Fin De Siècle*, that “fictional female criminals cannot be classified or labelled within the criminological taxonomy that social scientists of the era had invented” (4) because as romanticised figures they had no basis in truth. The poverty-induced crimes committed by the majority of female criminals in real life were largely ignored in fiction,³³ replaced by tales of scheming upper-class frauds, thefts and other elaborate schemes that usually removed women from physical labour or mixing with lower classes. The female criminal type we meet in fiction therefore projects an anxiety of an uncomfortable possibility: that female criminals were not common ruffians but middle and upper-class women who mixed freely in respectable society undetected and indistinguishable from anyone else.

Notwithstanding Miller’s reservations, profiles of female criminal types *were* attempted in the period. Lombroso’s analysis produced a triangular model of female criminality with three distinct types. In one corner, Lombroso sites the self-declared and highly visible prostitute who may be clearly identified through her dress. At another corner, he places the innate criminal who is depicted as unmaternal, gender or sex inverted, and anatomically unattractive. At the third corner, he deposits the normal woman, “the most

³² Studies of female criminals such as Lombroso’s *La donna delinquent, la prostitute e la donna normale* (1893) and *The Female Offender* (1895) appeared much later than those of their male counterparts.

³³ Mrs Henry Wood’s *Johnny Ludlow* stories did feature female criminals of the lower classes from the 1870s onwards, but the stories are typically didactic tales of rural life rather than primarily crime fiction. The most frequent female offence in Lombroso’s study is prostitution but this is notably missing from middle-class short crime fiction, hardly a subject matter appropriate for family periodicals. However, E.F Bleiler included a story “The Revelations of a Detective” by ‘Tom Fox’ in the 1980 anthology *A Treasury of Victorian Detective Stories* wherein a detective solves a murder in a brothel. Bleiler comments that the story constitutes “curb literature, sometimes a little on the raffish side” (71) and certainly not aimed at the traditional middle-class readership.

unstable figure because she was physically indistinguishable from the ‘occasional criminal’” (Horn 141). The result of Lombroso’s study “was less the (hoped for) transparent pathology of the female offender than the barely legible *potential* dangerousness of the normal woman” (Horn 140). With the exception of Phoebe Dole in “The Long Arm” (1895)³⁴ all the female criminals examined as part of this study occupy the ‘normal’ category in that they are all physically ordinary though, like kleptomaniacs, they may be prone to psychological ‘maladies’ which may be used to explain their behaviour. Far from being degenerate, physically obtrusive or aesthetically displeasing, the female criminals featured in the short stories are predominantly attractive, dressed fashionably and socially successful and as such, embody the latent criminality that Lombroso identified as dangerous. They are “figure[s] of fantasy rather than a reproduction of the headlines” (Miller 4) and coupled with the disproportionate ratio of female criminals in crime fiction compared to real life, there is undoubtedly a literary desire to portray a new and exciting character type that readers would find appealing.³⁵ Moreover, male criminals were generally not depicted as physically attractive as Miller points out (3) suggesting that female criminals were intended to be arousing objects of desire specifically intended to attract readers.

Female criminals wear clothing appropriate for their character but manipulate it in a manner that the reader cannot foresee, using specifically female garments in an ingenious method to assist their crimes and escape justice. If fictional female criminals can be categorised as normal in the Lombrosian sense, they tend more towards upper-class than working class in the depictions of their dress, with descriptions of lavish garments that

³⁴ Phoebe enters the crime scene by using her excessively long arm to lift the door latch, fitting Lombroso’s model of the innate criminal. See Chapter Two for a full analysis of this story.

³⁵ This sexing-up of female characters is also seen in portrayals of the female detective, for whom there were no real-life comparisons. See Chapter Three for a chronological analysis of the development of the female detective.

have additional properties of practical use in the crime story. For example, W.S. Hayward's "The Mysterious Countess" (1861) escapes justice by ingesting poison hidden in a ring on her finger. Socialite and gang member Sybil Kavanagh in Max Pemberton's "The Ripening Rubies" (1894) hides the jewellery she has stolen in the inner panels of her specially adapted ballgown, and the poisoner Lady Irene in Emma Orczy's "The Woman in the Big Hat" (1910) confuses the witnesses by hiding her identity behind extravagant headgear.



Figure 3: "I am a beautifier,' she said." Illustration of Madame Sara by Gordon Browne from "Madame Sara" in *The Sorceress of the Strand*. *The Strand Magazine*, Volume XXIV, July-Dec 1902. 389. Via Internet Archive Online, 1 Dec 2018.

Aside from these imaginative uses of clothing, dress is also used to generate a favourable social response, typically to allow the criminal women to blend in with the crowd, increasing the level of surprise for the reader once their crimes are revealed. This ordinariness creates believable characters and disguises the "monstrous self" to which Joanne Finkelstein refers in *The Fashioned Self*, the criminal and immoral otherness that provides the basis of entertainment for the reader and the moral explanation for the crimes. This monstrosity is overt in L.T. Meade and Robert Eustace's fin de siècle master criminals Madame

Koluchy and Madame Sara, the only female representatives to occupy part of the criminal mastermind subgenre of fiction that arose in the 1890s.³⁶ Madame Koluchy featured in ten short stories serialised in *The Strand* as *The Brotherhood of the Seven Kings* (Jan-Oct

³⁶ Other examples include Guy Boothby's *Doctor Nikola* (1896), Grant Allen's *An African Millionaire* (1897), E.W. Hornung's *The Amateur Cracksman* (1899) and Maurice Leblanc's *Arsène Lupin, Gentleman Burglar* (1907). See Chapter Four for more on criminals of the 1890s.

1898) and Madame Sara in six short stories as *The Sorceress of the Strand* (Oct 1902 - Mar 1903) respectively. Despite the severity of their crimes, which include violence and murder, they exemplify the attractive, successful and alluring female criminal type that Miller identifies, depicted in eye-catching illustrations by Gordon Browne [Figure 3] and Sidney Paget [Figure 4]. The drawings show fashionable women with corseted waists and shapely figures, apparently the centre of attention and, as in Figure 4, with no shortage of male admirers. Certainly, these are women who wish to be visible in the society in which they associate, verified in the stories by their notoriety and from the excitement created by their arrival in town. Crucially, despite their visibility, they cannot be read as criminal characters by their dress and appearance and it is this fact that catalyses the series as the narrators struggle to prove the women's criminality to a disbelieving public.

Looking and observing are central and problematic issues in both series because they are bound up with expectations of gender and control. The narratives are related in the first person through male narrators, Norman Head in *Brotherhood* and Dixon Druce in *Sorceress*. The narrators assume typically heterosexual male positions, emphasising the beauty and refinement of the women even though they are aware that the women are manipulative arch-deceivers leaving a trail of destruction in their



Figure 4 "Her Eyes Met Mine." Illustration of Madame Koluchy by Sidney Paget. From *The Strand Magazine* Volume XXV, Jan-June, 1898.88. Via Internet Archive Online, 1 Dec 2018.

wake. Head even employs physiognomy to read Madame Koluchy's face, commenting, "the marked intelligence and power of her face could not fail to arrest attention, even in the most casual observer" ("At the Edge of the Crater" 88). Yet he is evidently not simply a casual observer but watches her intently and consistently across the stories, combining

the detective's eagle eye with the traditional male gaze in an almost predatory manner. This is also seen in *Sorceress* as Druce and his police-surgeon companion Vandaleur confess that "Hunting her [Madame Sara] as a recreation is as good as hunting a man-eating tiger" ("The Talk of the Town" 67), evidently enjoying the thrill of the chase. Yet Madame Sara does not assume the role of a passive object of admiration but uses her visibility as a threat, haunting those that hunt her:

She visited us in our dreams, and in our waking dreams she was also our companion. We suspected her unseen influence on all occasions. We dreaded to see her visible presence in the street, in the Park, at the play—in short, wherever we went ("The Talk of the Town" 67).

Sara and Koluchy redress the power dynamic to some extent because they are unpredictable and do not adhere to the same legal and moral rules by which Head and Druce are bound, appearing and disappearing in accordance with their criminal schemes. However, the women are constantly under surveillance and pursued by men seeking to expose them, to strip away their facades as successful respectable businesswomen and reveal the monstrous other within. This pursuit is inevitably tainted by the physical attraction that the narrators and other men express towards them, a gross distortion of the classic pursuit of man after woman in which the female criminals, if caught, must surely be revealed and reputationally undressed. Though their dress and appearance conceal their monstrosity there is a sense that exposure is always around the corner.

The appearance of the women is significant in this complex interplay between visibility and invisibility as they use clothing to stand out from the crowd and to blend seamlessly within it. In part IV of *Brotherhood* "The Luck of Pitsey Hall" Koluchy is seen in "rose-coloured velvet and blazing with diamonds" (389) and later in "a dress of cloth and silver, [...] all eyes turned to look at her" (391). Her clothes command attention; they

are expensive, luxurious, sensuous garments that suggest affluence and an accepted place within well-to-do society, in turn a signifier of civility. As Tamara Wagner notes, “conflations of moral and financial significance [of dress] figured as a characterization device, working in tandem with theories of physiognomy and phrenology [...] as an extension of the body itself, as an embodiment of moral value” (214). Koluchy is not a common criminal but a woman to be admired. But Koluchy also disguises herself with dress. She appears masked in “The Iron Cirlet,” though her disguise is futile given that Head recognises “a pair of eyes of terrible power and Satanic beauty” (13). She appears in “a gipsy woman’s bonnet and cloak” (426) in “The Doom” and masquerades as an old woman in “The Bloodhound.” In these latter disguises, she is not detected by the characters who seek her and escapes her pursuers by making herself sartorially undesirable and aesthetically unattractive. She becomes almost invisible, an ‘other’ woman beyond the conventional aesthetic boundaries and outside of the marriage market which traditionally underpins the social visibility of Victorian women.

Madame Sara is first presented to the reader as childlike, “her dress was very simple; she looked altogether like a young, fresh, and natural girl” (“Madame Sara” 389) but a few pages later “she wore the richest white satin and quantities of diamonds” (392).

Head appears transfixed by her appearance:

She had never been dressed more splendidly, nor had she ever before looked younger or more beautiful. Wherever she went all eyes followed her. As a rule her dress was simple, almost like what a girl would wear, but tonight she chose rich Oriental stuffs made of many colours, and absolutely glittering with gems. Her golden hair was studded with diamonds. Round her neck she wore turquoise and diamonds mixed. There were many younger women in the room, but

not the youngest nor the fairest had a chance beside Madame. It was not mere beauty of appearance, it was charm – charm which carries all before it (“Madame Sara” 393).³⁷

Despite the narrator’s protests to the contrary, Sara’s charm is constructed, at least in part, by her appearance. Across the stories, Sara is always beautifully dressed, attractive, charming and likeable but there is something ephemeral about her, an otherworldliness suggested by her agelessness. In “The Talk of the Town” Druce describes how Sara is “dressed in dazzling white and silver, and whenever she moved light seemed to be reflected at every point. The brilliance of her golden hair was the only distinct colour about her” (76). His description emphasises her ethereality to a hyperbolic degree – she is translucent and yet radiates light – suggesting that her ‘otherness’ is not criminal but inhuman. Coupled by her ‘hauntings’ of Druce and Vandaleur and even her assertion that “I am not a ghost” (“The Bloodstone 204), Sara projects an image which suggests she cannot be caught because she is in some sense intangible and beyond the realms of human justice. Indeed, despite her eye-turning beauty she can disappear unchallenged at the end of each story shortly before the denouement is reached, vanishing without trace. Her dramatic death, mauled by a wolf while constructing an elaborate scheme to kill Druce and Vandaleur, can only be committed by an unreasoning beast, unaffected by her charm or appearance but driven by an animal instinct to hunt and kill, the same instinct that drove Poe’s orangutan four decades earlier.

³⁷ The twenty-first century reader may be troubled by the pursuit of what appears to be a child by a middle-aged man and the threats contained within but given the legal age of sexual consent was 12 until 1885, when it was increased to 16, the scene is typical of shifts in anxieties between readerships. The interpretation of clothing by each readership is inevitably influenced by social and moral changes such as these. For more on Victorian attitudes towards the infantilization of women see Anne-Marie Beller’s “Sensational Bildung! Infantilization And Female Maturation in Braddon’s 1860s Novels.” *DQR Studies in Literature* 50 (2012): 113,131,267.

There is a tension between acceptable levels of artificiality and downright deception,³⁸ between conventional and criminal levels of disguise and deceit, which resonate through the main characters, and amongst all the women that the female criminals influence over the course of the stories. Sara and Koluchy are adept at concealing their criminality because of the nature of their professions, which centre on improving the physical appearances of their clients to make them appear more attractive. They specialise in professions that encourage artificiality of appearance, making women seem more attractive than they really are, disguising any sense of visual truth behind cosmetics or dress and alluding to their own abilities to don disguise and escape justice. Koluchy is a scientific doctor of sorts who is rumoured to be able to restore youth and beauty to her clients, working with rich ‘patients’ for large sums of money, which helps to affirm her power in the upper echelons of society. Madame Sara is also a pseudo-scientist, working as a ‘beautifier’ who “can make ugly people quite handsome” (“Madame Sara” 388).

Indeed, there are many notable similarities between the two characters. They are both of foreign descent, skilled in science and/or the occult and experts in utilising modern methods to carry out their nefarious schemes, building on earlier female literary villains. As Janis Dawson notes:

Meade’s characters are modelled after the well-known villainesses in Mary Elizabeth Braddon’s *Lady Audley’s Secret* (1862) and Collins’s *Armada* (1866). Seductive, scheming, and treacherous, Lady Audley and Lydia Gwilt each possess a snakelike ability to hypnotize their victims and a willingness to commit murder to achieve their ends. Interestingly, the “ageless” Sara resembles the “childish” Lady Audley; both characters have blue eyes, “quantities of rippling gold

³⁸ See Chapter Four for further analysis of artificiality and deception in the 1890s.

hair,” beautiful complexions, and “innocent,” “childlike” manners.

Koluchy and Sara, like Lady Audley, are described as “beautiful fiend[s]” (64).³⁹

They are prototype femme fatales of typically Victorian fashion, alluring enough to allow them access to all levels of society but without the explicit sexual transgression that underpinned the femme fatale in twentieth century crime fiction. To all outward appearances they are respectable, playing with the instability of moral identity by the conformity of their appearance in much the same way as Slinkton, though the multitude of stories in which they feature increases the level of threat they pose because they can carry out a larger number of crimes over a longer period. The consistency with which they maintain their appearance, even though this is in fact inauthentic to their true intentions, undermines any attempts to uncover their deviousness.

It is the focus on the visual that is key to their plausibility as respectable women – it is their consistent and long-running personas that prove convincing to the victims they dupe though this, like their appearance, is a defective gauge. As successful businesswomen Meade’s villains raise a new social threat because they are not reliant on men either for their living or to raise their social profile. As Miller explores in *Framed*, these New Women criminals exploit commodity culture, including clothing and cosmetics, to create identities that subvert the traditional notions of either criminals or women. They display their own talents and use their bodies as aspirational images for their clients, and they epitomise “women’s suddenly expanded visibility in the public sphere, via consumerism and first-wave feminism, but simultaneously emphasize the opaqueness and indecipherability of female criminality” (Miller 71).

³⁹ There is a diametric opposition between the kleptomaniac women whose behaviour is treated as childlike but who appear aesthetically as successful society women and the scheming adulthood of Koluchy and Sara who appear outwardly as children.

Dress constitutes a vital part in creating and undermining the criminal and non-criminal identities of Koluchy and Sara, disguising the inner monstrosity that can scarcely be believed hidden beneath the attractive exterior. The paradoxical affiliation of beauty with monstrosity in the female criminal is typical of what Michel Foucault refers to as “the aesthetic rewriting of crime” (68) in his 1975 analysis *Discipline and Punish*. Foucault argues that the reader is entranced by the spectacle of crime committed by cunning and sharp-witted criminals, transforming crime into an art form. The appeal of such characters in literature stems from their tendency to keep hidden their ‘true’ nature behind an outwardly attractive façade, masters of acting whose abilities to deceive single out their individuality from the masses. The dominance of attractive villainesses in crime fiction illuminates anxieties about beauty and morality, extending Lombroso’s fears about ‘ordinary’ women by the suggestion that not only could one fail to distinguish a female criminal from an ordinary person, but one might even be attracted to them. Worse still, the female criminal might become a mother, breeding the next generation of criminals and tainting the pure pedigrees of the upper-classes.

Constructing the Other: Dissociative Identities

While Meade’s female villains looked so alluring that their criminality could scarcely be believed, Israel Zangwill and Baroness Orczy created pairings of false characters in which one alter ego epitomised sartorial respectability and the other alter ego created feelings of distrust by their shabby and dishevelled appearance. The mystery of the stories lies in the revelation that these sartorial opposites were one and the same character who repeatedly assumed and disregarded visual aspects of their appearance to create dissociative identities. Signs of identity are ambiguous, unstable and slippery and crime writers exploited these properties to create multiple identities or cause confusion over ‘true’

identities, relying on popular conceptions about clothing and appearance to infer morality. Writers deliberately sought to create identities through dress and appearance then detached those indicators to create uncertainty as to “true” and “false” identities. As Audrey Jaffe notes, “the possibility that identity can be dissociated from its signs undermines, even as it provokes the desire for, the stable categories of identity, [...] in detective fiction” (Jaffe 96-97). Koluchy and Sara for instance, are successful in their crimes because they remove any trace of the criminal other from the persona they project to the public. Even when Druce and Head advise others of the danger the women pose, their warnings remain unheeded because these charming, attractive, likeable women cannot possibly be equated with the deformed ugly women of criminological studies. Moreover, their socially successful personas remove any sense of motives for their crimes. There is a degree of doubling between the criminal and non-criminal that is played out in a literal sense in “The Bloodhound” in *The Brotherhood of Seven Kings*. Madame Koluchy fakes her own death with the help of a body double, a non-criminal “woman who was like [Koluchy] in every feature, in height, proportion, even to the expression of her face” (317). On the unknown woman’s natural death, Koluchy purchases her body and preserves it for future use, feeling that “*in extremis* she would be of the utmost use to me” (317). To complete the deception all Koluchy must do is to dress the corpse in her own clothes, a ruse that almost fools Head and other pursuers that she is dead, were it not for the later revelations of an eyewitness to the deception. The fact that the criminal and non-criminal are virtually indistinguishable from each other and the use of dress to assign a false identity is a recurrent trope in crime fiction that highlights the ineffectiveness of appearances as a gauge of criminality.

All the stories use multiple personas to explore, to some extent, the interplay between dichotomies of good and evil, public and private and absence and presence but they also rely on implicit judgements of appearance and dress imbued with moral associations to

reinforce the separate identities. This is notable in the Sensation fiction of the 1860s with the multiple personas of Lady Audley, the uncanny similarities between Anne Catherick and Laura Glyde in *The Woman in White* (1860), in the deception exercised by Isabel Vane in *East Lynne* (1861) and by the identity swap of Joseph Wilmot and Henry Dunbar in Braddon's *Henry Dunbar* (1864).⁴⁰ The device of doubling/introducing new identities was rendered unsportsmanlike in the Golden-Age fair-play rules unless the reader had been duly prepared for their presence, because it offered writers too easy an option to allow their protagonists to escape and because it prevented readers from discovering the true culprit, which certainly rings true in earlier Victorian texts. However, there were numerous instances of mistaken identity (both victims and criminals) in short stories in the intervening period including Braddon's "Levison's Victim" (1870) in which the sister of a victim, to whom she bears an uncanny likeness, is used to make the murderer confess to his crime. Catherine Louisa Pirkis's "Missing!" (1893) features a mother and daughter so alike that when the mother is killed wearing her daughter's dress she is buried under the name of her daughter. There is even a criminal who consistently poses as a detective in Guy Boothby's *The Prince of Swindlers* (1898), explored in Chapter Four.⁴¹ Arthur Conan Doyle's "The Man with the Twisted Lip" (1891) is one of the best-known and critically reviewed stories in which a man conceives multiple identities, posing as a beggar to make money while simultaneously maintaining his 'true' persona as a respectable family man.

⁴⁰ Transformative fiction was popular throughout the Victorian period and extended beyond the crime fiction genre towards the realms of fantasy fiction and horror. Anthropomorphic creatures punctuate Lewis Carroll's *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* (1865) and Alice herself undergoes several bodily changes. Robert Louis Stevenson's *Strange Case of Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde* (1886), Oscar Wilde's *The Picture of Dorian Gray* (1890), Richard Marsh's *The Beetle* (1897) and Kafka's *Metamorphosis* (1915) are all well-known examples of narratives featuring multiple identities or physical transformations.

⁴¹ Madeleine Seys draws on Ellen Thorneycroft Fowler's 1899 novel *A Double Thread* as the focal point in her study of *Fashion and Narrative in Victorian Popular Literature* (2018) because it features female twins raised separately and with opposing sartorial identities. As the stories discussed here, the central characters turn out to be one and the same.

Similarly, Israel Zangwill's "Cheating the Gallows" (1893) and Baroness Orczy's "The Fenchurch Street Mystery" (1901)⁴² are both stories which play with social constructions of identity to create diametrically opposed identities from a single being. In these texts it is not the criminal that is the most difficult to identify but the truth, producing an anxiety about the reading process itself, particularly in "Fenchurch" in which there is no final resolution to the case. The stories feature pairings of false characters constructed through dissociative sartorial identities, framed as scruffy on the one hand and well-dressed on the other and corresponding with notions of criminality and respectability. The two stories use these concepts in contrasting ways however, with "Gallows" framing the scruffy man for the crime committed by the well-to-do man and "Fenchurch" having the scruffy man commit the crime but pose as a successful millionaire. Though the false identities are established to commit fraud, the criminals undoubtedly enjoy the deception and readily take on the acting required. Both plots are complex constructions that do not reveal the false identities until the end, with the result that the reader feels dim-witted for not having detected the falsehood earlier, even though there are flaws in the plots that make the identity swaps extremely implausible.

Both stories are evidently crime fiction from their titles and the reader is therefore likely to be on the alert for clues from the outset. "Cheating the Gallows" was published in the illustrated monthly *The Idler Magazine* in February 1893.⁴³ Unlike "Twisted Lip" there is no 'true' identity, an identity from which the protagonist metamorphoses and subsequently returns, but two equally weighted characters with opposing appearances, mannerisms and lifestyles which disguises the revelation that the two men are one and

⁴² In her article "True Cock-and-Bull Stories: Negotiating Narrative Authority in Emmuska Orczy's "Man in the Corner" Tales" Rachel Smillie gives the date of publication as May-Oct 1901 for this story though I have not been able to independently verify this. See Chapter Five for more on this series.

⁴³ In the same edition, Mary Elizabeth Braddon describes how she published her first novel *The Trail of the Serpent*, cementing the links between crime/sensation novels and short stories and suggesting they shared the same readership.

the same until the last moment.⁴⁴ The central character poses as scruffy journalist Tom Peters and respectable banker Everard G. Roxdal, two men who share a flat in the city:

Tom Peters's profession was a little vague, but everybody knew that Roxdal was the manager of the City and Suburban Bank, and it puzzled her [the landlady] to think why a bank manager should live with a seedy-looking person, who smoked clay pipes and sipped whisky and water all evening (Zangwill 241).

George Hutchinson richly illustrates their differences on the first page of the story though the reader does not know at this point that the two men are one and the same, or that one of them may be a criminal, though the title of the story is suggestive of criminal activity. With hindsight, the illustrations here constitute what Stuart Sillars describes as a "dual discourse" in which "figures look directly at us, over the heads of the characters in both verbal and visual texts" ("Illustrated" 72) yet on first reading, they provide no indication of the twist in the tale and simply work alongside the written text to construct the narrative.

⁴⁴ The culprit's confession at the end of the story suggests that he existed as Roxdal first and created Peters later but within the main body of the text there is nothing to suggest that one character is more 'real' than the other.



Figure 5: Tom Peters. Illustration by George Hutchinson. From *The Idler Magazine* Vol 3, Feb-July 1893. Via Internet Archive Online, 3 Nov 2015.

In the illustrations Peters is shown scruffily dressed in “faded dressing-gown and loose slippers” (242) [Figure 5], attire that suits his relaxed manner and lifestyle. Roxdal appears in well-fitting evening dress wearing a monocle and engaged in the act of brushing his top hat [Figure 6], illustrating the attention to detail that befits his career and social position. Their respective employments in the city make the identity swap possible, the population density and ability to keep

themselves to themselves playing

a crucial part in maintaining the deception and the flat that they share operating as the private point of transition. Indeed, as Clarke highlights with reference to “Twisted Lip” published two years earlier than “Gallows,” “the city was a domain in which appearances could not be trusted and where dual-lives, especially amongst middle- and upper-middle-class men, were common” (Clarke 93). Clarke’s point suggests that in this case fiction *was* representative of real-life (unlike depictions of female criminals) and that the anxieties of identity shown herein were genuine social concerns about reading and trusting appearances.

“Gallows” makes clear judgements about the way a person dresses and how the viewer should interpret this as an



Figure 6: Everard G. Roxdal. Illustration of Everard G. Roxdal by George Hutchinson. From *The Idler Magazine* Vol 3, Feb-July 1893. Via Internet Archive Online, 3 Nov 2015.

indication of moral character. At first glance, Roxdal looks more respectable than Peters and demonstrates more morally reputable behaviour because he takes more care over his appearance and is thus clearly concerned by the way others might judge him. The reader is told that Peters wears “blue check shirts and loose ties, even on Sundays” (242) and does not attend church, whereas Roxdal habitually attends morning service in his immaculate dress. The disparities between them are not always as clear-cut as their clothing suggests, however. Though Peters appears to have a general disregard for his appearance, “lazy and indolent as he was, [he] shaved with the unfailing regularity of a man to whom shaving has become an instinct” (242). On the other hand, Roxdal “did not shave. He wore a full beard, and, being a fine figure of a man to boot, no uneasy investor could look upon him without being reassured as to the stability of the bank he managed so successfully” (243).⁴⁵ Though the 1890s fashion was for moustaches “heavy and of the ‘bicycle-handle’ shape” (Cunnington 343), it is the older tradition of full beards which carry connotations of respectability, suggesting that fashion did not always go hand in hand with social desirability. In fact, as Roxdal reveals in the epilogue, the beard is false, and Peters is clean-shaven to allow the beard to adhere, a deduction that the readers cannot possibly have reasoned for themselves.

The same observation reveals the identity of the criminal in “Fenchurch.”⁴⁶ Published in *The Royal Magazine* in 1901 the story focusses on criminal William Kershaw, a former medical student fallen on hard times who blackmails a former flatmate, Francis Smethurst. Smethurst allegedly murdered a fellow flatmate, fled to Siberia and changed

⁴⁵Full beards had initially come into fashion around the mid-century because of the cold climate during the Crimean War and were subsequently popularised by their ‘celebrity’ advocates in various forms such as sideburns (named after Major General Ambrose Burnside, a soldier in the American Civil War), mutton chops and Charles Dickens’ famous ‘doorknocker beard.’ These early endorsements led to facial hair being associated with an older, less radical generation, from whom the late nineteenth century aesthetes and radicals wanted to distance themselves. See Lucinda Hawksley’s *Moustaches, Whiskers and Beards* for a full history of facial hair and its interpretation and significance.

⁴⁶ This conceit is not used by criminals alone. Ian Ousby notes in *Bloodhounds of Heaven* that the typical detective is also “clean-shaven (so that he can conveniently assume facial disguises)” (113).

his identity, before becoming a successful businessman trading in furs. He returns to England and, according to the Old Man in the Corner's theory, is murdered by Kershaw who then poses in court as Smethurst to conceal his crime. Central to the Old Man's explanation of events is the appearance of 'Smethurst,' described from a photograph as having "a strange, astonished expression, due to the total absence of eyebrows, and the funny foreign cut of the hair" (Orzy 533). Seen in person in court, the Old Man realises that his lack of hair on his head and face and the "total absence of eyebrows and even eyelashes, which gave the face such a peculiar appearance" (533-534) holds the key to the mystery, later revealing that Kershaw has "shaved up to his very eyebrows" (542) to pose as the millionaire. Earlier in the text, Kershaw is seen wearing "moustache beard and wig, exactly similar to what he had himself shaved off. Making up to look like himself" (542). As in "Gallows," the public are unable to discern real whiskers from fake and this simple facial disguise hides the layers of identity deception.

The identity exchanges are so convincing that it becomes difficult for the reader to ascertain exactly who is who, exacerbated by the shifting narrative voice as the details of the crime are related second, third or even fourth hand through a series of unreliable narrators. The first identity exchange, related to the reader by journalist Polly from a story told by the Old Man who in turn relates the story from Kershaw, is that of Barker (the criminal's first identity) to Smethurst. There is limited detail of the change, but the success of the disguise lies in Barker's flight to a remote foreign land where he is entirely unknown, foregoing the need to change his aesthetic appearance. Though the reason for his flight, the alleged murder, "was never proved" (530) introducing doubt to the narrative, the reader accepts that the man depicted as Smethurst, ostensibly a criminal, remains as a stable identity. His return to England is marked by his distinctive dress - he can be recognised at the railway station by "a heavy Astrakhan fur coat [...] with a cap of the same" (531), an expensive item of sufficient rarity that he is the only passenger

wearing such garments. His appearance gives credibility to his claim to be a successful businessman, visually reiterating his economic success and masking his criminal identity. Displays of wealth through dress align with judgements about social class, with the prevailing supposition that a well-dressed individual is naturally a member of the respectable upper-classes. Like the ‘instinct’ of criminality, there is an assumption that class can be intuitively interpreted from a person’s appearance and behaviour, but this is also complicated by the criminal’s use of dress to change their ‘true’ social position. Kershaw, initially described as a “shabbily dressed individual, with shaggy hair and beard” (526) successfully poses as the millionaire businessman Smethurst and even “hobnobbed in the park with duchesses” (542), the “duchesses” apparently unaware of the identity exchange. Smethurst’s name and reputation is sufficient to prove both his identity and his social worth. Providing that the criminals’ appearance and behaviour is appropriate for the society in which they mix, their identities are accepted because of the reputational risk of inaccurately denouncing an interloper. The complete contrast of the two identities, downtrodden man “of no occupation, and apparently of no fixed abode” (529) on one day and well-known millionaire Smethurst on the next seems implausible to the reader because it suggests that they share common manners, intellect and social skills. Though the pair studied together as medical students making Kershaw more educated than the average ruffian, the ease with which he is accepted into upper-class society as Smethurst reiterates the point that Allen makes in “Ruby Robbery,” that the social elite are undiscerning judges of character.

Despite the failure of the duchesses and others to identify that Smethurst is an imposter in their social set, dress is used elsewhere in the story as a definitive statement of identity and as measure of moral character. There is a flawed belief system in both “Gallows” and “Fenchurch” wherein characters believe unequivocally that they can successfully visually

read other characters, a flaw that stretches the bounds of credulity when wives fail to recognise their husbands. Incredibly, Kershaw's wife fails to identify her husband at two vital points – when the body is found in the barge and when he is under cross-examination in the courtroom. The body, in an advanced state of decomposition, is identified by “sundry articles such as a silver ring and a tie pin” (533) confirmed by Mrs Kershaw as belonging to her husband, though in fact the body is that of Smethurst. His clothing is so bound-up with his identity that there is never any suspicion that the sundry articles might simply have been transferred from one person to another. In the courtroom, “she would not look at the prisoner [Kershaw]” because “she firmly believed that Kershaw's murderer sat there in the dock” (534) and thus she relies on her instinctive response to affirm identity. Convenient perhaps for the sake of the plot, but it is doubtful that she would fail to recognise the voice or mannerisms of her husband in the defendant.

Clara Newell also fails to recognise her fiancé as his alter ego Tom Peters because she is blinded by Peters's unsavoury appearance and like Mrs Kershaw, does not wish to see the truth. Newell is engaged to Roxdal for whom she has “a good deal of affection” as he is “unmistakably a clever man, as well as a good-looking one” (243). Yet she is unable to identify her good-looking fiancé in the guise of Tom Peters, because “the moment [she] saw him a strange repulsion and mistrust came over [her]” (245) and “instinctively she distrusted the man” (244). This instinctive distrust harks back to the earlier sensing of criminality, suggesting (erroneously) that Peters will prove to be the criminal character. Roxdal claims that Newell's aversion to Peters stems from his looks, since Peters is “very untidy, and you women go so much by appearances” (245), a supposition that Newell refutes. With hindsight the scene is ironic since Newell is unfairly biased towards Roxdal even though he and Peters are one and the same and her feelings are not innate as she supposes but a socially conditioned response towards his appearance. The omniscient narrator's comments are red herrings that subtly steer the reader away from making the

connection between the characters. The reflection that “men are much of a muchness where women are concerned; shabby men and smart men, bank managers and journalists, bachelors and semi-detached bachelors” (246) is clearly untrue in Newell’s reaction (although it is applied to the liberal maidservant Polly) but by grouping all men as one it does, in retrospect, subtly point to the truth of the case. It further suggests that all men are capable of the same behaviour towards women and that the categories that separate them – appearance, employment and marital status — are of no consequence to women, destabilising these identity markers.

The misidentification of a corpse through clothing also exposes dress as an unreliable identity marker in “Gallows.” The reader is told that “the body of Roxdal came to shore, the face distorted almost beyond recognition by long immersion, but the clothes patently his” (251). As in the case of Smethurst/Kershaw, identification of the body takes place through sundry items and clothing, but the body is also positively identified by Newell, Polly and the landlady. In fact, the body is that of an unknown man who (somewhat improbably) steals the clothes that Roxdal had intended to throw in the river once he had permanently transitioned to become Peters, and the thief later commits suicide whilst wearing them. The unknown man’s lack of identity allows a false identity to be placed upon him through dress and he unwittingly assumes the role of the criminal Roxdal. Clothing thus has the potential to both incriminate an innocent man and disguise a guilty one and the distinction between the two depends largely on contextual interpretation. The resolution to this case is almost as troubling as that of “Fenchurch” however as Tom Peters is hung for the murder on the assumption that the unknown body is Roxdal – the reader finds out in a retrospective confession that Roxdal/Peters is hung for his own murder. Zangwill’s unjust denouement reveals how crucial clothing and appearance are to affirming identity and how dress provides compelling circumstantial evidence to affirm the instinctive response that the body must be Roxdal and Peters must be the murderer.

The stories prove that “an outward appearance of respectability is capable of duping everyone” (Clarke 93), reaffirming the anxiety that criminals cannot be readily identified and reconceptualising the notion of respectability. Though the transition of Roxdal to Peters cannot be regarded as monstrous, the transition of Kershaw to Smethurst may be considered morally transgressive since he assumes the place of a millionaire and perjures a criminal court. The crimes in “Fenchurch” – murder and fraud – are more serious than the fraud committed in “Gallows” but we as readers are not privy to the final outcome of Kershaw’s case and do not know if the case is ever solved. Both stories leave the reader in a position in which they are told more than the judicial authorities but cannot ascertain for certain whether the explanations they are given are true, an anxiety which reflects the way in which the characters are interpreted all the way through. There is no way to distinguish criminality and no way to establish the ‘truth.’ Their use of costumes and disguises subverts traditional markers of identity; they are fashioned in order to be read and perceived in a particular way.

The contrasting sartorial and aesthetic appearances of the split characters are a metaphor for storytelling as their “interwoven and unravelling narratives” (Seys 4) hinge upon their dress literally as well as metaphorically.⁴⁷ Dress proves to be an unreliable marker of identity in the way that corpses are erroneously identified by accessories found upon them and in the way that it is used to insinuate the morality and criminality of the paired characters. The scruffy appearances of Peters and Kershaw are deliberately generated and manipulated by the criminals to engender suspicion and draw attention away from the real criminals, the respectably well-dressed Roxdal and Smethurst. The reader is continually frustrated by the false representation of character and their efforts scarcely rewarded by the death of Peters/Roxdal in “Gallows” and the complete lack of resolution

⁴⁷ The shared language of narrative and clothing is explored in greater depth in Chapter Five.

in “Fenchurch.” Though the visual clues are there and accessible, they are so subtle and the solution so unlikely that even when rereading the story, it is difficult to envisage the separate characters as one being. To solve the case, the narratives rely on the subjects to declare their own identities as multiple personas or, as in “Fenchurch,” on the extensive insider knowledge of an experienced detective. In “Gallows,” the culprit confesses that the idea for the fraud arose because of his inability to grow a beard as a young man that resulted in the application of false whiskers. This vanity over his appearance facilitates the whole plot as he conceives a plan to create an alter ego, reasoning, “it would be easy enough to masquerade in the evenings in [...] beardless condition, with other disguises of dress and voice” (252). To enable the change, he has “trick clothes in [his] bedroom like those of quick-change artistes” (252), identifying himself as a performer and demonstrating that he clearly enjoys creating the dual identities, a break from the monotonous routine of the life of a respectable bank manager. The theatricality of his life reflects the artifice of the world in which he is accepted as two false characters, a world in which he is judged by the superficiality of his appearance. As Beller argues in relation to *Henry Dunbar*, social identity is “contingent on the outward appearance, manner, and conduct of his body” (“Obliged” 282) rather than simply a disguise of upper-middle class appearance and it is “the performativity of class” (282) which renders the plot successful. Everard’s transition to the less respectable Peters also echoes (though to a lesser extent) the transition in “Twisted Lip” and “plays on the same fears that were responsible for the countless theories that Jack the Ripper, the most feared and notorious criminal of the era, was not a slum-dweller, but rather an outwardly trustworthy and respectable man – a doctor, a banker, or even a member of the royal household” (Clarke 93). Appearances could not only be deceptive, they could be downright dangerous.

Conclusion

This chapter foregrounds the most obvious connection between clothing and crime fiction in its use to reveal and conceal identity and therefore forms the starting point of this thesis. Whenever a character is described in fiction, the image created in the minds of readers always varies according to their own experiences and the way that they read and interpret the text. If that character is contentious or may be expected to fit a certain ‘type,’ such as the criminal, the reader may have even more preconceptions or expectations that come to shape the vision of the character. These preconceptions are socially conditioned through a range of media, such as the scientific studies of Lombroso and Ellis, the sociological studies of Mayhew, the sensational reports of newspapers and the literary traditions that precede their appearance in text such as the penny dreadfuls and gothic romances of the eighteenth and early nineteenth century. They may also be the result of unexplained personal feelings such as Sampson’s suspicion of Slinkton in “Hunted Down,” feelings generated by appearance without a full understanding of the root cause. The art of reading character through dress and appearance is also governed by external factors such as age, gender and social class of the reader that may affect a reading in different ways at any given moment. The tension between readerly expectation and reality increases through the blurring of boundaries through imitation, impersonation and artificiality, which make it impossible to establish a ‘truth’ of identity within the narrative such as that in “Gallows” or the inconclusive ending of “Fenchurch.”

Crime writers use dress to exploit the understandings and misunderstandings of criminal identity to create innovative characters who are not obviously apparent as the perpetrators. In “Hunted Down,” the criminal is suspected of being such because his hairstyle and overly neat appearance attract attention and produce a suspicious response in those that meet him. Dickens’s use of the pseudoscience of physiognomy complicates interpretations because Sampson fails to realise that he also judges Slinkton’s dress,

which, to the outside observer, appears perfectly appropriate for the setting. Clothing destabilises Sampson's "instinctive" dislike because he cannot logically explain why Slinkton's appearance is so unsettling. Poe and Allen prevent the reader from visualising the criminal by creating characters beyond the realms of probability through the presentation of the orangutan in "Rue Morgue" and the thieving detective in "Ruby Robbery." The writers use sartorial clues that are explicitly read by the detective figure, leaving no room for interpretation and thus the reader is prevented from making their own judgements as to the morality of the characters. These stories suggest that criminality cannot be read by dress or appearance but by removing the possibility that may be so, the reader is left feeling cheated and the perpetrators seem unrealistic. Similarly, the female kleptomaniacs of 1890s short fiction are presented as one-dimensional, unconvincing characters because they are not visually described to the reader. Meade's female master criminals, on the other hand, project the terrifying possibility of monstrous criminality behind a beautiful façade, using dress to hide their criminality. Though Meade makes the criminality of Koluchy and Sara transparent to the reader through the narrators, the other characters in the story cannot recognise their criminality because of their beauty and their powers of sartorial and aesthetic deception.

There is always an expectation that a person's character can be read through their dress and a belief in an individual's ability to detect artifice, but crime fiction consistently shows that this belief is misguided. The successful disguise lies not in dress alone but in exemplary social behaviour supported by a respectable appearance. Artificiality and falsehood thus constitute a criminality almost beyond that of the law as social crimes because they breach implicit codes of honour and integrity. Zangwill and Orczy use dress and appearance to deliberately destabilise notions of respectability through the dual characters in "Gallows" and Fenchurch." Identity is disassociated from the physical body and presented as a costume which can be put on and off to suit the circumstances. The

reader is encouraged to interpret the dress and appearance of the characters and to make judgements about the appropriateness of their attire and their behaviour. Like Meade's characters, the respectable facades of the criminals dupe other characters (and the reader) into believing they are morally good with the result that their criminal deeds are hidden for a sustained period of time.

Clothing as clue or as part of a description helps readers to visualise criminal characters but it also generates responses that are harder to control, can be less readily discerned and may vary wildly from reader to reader. In stories where dress or clothing is absent, or descriptions of the perpetrators are minimal, like "Rue Morgue" and "Ruby Robbery," the markers used to assess morality, and even humanity, of which clothing is indisputably one, are missing. The reader must then rely wholly on the authority of the narrator's judgements; they cannot 'see' the criminal for themselves and cast their own judgements. This generates a readerly vulnerability to be misled by dress, such as in the reassuring respectability of Madames Koluchy and Sara, which belie their true characters or the overt criminalisation of Slinkton, which makes the reader suspicious. For the crime writer who, by definition of the genre, has a desire to steer the reader in a specific fashion, this slipperiness of interpretation can be both a source of anxiety and a boon. The reader can be encouraged to make assumptions which prove to be red herrings, such as the suspicions of scruffy Tom Peters, but may also find characters implausible for example with the beggar-to-millionaire transformation of Kershaw to Smethurst. This ambivalence also runs counter to the themes of rationalisation and virtue that dominate detective fiction and thus there is a tendency for detectives like Dupin and Holmes to conclusively read clothing as revelatory of a specific set of circumstances or identities towards which the reader cannot and is not invited to contribute.

Despite their best efforts, Victorian scientists, anthropologists, psychologists and other professionals were unable to pinpoint a consistent criminal aesthetic and their attempts were undoubtedly thwarted by the use of dress and accessories. Moreover, the photographs, court-sketches and courtroom reports of real criminals did not correspond with the illustrations or depictions of well-to-do criminals in the pages of periodicals. Writers exploited these insecurities by creating characters who blended seamlessly into society or who raised instinctive suspicion without any obvious explanation and thus escaped recognition as criminals. Consequently, responses to the Victorian criminal in fiction are not those of marginalised, transgressive beings. Instead, criminals are depicted as skilled masters of disguise, smooth-talking manipulators and even, as in the kleptomania cases, as victims, all of whom are accepted by their respective communities. These characters are persuasive performers who use their social reputes as a form of alias to disguise their criminal deeds. It is not possible to identify through dress a singular criminal type, but it can be recognised that fiction provides a privileged viewpoint into a criminality that differs widely from the reality it claims to portray. It is both realist fiction and the construction of an entirely fictional self that is forgiven its defects because it is the creation of a genre which always seeks to look further, to look beyond the obvious, to try something new for the purposes of entertainment. But this is a sphere where we are all at risk of misreading; there is a struggle to pinpoint 'true' identity that cannot be controlled by author or reader because the interpretation of dress is a private, individual nuanced act borne of a myriad of social and cultural influences.

Chapter Two: Anxieties of Sex and the Body

Nothing, perhaps, is so full of sad suggestiveness as an old-clothes shop. [...] Look at the girl's ball-dress, once so light and pure. [...] Have the freshness and purity gone out of her soul as they have out of her dress? From being fit comrade of the vestals, with robes as snowy and spotless as theirs, has she fallen into ranks which the soil of burnt-out ashes and the stain of impure fires have sealed and marked to enduring degradation? ("Old Clothes" 40).

The anonymous remark from an 1864 article in *All the Year Round* foregrounds the agency given to dress by Victorian writers and the way in which clothing is read as symbolic of moral character, as explored in Chapter One. Central to the vision of the dress in the above passage is the idea of bodily and sexual purity, the reference to vestals implying chastity, with the images of the snowy spotlessness of heaven juxtaposed against the burnt-out degradation of hell. The discarded dress represents the tension between virtue and vice, its flimsy lightness illustrative of how fine the divide may be and how easy it is to stain and degrade, with the garment offering no protection for the body, as it is unable even to retain its original freshness and purity. The sensory invitation to feel the weight of the dress, to smell its freshness and observe its faded splendour invites a physical response and generates a haptic pathos applied to the dress and transferred to the unknown, but presumed to be a fallen, woman. Anxieties about moral and bodily degradation resonate through the image of the dress and raise questions about the type of person that wore such a garment, illuminating the way in which clothing codifies sex.

Though critics such as Clair Hughes and Madeleine Seys have persuasively explored the way in which clothes portray the "dangerous and transgressive sexuality" (Seys 71) of

sensation fiction heroines, and how virtue and vice can be read from their attire, no critical examination has been directed at how clothing exposes anxieties about sex and the body in short fiction, or crime fiction more generally. This chapter explores how clothing shapes the way that the body is portrayed in crime fiction, as corpse, as commodified object and as sexualised and desexualised entity. It traces Michel Foucault's notion of the codification of sex through the use of dress to imply sexual transgression and considers the salacious drive towards sensation in both contemporary journalism and fiction. In light of this lust for sensation, the chapter examines Joseph Sheridan Le Fanu's "The Murdered Cousin" (1851) which uniquely features an undressed body, brutally murdered in a thrilling quasi-sexual fantasy. It considers how dress is central to sexual and bodily control in Mary Eleanor Wilkins Freeman's "The Long Arm" (1895) which unusually features a woman viciously murdering a man in a story punctuated by undertones of lesbianism, cross-dressing and sexual revenge. By contrast, Rodrigues Ottolengui's "The Azteck Opal" (1895) uses dress to frame the body as a commodity, drawing parallels between the purchasing and ownership of jewels and the female body. The chapter culminates in a close reading of Maurice Leblanc's 1911 short story "The Red Silk Scarf" in which the victim is sexualised by her dress and a suggestive hidden jewel but turns the tables on her murderer by retaining a material clue that leads to his discovery. All four stories feature physical touching in the course of the crimes enabled to some degree by dress, generating anxiety about sexual transgression but also providing a sense of titillation, gratuitous details which are not always explicitly relevant to the solving of the mysteries. The chapter concludes that these sartorial details are a vital constituent of the 'thrill factor' because they imply and codify sexual responses.

Victorian Attitudes towards the Sexualised Body

The stereotypical image of a Victorian woman dressed to conceal every inch of skin from head to foot exemplifies perceived attitudes of Victorian prudishness towards the body and sex. But the idea that the Victorians suppressed sexual desire and covered up any overt references to sex is a social fallacy according to volume one of Foucault's seminal study *The History of Sexuality* (1981-82). He terms this illusion the "repressive hypothesis" and points out that discussions of sex were evident and actively encouraged in science, law and business discourses throughout the nineteenth century. However, he proposes one caveat to this open discussion: the codification of language that dictates, who, how and where sex could be discussed using an authorised vocabulary. Discourses of sex, he argues, are only open if one recognises, and is permitted to understand, the code.

These codes are present in literature and in journalism in a variety of forms, using euphemisms, suggestive hints and signifying objects, including articles of dress, to infer sexual activity. In the press, newspapers tended to avoid any idea of sex even where factually relevant, such as in the reporting of crimes involving some form of physical violation. As Judith Flanders makes clear in *The Invention of Murder*, until the notorious Jack the Ripper murders of the 1880s

the press had been relatively reticent in describing sex crimes. While both the courts and the papers were far more habituated than modern audiences to body parts being displayed in court, or to detailed reports on scientific or medical testimony, sex was off-limits (430).

Victorian reporters faced the dilemma of "convey[ing] the sexual content of their stories without offending their readership" (Cohen 4), using veiled descriptions of 'outrage' or 'criminal violence' (Flanders 430). This covert reporting did little to dampen the public

clamour for such stories, however, with increasing demand for what Flanders describes as “Trial by Newspaper” (20).

Publicly, regulations regarding censorship in literature and media, such as the 1857 Obscene Publications Act⁴⁸ that restricted the sale of indecent material in “Books, Pictures, Prints, and other Articles” (CAP. LXXXIII 287) made clear the desire to protect the morality of the reading populace from sex, if not from crime. But simultaneously the public could freely pore over the gruesome details of a murder case in broadsheets, witness scenes of seduction in the local music hall (both on and off stage) and obtain cheap copies of morally dubious French ‘romances’ with relative ease, indicating the demand for vice as entertainment. The hypocrisy of the situation was not lost on Leslie Stephen who remarked in his 1869 essay “The Decay of Murder” that “the more common practice of English newspapers has been to give us minute details of everything connected with the crimes, and then to say how horrible it is that any one should take an interest in such atrocities” (Stephen 722).

Sexual acts were not explicitly referenced in crime reporting or crime fiction. However, the Whitechapel murders (which took place between 3 April 1888 and 13 February 1891) cemented the implicit relationship between murder and sex. Increasingly sensational stories surrounded the identity of the lust-driven killer, creating “a convergent set of fantasies” (Walkowitz, 3) that fetishised the mysterious assailant and saw the resolution of the mystery as the ultimate social fulfilment. The line between fact and fiction became increasingly blurred. Newspapers gloried in the presentation of the victims, their gory display as public horrors, their torn and stained clothing, their mutilated bodies cut with the precision of a surgeon’s knife, looking for anything that might be construed as a clue to the murderer’s identity. Readers speculated as to the identity of the killer, always

⁴⁸ The act makes no attempts to define ‘obscene’ but the passing of the act by Lord Chief Justice Lord Campbell was prompted by a trial for the sale of pornography, suggesting a basis in sexual material.

described as male, and newspapers indirectly suggested that the “sexual mutilations of prostitutes were [...] unnatural alternatives to heterosexual copulation” (Walkowitz, 3).

Conveying all the details of the crime, especially descriptions of the body and particulars of dress remained a delicate balance even after the Ripper murders. In 1897, a report in the *Leicester Chronicle and the Leicestershire Mercury* described the death of a young woman:

the body [...] was found to be quite nude, with the exception of the boots and stockings worn by the deceased, and which the murderer or murderers had failed to remove from the remains of their victim, who had been stabbed through the throat with some sharp instrument (“Murder of a Woman near Windsor” 2).

The reference to “remains” and the lack of gendered pronouns dehumanise the victim and imply that the clothing was removed after death by way of robbery or to remove evidence rather than for any sexual purpose. The report further comments that “there were bruises on other parts of the body [but] there was no appearance of outrage” (2). This remark seems intended to quell the anxieties of a sexually fearful community who were more concerned by the possibility of sexual assault than by the reality of the violent murder.

As an almost universal language, clothing constituted an authorised vocabulary for references to sex and the body because class or education did not limit its reach but operated across peer groups, diverse age ranges and through normal daily social interaction. It could also be defined pictorially in advertisements and newspapers, viewed in shop windows, pawnbrokers and second-hand shops and flaunted at public exhibitions, fashionable streets and popular meeting places. Associations of dress and personality attributes, including moral character, could be made simply by seeing, without any need for words at all; for instance, a woman might be supposed a prostitute merely by the

clothes she wore. Cycles of fashion meant that the lower classes frequently copied the styles and dress of the upper classes (or bought second-hand clothing), meaning that any innovations in terms of cloth, cut or manufacturing, tended to be passed on relatively quickly⁴⁹ and the language and associations with it. With some exceptions,⁵⁰ this allowed clothing to become a much more universal discourse with which to covertly refer to, align, expose or compare sexual anxieties. However, this social inclusiveness contributed to slippage of meaning and ambiguities of interpretation. Even where the same item of clothing constituted the subject of discussion, moral and sexual anxieties were approached differently depending on the cultural and social context. Rachel Verinder's attitude towards the precious gem in Wilkie Collins' crime novel *The Moonstone* (1868), for example, is one of naive delight. She sees the moonstone simply as a jewel she can wear to accentuate her beauty in her position as a young single woman and thus it symbolises her youthful purity and her sexual potential. When the jewel is later stolen from her bedroom as she sleeps (by the man with whom she is in love) the stone becomes a metaphor for her deflowering, taking on a more overtly sexual metaphorical function (Grass 108). The Indians however, see the moonstone as symbolic of religious purity desecrated by colonial violation, because their value system is based not on love, but on spirituality. On the one hand, the jewel is a beautiful trinket, and on the other, a sacred symbol. The novel renders the moonstone an impenetrable object regarded with unfathomable reverence by each set of characters who fail to understand each other's interpretations. Understandings of dress and accessories are thus relative to cultures,

⁴⁹ This is known as the trickle-down effect. See Chapter Four for a detailed examination of this theory in relation to dress and fashion.

⁵⁰ There were a number of class and regional variations in the terminology of dress that complicated this oversimplification. 'Shoddy' for example was a woollen yarn made from shredding rags or the waste of spinning mills, mixed in with some new wool to create an inferior cloth worn by the lower classes. The meaning of 'shoddy' as a derogatory term to describe poor quality or cheap goods coexisted with the textile definition, indicating the chasm between desire and need.

fashions, genders, social hierarchies and historical influences that may shift even within the space of a single narrative.

The Salacious Potential of the Undressed Body

The codification of sex through dress is pertinent to crime fiction because of the continual desire to stimulate a response in the reader, but there are also related anxieties about the corrupting influences of immoral texts and the links between the physicality of both criminal and sexual acts. In the introduction to the 1936 crime anthology “Tales of Detection,” Dorothy Sayers describes the way in which the detective story is “embellished by the emotional elements of horror, moral indignation and excitement common to all types of crime literature” (vii), elements of passion specific to the genre that enticed the reader to keep reading. Victorian crime fiction straddled the grey area between rational, factual reporting and a sordid thirst for details, a balance between public and private that aimed to keep the readers enthralled and eager for the next instalment without being branded licentious.⁵¹ This delicate balance is heightened by the overlap between the language used to describe crime and the language that is used to depict sex in literature, a rhetoric of seedy, dark immorality but also thrilling sensual stimulation. In depictions of both crime and sex, feelings of guilt, pleasure, desire, control (or lack of) can be observed alongside actions of watching, following, devouring and savouring, and moral quandaries that can be as readily applied to sexual acts as they can to reading crime fiction. At the heart of both is the body, a body of text, a corpus of crime, a dead body, a missing body, a criminal body, but never explicitly a sexual body.

The moral accountability of crime fiction and its capacity to corrupt is evidently a persistent anxiety across the period. Indeed, the entire detection and resolution process

⁵¹ This of course did happen with some sensation fiction including Charles Reade’s *Hard Cash* (1863) and M E Braddon’s *Lady Audley’s Secret* (1862). I have not found evidence of individual short crime stories being upbraided in the same manner.

can be considered as an allegorical representation of the sexual act: the undressing of clues, suggestive flirtations with potential matches, misconstrued words and behaviours, forbidden observation, the anticipation of climax and the ultimate satisfaction of the quest. The reader must be complicit in this relationship; they must indulge in playing the game to achieve gratification by revealing the culprit or methodology of the crime. The excitement of danger, of discovery or of getting away scot-free indulged through the genteel activity of reading is a form of stimulus akin to that of sex: the reader always desires to know more, to reveal, to expose. However, though the reading of sensation novels was widely linked to concerns of immorality,⁵² crime stories and short stories do not appear to have been adjudged as morally corrupting to the same degree. An article in the *Westminster Review* in 1893, "Crime in Current Literature" deplores the vast amount of crime and vice featured in literature of the period with the onus on novels, claiming that

it has been carefully estimated that fully 80 per cent of the yearly output of works that may be classified as purely fictional are exclusively stories of crime and criminals; and when it is to be recollected that the bulk of this body of writings is by second and third-rate hands, it is not difficult to image the degree of perniciousness on the minds and morals of the great novel-reading public (435).

The writer (signed only as A.C) goes on to single out the "abnormal thirst" (436) for detective fiction with the result that it is "so much overdone at this present time, that the

⁵² Ian Ward discusses the "disease of reading" in *Sex, Crime and Literature in Victorian England* with reference to women readers craving the excitement of sensation novels, "novels about sex and crime, most commonly adultery, bigamy and murder" (Ward 19). Worse still, "the idea that addictive reading would lead to inexorable sexual 'ruin' became a recurrent theme in such evangelical and conservative journals" (20).

consequences are certain, sooner or later, to be disastrous to the community” (436). The reference to community makes explicit the wide readership of the stories and contrasts against the threat to individual female readers thought to be posed by sensation fiction. Contemporary anxieties about the idealised concept of the family, the regulation of sexuality through marriage and women’s place in society, “what they should be doing, what they might be thinking, and what they seemed to be reading” (Ward 3) contributed towards these tensions. The article further suggests that such literature “must certainly have a demoralising tendency, if it does not actually become the means of stimulating crime and vice. That many persons take their moral “cue” from such detective stories may be readily surmised” (A.C 437), though no evidence of this is provided. There is an acknowledgment of the counter-argument in that the detective ‘checkmates’ the movements of criminals and that such literature may be intellectually stimulating to the reader providing it is written “by clever writers such as Conan Doyle” (436). However, the overarching tone is critical of the genres’ tendency for “depicting the hideousness of crime as it certainly ought not to be depicted” (437), echoing Leslie Stephen’s remarks nearly twenty-five years previously.

The link between crime and sexual vice is also emphasised by the physicality of crime fiction in scenes of brutal murders, adrenaline-raising foot chases, unauthorised touching and the physical restraint of a body by another body. Clothing is instrumental in allowing these scenes to occur, revealing and concealing the body and aiding and restricting movement and in so doing, stimulating the reader. In his chronological analysis of crime fiction, John Scaggs suggests that the modern *noir* thriller relies on sex as a catalyst to prompt the working-out of the narrative. The root of this association, he argues, lies in the world of revenge tragedy “in which the ties between the ‘blood’ of sexual passion and of physical violence and death provide the narrative engine” (110). As George Orwell argues in his analyses of murder cases from 1850 to 1920 “sex was a powerful motive”

(“The Decline of English of Murder” 1030) and although sex was off-limits in Victorian fiction, underlying sexual tension can be traced in crime stories of the period. Certainly, there is a well-established link between sex and violence because they are driven by common factors including social power dynamics, cultural expectations and male-female relationships. However, crime stories focussing on a male criminal always avoided references to sexual conquests because it was dishonourable⁵³ and detracted from the central narrative. For the most part, short fiction avoided gratuitous violence or motiveless crime because the reader would be unable to follow clues to guess the perpetrator, reducing the sense of readerly satisfaction. Nevertheless, physical violence can be found in short crime fiction across the period, such as Elizabeth Gaskell’s “The Crooked Branch” (1861) in which an evil son attacks his parents in cold blood. Earlier Victorian stories inherited the Gothic modes of storytelling that “were exciting readers by concentrating on the criminal, not on the explanation of the crime” (Knight, 22), typically featuring bloody murders that privileged feelings of terror and revulsion over intellectual puzzles.

Le Fanu’s melodramatic short story “The Murdered Cousin” follows in this literary tradition, boasting Gothic conventions such as the pursued protagonist, the trapped heroine, murderous family members and a strong sense of dread, brought about by the tyrannical Sir Arthur Tyrell. The story has a long publishing history, with three different incarnations across nearly thirty years. First published as “A Passage in the Secret History of an Irish Countess” in *The Dublin University Magazine* in November 1838 (reprinted by the *Belfast Morning News* in May 1864), then retitled and published anonymously as “The Murdered Cousin” in *Ghost Stories and Tales of Mystery* in 1851 and finally

⁵³ John Scaggs, Colin Watson and Julian Symons all refer to the idea of the honourable or romanticised criminal, particularly in detective fiction, in which there is some form of understandable motive, limited brutality and demonstrable intellect.

developed into the novel *Uncle Silas* in 1864.⁵⁴ The early incarnations of the story fit the mould of the penny blood with their scenes of “gratuitous physicality, melodrama and excess” (Beller “Obliged” 277) popular from the 1830s through to the 1860s. The story has been referred to as “gruesome and ‘creepy’” (“New Novels” 2), as a ghost story, a supernatural tale or as a mystery but not explicitly as a crime story, though it has featured in a number of twentieth century crime fiction anthologies.

“The Murdered Cousin” does not rely on the codification of sex via dress but instead appears suggestive by the victim’s lack of dress, an unusual circumstance and the only occasion identified in the fiction examined for this thesis. It is only in the first two versions that the reader is explicitly told that the victim is undressed at the time of her death, a fact that seems to have little significance to the plot, but which implies a sexual undertone. The later novel *Uncle Silas* changes the plotline substantially in that the murder victim is not the innocent English rose Emily, but the manipulative French governess who is in collusion with the murderer, and whose murder seems to be a punishment rather than a sacrifice for the sake of sensation (like that of Emily). In addition, there is no mention of being undressed and no reference to the female body, rather the victim becomes so at her own instigation after greedily drinking drugged wine intended for another,⁵⁵ weakening the murderous intent so powerfully played out in the earlier stories.

⁵⁴ The story’s trajectory is explained in an 1888 article “Joseph Sheridan Le Fanu, Novelist and Poet” in *Our Young Folk’s Weekly Budget*. Le Fanu also acknowledges the earlier versions (though “The Murdered Cousin” is not named) in the Preliminary Word of *Uncle Silas*, writing that “it is very unlikely that any of his readers should have encountered, and still more so that they should remember, this trifle” (*Uncle Silas* 11).

⁵⁵ The story borrows elements from William Godwin’s *Caleb Williams* (1794), considered by some critics and historians as a prototype detective and an early example in the crime fiction genre (Knight, 12). The oppressive aristocrat Tyrell, the vulnerable victim Emily, the imprisonment in a locked room and the subsequent escape are motifs found in both narratives. The figure of Caleb is refashioned as Margaret, who does not detect the crime but physically witnesses it and comes under threat as a result. Like Caleb, she exposes the real truth, though her ending is somewhat happier.

“The Murdered Cousin” tells the tale of Margaret, an orphaned heiress taken in by her uncle, Sir Arthur Tyrrell, following the death of her father. Sir Arthur was implicated in the vicious murder of a fellow gambler at his property and shunned by society as a result; his brother, however, believed in his innocence and resigns his only daughter to his guardianship on his death. Margaret is initially well-cared for, living in the faded glory of a neglected country house⁵⁶ with her cousins, quiet and submissive Emily and arrogant and reckless Edward. She develops a deep abhorrence for Edward, whom she describes as an “odious wretch” (30) and is horrified by his declaration of love, denouncing him with strong rhetoric that marks her “disapprobation, [her] disgust, as unequivocally as [she] possibly could, without actual indelicacy” (30). Margaret’s rebuttal sees the anagnorisis of the plot as Sir Arthur gives her a month to accept his son as her husband or face violent consequences. He suggests she is sexually manipulative, describing her as a “worthless coquette” (32) and infers imminent murder, informing her that “a single blow” (33) could allow him to gain her substantial income. Arthur’s intimidation reinforces his physical power and the supremacy of his position as male head of the household, as he threatens to declare her insane and incarcerate her by “chains, darkness, and the keeper's whip” (39). This image of physical restraint evokes a sadistic control wherein women can be made the physical playthings of their powerful masters. Her inevitable refusal to marry prompts Sir Arthur and Edward to hatch a plot to kill her, allowing them to acquire her inheritance and teach her the values of womanly subservience that they expect.

Margaret confides her fears in Emily and the pair resolve to protect one another, promising “vigilance, devotion and love” (38), a sisterly solidarity against the physical

⁵⁶ The neglected mansion is a typically Gothic trope later used by Sensation fiction. See, for instance, the opening scenes of *Lady Audley's Secret* (1862).

might and cunning deceptions of two strong and determined men. Margaret is so fearful for her safety that she invites her cousin to share her bed:

I determined to call my cousin Emily, who slept, you will remember, in the next room, which communicated with mine by a second door. By this private entrance I found my way into her chamber, and without difficulty persuaded her to return to my room and sleep with me. We accordingly lay down together, she undressed, and I with my clothes on, for I was every moment walking up and down the room, and felt too nervous and miserable to think of rest or comfort. Emily was soon fast asleep, and I lay awake, fervently longing for the first pale gleam of morning (40-41).

Clothing highlights the bodily and psychological turmoil that the young women are facing, as Margaret feels unable to follow her customary habits and dress for bed. Margaret acknowledges that removing her clothes is more comfortable than being dressed but sacrifices her comfort to remain on the alert, her clothing providing some degree of security, a protective shield from the unknown danger lurking in the dark. Emily seems less concerned and appears to follow her usual routine, albeit in a different bed. Though the reader later finds out that Emily has been drugged and the sleep is unnatural, Margaret finds comfort in Emily's peaceful sleep, as she reposes without fear in her innocence of the true evil of her family. The explicit mention that Emily is undressed invites the reader to picture her innocence but also leaves her vulnerable to the reader's imagination. She is a living, breathing but passive entity that can be physically overpowered with ease, without the physical capacity to act (owing to the drugs), she becomes an object, foreshadowing her later transition to corpse. The invocation of the reader in the direct address "you will remember" brings a third party

to this scene, an omniscient reader that watches in an almost voyeuristic sense over the anticipatory scene, which is sensually magnified in the darkness of night. The bodily vulnerability of both women, undressed Emily and powerless Margaret who strives to make herself invisible in the shadows, makes clear the gendered power imbalance and enhances the feeling of impending doom but also adds a salacious element to the scene, increasing the thrill for the reader.

Though “undressed” may not necessarily mean naked given that Victorian women wore a range of attire in which to sleep,⁵⁷ Emily allows Margaret to see her in a manner that is not public, a private image normally confined to the realms of a woman’s own personal space. Emily has been willingly led into the bed of her friend and shares her body in its undressed and unadulterated state as the most natural and basic affirmation of their friendship; she intends to comfort and protect her friend by her only available means, physical contact. Margaret’s retrospective description of their relationship speaks of a passionate, progressive relationship cemented with love: “I never, in after-life, formed a friendship so close, so fervent, and upon which, in all its progress, I could look back with feelings of such unalloyed pleasure” (36). She affirms that Emily was “the only being that had ever really loved me [...] the only creature on earth that cared for me” (47). The choice of language in the repetition of fervent, the ‘unalloyed pleasure’ that conveys physical purity, the idea of Emily as devoted creature suggests an intimacy not unusual in Victorian fiction but intensified in this story because of the dramatic nature of her death and the heightened sensations throughout the narrative. Later readers may detect same-sex desire in the bedroom scene, particularly in the light of Le Fanu’s infamous 1871 novella *Carmilla* in which the relationship between the vampire Carmilla and the

⁵⁷ The 1851 edition *Ghost Stories and Tales of Mystery*, which featured “The Murdered Cousin,” contained four illustrations by ‘Phiz’ (Hablot Knight Browne) for the four stories contained within. The illustration of Emily, shown overleaf in Figure 7 shows she is clearly wearing a long-sleeved nightdress, in contradiction to the text. The original 1838 publication was not illustrated.

female narrator is presented in homosexual terms. In this sense, Emily's lack of clothing may elicit a sexual response from the reader if not from Margaret because it highlights the possibility that the two women could be engaged in a lesbian relationship.



Figure 7: Accompanying illustration to “The Murdered Cousin” by Phiz taken from “Ghost Stories and Tales of Mystery” (1851). Via Internet Archive Online, 23 Mar 2019.

The scene becomes more sexually charged with the discovery that the bedroom doors have been locked, entombing the young women in their boudoir, the feminine cocoon that ought to be their safe zone but that is now surrounded by preying men who intend to expose them [Figure 7]. This entrapment echoes the scene that Margaret has recently witnessed, when she sees Edward digging outside and surmises, “they are digging the grave in which, before two hours pass, I must lie, a cold, mangled corpse. I am *theirs*—I cannot escape” (42). She envisages her body as a material object, defiled, disfigured and owned by her captors, physically overpowered, she is unable to escape from her fate despite straining “every nerve and sinew” (42). These biological terms and the ‘mangled’ state of her body reduce her physicality into something unrecognisable, detaching her sense of self from the weaknesses of her body, allowing her to retain a sense of self-

preservation in that they may overpower her body, but they cannot change her will. Margaret's fears are realised at the appearance of Edward at the bedroom window, lowering himself from the roof intending to enter Margaret's room to kill her. Standing on the window ledge, he "began to gaze into the room" (43) unaware that Margaret can see him, enacting a perverted version of the male gaze while looking for his victim. However, Margaret is hidden in the shadows and Edward's gaze is unknowingly directed at the bed that holds his sister Emily, thus Edward's voyeurism sexualises his own sister, adding an illicit incestuous taboo to the narrative. Although Margaret has already considered her body as a material object, her status as spectator allows her to command an intra-diegetic gaze with which she can describe the events to the reader.

Astonishingly, Edward does not recognise his sister and proceeds to beat her to death with a hammer, thereafter "a quivering sigh, and the long-drawn, heavy breathing of the sleeper was for ever suspended" (44). This description emphasises the sexual potential of the scenario, the "quivering sigh" and "heavy breathing" reminiscent of sexual climax as the body is now completely desecrated and the deadly deed is done. Wrapping the body in a quilt, Edward unlocks the door to allow Sir Arthur to enter, who exclaims, "by G-d; not much blood - eh?" (44), to which Edward responds, "not twenty drops, [...] and those on the quilt" (44). Sir Arthur's blasphemous execration has been censored in the text despite the brutal horror that has been described a few lines before, demonstrating a readership willing to consider the brutal murder of an innocent woman but not sacrilegious speech. The reference to blood on the sheets represents a twisted enactment of the honeymoon scene that should have occurred between Margaret and Edward if only she had acted as the 'proper' subservient woman. The fact that the blood is only on the quilt makes the act seem temporary, it can be washed away, effaced and dematerialised, and their guilt with it. Sir Arthur's description of the dead body as "the *thing*" (44) marks the final objectification of the body reduced to a scientific discourse, the italic type

emphasising the transitional process that Emily has undergone; her body is now exposed beyond the realm of ordinary language and can no longer be present in the narrative.

“The Murdered Cousin” codifies sex using excessive physical violence against an undressed body described in electrifying scenes of gratuitous detail. In this early story, the state of undress is used to convey a sense of vulnerability and purity, while clothing offers a means of protection from depravity and ultimately allows Margaret to flee from her pursuers. Though there are no explicitly sexual references, the story is replete with sexual suggestion amplified by the linguistic overlap between sex and crime and the building sense of fear, excitement and anticipation. The objectification of the body as corpse, the ease with which the body is overcome, and the lack of firm judicial resolution lends the narrative a predatory, erotic air as the reader is invited to indulge in all the particulars of the crime. The reader achieves gratification not from solving the mystery and unravelling clues but from the traditional gothic horror tropes: the immersion in sensation, the horror of anticipation, the relation of the macabre events and crucially, from the sexual undertones that pervade the story. Though Edward does not seem to notice that Emily is undressed, the reader is fully aware, a factor that heightens anticipation and encourages the reader to read beyond the text and infer sexual connotations.

Sartorial Power and the Cross-Dressed Body

Whereas Le Fanu’s Emily becomes the martyred virgin, evocative of innocence and feminine weakness in the male dominant household, Mary Eleanor Wilkins Freeman undermines this angel of the house ideal in her central character by transforming the local dressmaker from domestic doyenne to androgynous vengeful spinster. Published in 1895,

“The Long Arm”⁵⁸ stands out from other crime stories of the era, including those featured in this thesis, because of the respective genders of the victim and killer: the murderer is a woman who physically overpowers her male victim in an act of cold-blooded jealousy. The story is almost a complete gender reversal of “The Murdered Cousin” though the plot shares many of the same hallmarks, including the murder of the victim in bed at night, physical blows with a blunt object, references to bloodstains and a killer who escapes legal justice, but dies before the trial begins. Anxieties of the body become confused and distorted by representations and expectations of gender and elements of desire that are exposed and highlighted through the references to cloth and clothing that litter the story. Set in Vermont, USA, the story is mostly narrated by Sarah Fairbanks, daughter of the murder victim Martin, as she sets out to identify her father’s murderer. Sarah discovers that forty years earlier her father had been betrothed to their next-door neighbour, Maria Woods, but was prevented from marrying her by the oppressive matriarch Phoebe Dole, with whom Maria resides. The spinsters have lived together since childhood but are presumably unrelated, as the repeated mention of their surnames reiterates. The “sweet, weakly, dependent” Maria (143) lives firmly in the shadow of the more dominant Phoebe, who ignores the feelings of everyone around her and “always does things her own way” (142). As young women, Phoebe forced Maria to promise that she would never marry, compelling Maria to refuse Martin’s marriage proposal even though she is in love with him, and he subsequently marries another woman. Following the death of Sarah’s mother, Martin and Maria secretly rekindle their romance and resolve to marry. But when Phoebe discovers their plans, she determines to kill Martin, intending to pin the blame on his business rival. Phoebe subsequently dons his overalls and stabs Martin to death with her

⁵⁸ In her biography of Wilkins Freeman, *In a Closet Hidden: The Life and Work of Mary E. Wilkins Freeman*, Leah Blatt Glasser notes that “The Long Arm” was a collaboration between the American writer Mary E Wilkins and Joseph Chamberlain but this detail is omitted from all reprints of the story I have seen in crime anthologies.

dressmaking shears, successfully covering up the crime until she is forced to confess when the detective follows a series of clues that unequivocally reveal her guilt (see Chapter Five). These clues consist of dress related detritus, including numerous discarded threads, lost buttons and a dropped ribbon that belongs not to a young woman as might be expected, but to the riding crop of a man, anticipating the gender reversals that follow. The violent physicality of the crime is contrasted against the pleasurable feeling of dress from the outset of “The Long Arm” and clothing is used to signify sexual freedom as well as violence. Unlike “The Murdered Cousin” the story does not build tension through a chronological relation of events but begins with a strange event which, like Emily’s nakedness, seems to have no relevance to the plot. Prior to the finding of the body, Sarah discovers that a dress hanging in her wardrobe is stained with blood, an occurrence for which she cannot account. Throughout the investigation and inquest, Sarah does not mention the bloodstained dress, knowing that this could provide compelling circumstantial evidence of her guilt, even though she is innocent. The dress is of sentimental value, “made of thin summer silk [...] green in colour, sprinkled over with white rings” (137) and she wears it to look her best in anticipation of her betrothed, Henry, stopping by unannounced. Sarah describes it as her “best dress for two summers” (137) and though it is now worn, it is more affectionately described than the coarse, dark blue calico dress she uses to “do housework in” (137). The light materiality of the dress and the childish description of its colour “sprinkled” with patterns, contrast sharply against the brutality of the unknown blood with which the dress has been heavily soiled. Sarah describes how she discovers it “covered with spots - horrible great splashes and streaks down the front. The right sleeve, too, was stained, and all the stains were wet” (137), again focussing on the sense of touch as the reader imagines her touching the stains to ascertain their freshness. The bloodstains smell “sickening in [her] nostrils” (137) shattering the sensuality of the garment and displacing the haptic pleasure of the silk with

the cold, metallic solidity of unknown blood. Her surprisingly nonchalant explanation that the stains must stem from “some accident the night before” (137) seems unconvincing given the significant amount of blood that has mysteriously appeared on the dress and the recent nature of the stains and insinuates a sinister aspect to the case. Moreover, as in Le Fanu’s story, the reader has been provided with additional background information, which by the nature of its sequential appearance in a story so short, appears to be linked to this event. Sarah’s betrothal is vehemently against her father’s wishes for reasons unknown and thus the blood suggests foul play between the pair or even by Sarah against her father. The dress functions metaphorically, as the staining of the dress with which Sarah hopes to attract Henry seems to be an ominous sign that foretells the end of their relationship, the desecration of first innocent love. The final state of the dress reiterates this despoliation - Phoebe removes the dress from Sarah’s house while she is in police custody and dyes the garment black, ostensibly for mourning, but also to hide the bloodstains. The transfiguration of the dress from expensive, delicate silk, symbolic of carefree summers, to the dark absence of colour, highlights not only the loss of Martin’s life and Sarah’s resultant forced independence, but also the loss of innocence Sarah has experienced since the discovery of the blood. This is also a mirroring of Maria’s situation, with the metamorphosis of the dress signalling the final loss of hope, now plunged into a permanent widowhood not only from the death of her lover but also from the loss of her companion, who must surely be hung for her crime. This is Phoebe’s last act of manipulation; she removes all traces of the green that represented youth and innocence with her own version of the colour, the green of envy and jealousy, and leaves the dress unrecognisable from its former state in which it was beloved by Sarah.

The dress is not crucial to the undertaking of the murder, despite the numerous references to the dress in the story. In fact, the bloodstains are caused by the murderer hiding in the closet when she thinks she is disturbed and using the silk to wipe off the blood from her

own garments. However, the silk dress is more than a plot device and functions narratively in a number of ways, assisted by the material properties of silk which “evoke the decadent, mystic, mysterious, theatrical, sensual and sexual” (Seys 65). Firstly, the bloodstained dress provides the initial element of mystery to the reader, building suspense, and casting doubt over Sarah’s innocence. The reader is curious to discover how the bloodstains have appeared and how they are relevant to the crime, particularly at the outset of the narrative before the nature of the crime is known. The motif had particular relevance to the Victorian reader because the infamous Constance Kent murder trial of 1865 had centred on a bloodstained nightdress that was found hidden in the kitchen. Closer to the setting and time of writing of “The Long Arm,” American Lizzie Borden burned her ‘paint-stained’ dress the morning after the axe murders of her father and stepmother in a well-publicised trial of 1893.⁵⁹ The stained nightdress is also used to implicate the innocent Rosanna Spearman in Wilkie Collins’ Sensation novel *The Moonstone* (1868). Secondly, the dress embodies the idea of young romance; it is a costly fabric that is not used for working clothes but for aesthetic design and sensual pleasure, the soft silk clinging to the body of the wearer rather than shaping or forming the body. It symbolises the naive purity that exists in Sarah’s relationship with Henry but also in Martin’s early relationship with Maria, linking the two generations. The fabric exhibits a certain metamorphic quality in that the wearer may shape it and it has the material benefit of being easy to dye, or in this case, stain. Thirdly, the silk dress constitutes a statement of socially desirable femininity by contrast to the working man’s boiler suit worn by the killer, constructing a framework of sexual desire in sartorial terms - the androgynous

⁵⁹ S. Bradley Shaw claims that “With “The Long Arm” Freeman fully appropriates the conventions of mystery and detective fiction to “solve” the crime of the century, the Borden family ax-murders of 1892” [...] indirectly settling “questions raised by the Lizzie Borden case through her own peculiar domestication of terror” (212). However, the confession of the murderer in Freeman’s tale provides a readerly satisfaction missing from the Borden case.

boiler-suit wearing sociopathic killer Phoebe and the innocently feminine, loved-by-all victim Sarah.

The depiction of Phoebe as murderer is significant because she dons men's clothing to carry out the deed. Wilkins Freeman uses dress to illustrate the cold-blooded planning that goes into the murder and Phoebe's deviance from the expectations of her gender and even humanity, with the overalls she wears operating on several narrative and symbolic levels. Her cross-dressing is revealed towards the end of the narrative, once her guilt is unequivocally proven, as Phoebe describes in detail how she carried out the murder:

I got out your father's overalls from the kitchen closet; I knew where they were. I went through the sitting-room to the parlour. In there I slipped off my dress and skirts and put on the overalls. I put a handkerchief over my face, leaving only my eyes exposed. I crept out then into the sitting-room; there I pulled off my shoes and went into the bedroom (162).

Phoebe has evidently watched her victim closely since she knows where the overalls are stored, and her actions show a rigorous level of preparation and intent. She has considered the practicality of murder as being a messy business that might potentially ruin her own clothes and she prepares herself accordingly. She has a job to do and must be dressed for the part. Wearing a covering protects her own garments but also allows her to remove the evidence in its entirety and dispose of it with ease. If the soiled overalls are found, it could be deduced that any blood might have been legitimately caused by a workplace accident or from animal matter or other working activities for which the overalls would ordinarily be worn. The overalls presumably entailed some form of trouser, widely conceived in the period to be immoral since they were only associated with working women in coarse labour, actresses, acrobats, miners and radical women (Wilson 175). Phoebe's physical

description, “tall, and very pale and very thin” (143) tends towards the masculine, reinforced by the mention of two large bloody footprints matching a foot “either bare or clad only in a stocking” (149) making Phoebe seem monstrously outsized and overbearing over her victim. Her monstrosity is central to the story and highlighted by the title, suggesting that not only are her actions perverse, but her body is too. Her abnormally long arm represents a grotesque phallic symbol, pushed menacingly through the cat-flap and manipulated to force entry to the house to carry out an act that sees the violation of private space, physical overpowering and a bloody climax. This is reiterated by the victim’s semi-nakedness, as he, like Emily, lays in bed, unaware of the potential danger that awaits. He [Martin] “was fast asleep; it was such a hot night, the clothes were thrown back and his chest was bare” (162). His state of undress illustrates his vulnerability and allows Phoebe to locate the heart that she thinks has wronged her and through which she drives the murder weapon.

The overalls signify more than her level of intent, they represent Phoebe’s transgression into masculinity and ultimately into crime.⁶⁰ Since the cultural and social standard in the period avowed that “marriage was success, spinsterhood was failure” (Flanders, 177), by assuming the male garb Phoebe can shake off the expectations of femininity that she has failed to reach: marriage and sexual desirability. This is emphasised through the removal of her dress and skirts in the parlour, a room specifically designed to receive guests and flaunt material wealth; the parlour was largely considered a female domain, a place to show off material possessions linked with the economic success of marriage. Phoebe’s transformation from woman to man in the parlour illustrates her rejection of social gender

⁶⁰ Arthur Conan Doyle’s depiction of Irene Adler dressed in men’s clothing in “A Scandal in Bohemia” is perhaps the most well-known incident of cross-dressing in Victorian crime fiction. However, Adler uses male dress as disguise to allow her to freely move about London as a middle-class youth while Phoebe Dole does not intend to be seen in male dress (hence she changes at the crime scene). See Constance Crompton’s “Dissimulation And The Detecting Eye: Female Masculinity In “A Scandal In Bohemia”” for more on Adler’s masculine performativity.

expectations, literally stripping to her base level and leaving the outline of her socially constructed self in the form of her discarded skirts. Her brief inhabitation in the masculine world of physical empowerment must be unhindered by the restrictions of her dress, ironically the very items from which she earns her independence as a seamstress.

Phoebe can be considered as representative of a late nineteenth century cultural construction, “the Glorified Spinster,” identified in *Macmillan’s Magazine* in 1888 as a “new species” (Walkowitz 63) of women who embraced life as independent working women and celebrated the increasing freedom of womanhood. As an inhabitant of a quiet country village, Phoebe is not the radical urban androgyne identified by the magazine, though she does seem to reject the idea of marriage as woman’s ultimate destiny, a key identifier of the new categorisation, seemingly content in her residence with Maria. She is however, part of a new subspecies, one of George Gissing’s *Odd Women*, a re-categorisation of sexuality in scientific terms that negates sexual desire by creating a new category of conformity in which procreation is not possible or necessarily desirable. This redefinition was typically applied to the lower classes who were not troubled by issues of inheritance and therefore did not value the procreative need for sex and who were thus keen to turn away from traditional roles that had failed to bring them economic or social success. Indeed, “adopting the clothes and/or the life-style, work, mental disposition, or manner of the opposite sex was generally associated with female proletarian behaviour” (Walkowitz 62). Phoebe’s radical transformation from seamstress to murderer is the most extreme imagining of the transition from traditional femininity to glorified spinster but there is no sense that Phoebe sets out to be politically provocative, rather she is a social misfit whose looks and behaviour set her apart from the norm.

Phoebe’s profession as seamstress exacerbates her transgression of gender roles as she abuses her position to control the local women: “all the women in the village are in a

manner under Phoebe Dole's thumb. The garments are visible proofs of her force of will" (142). Phoebe utilises her skill and her position as the only dressmaker in the vicinity to force the local women to dress as she wishes, ultimately giving her the power to construct a sartorial hierarchy. Not only is a garment a proof of her power, it is an extension of her body; her "hands had held it, her mind had planned it, her eyes had gauged it, and she had communicated something of her intangible subjectivity to the completed object" (Schaffer 33). In addition, there are traces of her body in her work, perhaps a tiny drop of blood from a pin-pricked finger or traces of saliva from wetting the end of a thread that have been distributed amongst every woman and therefore every household in the area. In this sense she is preserving herself through dress and disseminating traces of her body almost as a mitigation of her lack of children. Reminders of her power lie in every closet and literally hang around the necks of the villagers who unquestionably yield to her control in dress. Ironically, her role as a dressmaker, with her intimate knowledge of the most feminine of institutions, exacerbates her deformed body since she cannot hide her physical deformities behind the clothes of her creation. The way in which she carries out the murder is also particularly poignant as Phoebe pierces Martin's heart with the symbol of the independent womanhood that she and Maria share: the dressmaking shears.

Aside from their practical function and their symbolism of failed femininity, the overalls also signify work and industry. Wearing the clothing that Martin uses for business allows Phoebe to enter the male domain of industry, not for the trading of a commodity (Martin is a wholesale dealer in food items) but to defend her possession, Maria, from the covetous eyes of her rival. She enters a market not as a wife-to-be, as is expected from her gender, but as a jealous love rival, intent on removing the challenger in order that she may fully exploit her hard-won possession. Phoebe's relationship with Maria is intensely possessive, seeming to go far beyond that of close friends or sisters towards that of husband and wife, with Phoebe assuming the powerful male role and Maria

subserviently accepting her lesser position as obedient wife.⁶¹ Phoebe's declaration that "there are other ties as strong as the marriage one, that are just as sacred" (161) seeks to legitimise their relationship as a tied union in the eyes of God and indicates something more than a romantic friendship, a union that is not recognised by others. As Cohen points out, even at this time, lesbian relationships "were less unspeakable than unthinkable" (6) and were supposedly omitted from legislation on the grounds that they did not exist. Phoebe's ruthless killing of Martin is akin to a lover's revenge; she is ousting a love rival who seeks to repossess that which she has claimed as her own; the killing becomes almost a man's defence of his wife as the roles are reversed. Her direct question "what right had he to take her away from me and break up my home?" (161) indicates that she feels it is her right to defend her home and the possessions within it (including Maria) at any cost, irrespective of her gender, and wearing his clothing allows her to assert her authority still further. Phoebe's violation of the personal lives of Maria and Martin echoes the gradual control that Tyrell exerts in "The Murdered Cousin," with Phoebe acting as master over the captive Maria and Martin becoming the sacrificial victim.

Phoebe views Martin as an object that stands in the way of her relationship with Maria, but Martin's body is not subject to the same sense of objectification as that of Emily in "The Murdered Cousin." The epistolary and largely first-person narration of "The Long Arm" means that the body is never referred to as a body at all, but "my father," for even after death his familial position remains in relation to the narrator. This precludes any sense of sexual desire, notwithstanding Phoebe's homosexual inclinations. However, Phoebe's method of killing Martin, the calculated means of death, her choice of clothing,

⁶¹ Their relationship epitomises John Stuart Mill's interpretation of marriage in which the wife is a "bond-servant of her husband: no less so, as far as legal obligation goes, than slaves commonly so-called" (Quoted in Ian Ward's *Sex, Crime and Literature in Victorian England* pp.5).

the covering up of incriminating evidence and her complete lack of empathy all point towards her distorted sense of value and lack of familial love. Her passion to retain Maria borders on obsessive and the violence with which she kills Martin, first pistol-whipping him and then stabbing him, indicates a displacement of frenzied passion, a pseudo-sexual act. Phoebe's attempt to suppress the sexual and romantic instincts of Martin and Maria by physically overpowering Martin paradoxically has the opposite effect. Once the details of the murder are discovered, sexual desire is brought to the forefront of the story as the full details of Martin and Maria's love emerge. The natural love between man and woman has been displaced by a calculated, scientific trope of distorted love envisioned by Phoebe, cut and shaped over twenty years as if it were a garment of her own creation. Phoebe's confession of murder is thus also a confession of sexual desire, a cathartic outpouring in which she indulges the reader in all the gory and depraved details of her crime, foregrounding the physicality of the act.

"The Long Arm" codifies sex through dress in a different way than "The Murdered Cousin" because the genders of the victim and murderer are reversed and because Phoebe is presented as so unfeminine that she is virtually inhuman, emphasised by the story's title. However, dress is central to the story on a number of literal and metaphorical levels, empowering and equipping the murderer in her illicit deed, acting as a measure of femininity and functioning as both a clue and a red herring. Through the sartorial details, the reader follows a series of conflicting emotions, from the silky happiness of summer days to the guilty secrecy of bloodied garments. The femininity of the two women is contrasted by the haptic sense of the garments they wear, with the pleasant softness of Sarah's dress juxtaposed by the coarse overalls worn by Phoebe. Both women don garments that they believe will lead to their own sense of happiness – Sarah's by marriage to Henry and Phoebe's by the murder of her love rival. The murder scene is shockingly violent even to the modern-day reader, revealing an intensity of passion in Phoebe that is

both thrilling and terrifying, infused with sexual tension as details of the unusual love triangle are revealed.

The Objectified Body: Values of Desire

Wilkins Freeman uses clothing as clue to reveal the identity of the killer but there is a sense of detachment from the body because each clue is viewed independently from its origin, such as dropped buttons from unknown garments. Moreover, the murderer uses dress to distance herself from the crime, from expectations of femininity and from humanity and she is unsexed by the monstrous power she brandishes over others through dress. By contrast, Rodrigues Ottolengui places the body at the heart of his short story “The Azteck Opal”⁶² as a display case for the jewel of the title, inviting the reader to look closely at the body and assign aesthetic and commodity values in the process.

In short crime fiction, the body is typically used as a narrative device and imbued with characteristics designed to facilitate the plot rather than to evoke an emotional response. In viewing the body and its coverings as a source of information, the reader is invited to participate in the objective gaze and is implicated in the process of interpreting the body as sign. This process has significance in the period as bodies were imbued with value systems very different from today, with monetary value in physical ownership through slavery and indenture and less legitimate ownership through prostitution and body snatching, whilst even the marriage market placed a value on the body in terms of dowry and inheritance. As Katharina Boehm points out in her study of *Bodies and Things in Nineteenth-Century Literature and Culture* “throughout the nineteenth century, the body and its individual parts were given object-status when they were sold, bought, exhibited, collected and exchanged” (6). Dress provides a vital part in this value system, such as

⁶² The story was originally published in *The Idler*, vol 7, no. 3, Apr 1895, pp. 359-372.

identifying the social position of slaves and servants and denoting the respectability and moral worth of potential wives. Even in grave robberies, disturbing grave goods such as dress carried a heavier criminal penalty than the theft of the body in the early nineteenth century because the clothes had a defined monetary value whereas the body was technically without owner and therefore worthless.⁶³

Clothing illuminates fears of desire: bodily desire, sexual desire and criminal desire. It stands as a metonym of the body's ability to be metamorphosed into a labelled "thing," an object that can be animated by the act of being worn and commoditised through sale and exchange. The body is further objectified by clothing as a model wherein the viewer is invited to look closely at an item or items worn on the body and in so doing necessarily looks closely at the body or body parts, such as an eye-catching bracelet worn on a slender wrist. Again, the garment or accessory becomes metonymic of the body, an item that can be bought or sold, desired or detested, exploiting erotic appeal to the point of being fetishized. Though this term is inherently problematic when retrospectively applied to nineteenth-century fashion because it imposes and exaggerates cultural assumptions,⁶⁴ it is used here in the sense of "sexual instinct, involving a desire for only a part of the body or even an article of clothing that functions as a substitute for the loved person" (Steele 30), in this case a coveted precious jewel in "The Azteck Opal." As Deborah Wynne explains, "Victorian novelists found the representation of desire for property a good way of signalling other, less easily representable forms of desire. The desire to own things, then, becomes a mask for sexual desire" (48), that in turn, Wynne suggests, can be a

⁶³ This forms the basis of A H Bowen's short story "The Bridal Dress" published in *Reynold's Miscellany* in 1853, which sees the results of a gravedigger stealing the beautiful bridal dress from a corpse and presenting it to his daughter. When his daughter wears it to a masked ball attended by the dead bride's fiancé, the would-be groom collapses in horror and the scandal is revealed, with the gravedigger subsequently convicted of a criminal felony.

⁶⁴ See Valerie Steele's *Fashion & Eroticism* pp.30 for a useful explanation of fetishism and the misapplication of the term in fashion.

means of constructing social identity through the established economic value systems associated with material goods.

Dress is significant in the story because it enables and encourages illicit physical touching which foregrounds the body as a sexualised entity. The narrative focuses on the loss of an opal necklace in a locked-room mystery that forces the participants to grope in the dark to ascertain the identity of the thief, exposing a myriad of hidden desires in the process. Four men and three women are aboard a yacht celebrating their last evening on board with a dinner, when the boat shudders violently and all the lights are extinguished. During the short period of enforced darkness, a valuable opal is stolen from around the neck of one of the ladies, Mrs Gray. The story is largely narrated in the first person by the detective Mr Blake, who interviews each of the characters on the yacht to ascertain their version of events during the period of darkness. While outlining the case to his friend Mr Mitchel, it is apparent that clothing plays an active role in the heightening of prurience in the scene. The two married women aboard the yacht, Mrs Gray and her sister Mrs Cortlandt are described as wearing “*décolleté* costumes”; low-necked evening dresses in vogue in the mid-1890s.⁶⁵ Though the fashion was readily worn, it was denounced for its risqué style in numerous contemporary publications. Elizabeth Stuart Phelps complains that “to be *décolleté* is nothing but a shocking thing and abominable” (“Of Decollation” 187) in an article mocked by *The Saturday Review* in 1890 and in *Judy* magazine in 1897 the following quip appeared under the header “rather decollete” [sic]:

⁶⁵ A fashion article from *The London Journal* in 1896 affirms, “it is now a well-established custom that low-necked dresses must be worn in the evening for any sort of entertainment, and even in one’s own home the style is carried out. [...] no matter how simple the material employed in a plain dinner-gown, the bodice must be *décolleté*” (Fashions 6).

Mrs Vincent: “What do you think of my dress? Madame Marie when she had finished described it as a dream.”

Mr Vincent: “Well, it has about as little body as a dream.”



Figure 8: Madame X. From *Painting Skin: John Singer Sargent's "Madame X"* Susan Sidlauskas. *American Art*, Vol. 15, No. 3 (Autumn, 2001), pp. 8-33. Published by: The University of Chicago Press on behalf of the Smithsonian American Art Museum. Via JSTOR, 5 Dec 2015.

Most famously, John Singer Sargent's portrait of the French socialite Virginie Gautreau known as “Madame X,” exhibited in Paris in 1884 was publicly attacked for the sexual suggestiveness of her pose and her décolleté gown, with one strap provocatively falling from her shoulder, as if her dress may fall down at any moment. Sargent subsequently repainted the image to make her dress appear more stable, placing the strap in its proper position and also changing a detail of the background so that a carved female image on a table-leg was covered more modestly [Figure 8].

Though evidently fashionable, women who sported the style knew that their bodies were on display, opting for “selective exposure [...] extreme enough to be exciting, but not so overt as to be widely considered obscene” (Steele 34). Mrs Gray takes this exposure a step further by using

the fashion to frame the Azteck Opal worn “as a pendant to a thin gold chain which hung around her neck” (366), suggestively drawing the eye of the viewer, and the reader, towards her cleavage. The notoriety of the stone and its worldwide desirability further affirm Mrs Gray's desire to attract attention. As a married woman, Mrs Gray's body

operates as the display case for exhibiting the wealth of her husband and the family heirlooms (Wynne, 116) though paradoxically, “the dress of married women [was] permitted to be more erotic and more sumptuous than that of unmarried girls” (Steele 135). Mrs Gray is as objectified as the opal, is fashioned to be desirable and valued through the commodity exchange of the marriage market but judged according to modes of taste and social assimilation.

The theft of the gemstone in the darkness comes amid a chaotic scene of swapped places and confusion that emphasises the potential for social disorder and sexual misconduct away from the usual surveillance of Victorian society. Mrs Cortlandt’s testimony reveals that she suspects Mr Gray has set-up the theft, explaining, “on account of the confusion and darkness, I sat in my sister’s seat [Mrs Gray] when I returned to the table. This explains his mistake, but he put his arms around my neck, and deliberately felt for the opal” (369). In this scene, Mr Gray is groping around the bare décolletage of his wife’s sister in attempt to retrieve an object that he already owns. Mrs Cortlandt identifies him by “the large cameo ring on his little finger” (369) which she feels when she reaches out to grab his hand. The cameo illustrates the fashion for imitation antiquities but also signifies the framing of the body as object since the typical cameo image is a bust - the very framing that Mrs Gray has adopted for the display of her opal. Had he placed his arms around the neck of his wife as it may be assumed he intended, the scene is at worst a collusion of theft between the couple, but given that the violated person is his sister-in-law, the scene takes on much more obvious sexual undertones with the potential for scandalous results.

The bare arms are a red herring that deceive the reader but also introduce a salacious possibility to the events that take place. Mrs Gray confesses that she has felt hands grasping round her neck but does not cry out as she suspects a prank, adding only that the

arms she felt against her skin were bare. Her defensive tone, her unwillingness to name any suspects and the fact that she does not cry out arouse the detective's suspicion and suggest collusion with another of the suspects on the yacht, the skin-to-skin contact



Figure 9: "Tried very hard to convince me that she knew absolutely nothing." Illustration by Stanley L Wood showing Miss Livingstone. *The Idler; an Illustrated Magazine*, London Vol. 7, (Jul 1895): 363. Via Internet Archive, 23 Mar 2019.

intimating comfortable intimacy with the perpetrator. However, the narrator affirms here that the other two women aboard the yacht both have bare arms. Miss Livingstone's "dress was not cut low in the neck, it was, practically, sleeveless; and Mrs Cortlandt's dress has no sleeves at all" (368), contrary to the accompanying illustration [Figure 9]. This detail marks the women as suspects but also shows that all three women are vulnerable to sexual touching when the lights go off and the dinner guests are groping around in the dark. The unusual setting of the action distorts the usual rules of propriety as the guests are seated much more closely together than is usual (sufficiently close that they may accidentally swap seats) enhancing the potential for physical contact. Whereas Le Fanu's story at the midpoint of the nineteenth century strongly depicts physical violation but skirts round the presentation of naked flesh, "The Azteck Opal" seems to glory in the bare skin of the characters but leaves the question of who is touching who in the minds of all of the characters and in the imagination of the reader.

Though the confusion in the dark is not explicitly sexually suggestive, the opal is used to infer a certain impropriety in the events. As Steele highlights, jewellery has been interpreted by some fashion critics, including J.C. Flügel, as representative of the female genitals (Steele 25) and the desire of self-display and of inviting the gaze can be interpreted as analogous to the libido. The metaphor is extended to a lesser extent in “Azteck” but there is certainly an analogy to women’s sexual desirability through the jewel. Drawing on the cultural significance of the opal, Mr Mitchel tells Mrs Gray that the stone is used as an engagement stone in the Orient, “the lover gives it to his sweetheart, and the belief is that should she deceive him even in the most trifling manner, the opal will lose its brilliance and become cloudy” (374). The opal symbolises the reputation of the woman that once sullied loses value and ceases to become as attractive as it once was. Mrs Gray fully understands the inference, angrily crying out “what do you mean to insinuate?” (374). Mitchel’s response that “by this act you might have seriously injured if not ruined Mr Gray” (375) alludes to the financial implications of her actions whilst hinting at the public scandal of cuckolding her husband through sexual transgression, implicit in the “act.” The criminal acquisition of the opal is equated with relinquishing the body as Mitchel concludes that “Mr Livingstone did not steal it at all. Mrs Gray simply handed it to him in the darkness” (376), reflecting the earlier example of Rachel Verinder’s metaphorical deflowering at the loss of the moonstone.

Whether Livingstone desires Mrs Gray as much as the opal is unclear since his motives behind the theft are never fully revealed. However, that the opal is a source of great desire is evident. The opal conjures up feelings of covetousness in three men in the story – Mr Gray, Mr Livingstone and Mr Mitchel, friend of the detective and co-narrator. Mitchel has an interesting relationship with jewels, believing that he is ameliorating society by buying as many stones as possible and storing them securely to remove the temptation for theft. His eccentric habit brands him “a crank who collects gems” (368), raising

distrust in the other characters who are understandably suspicious of his interest in the case particularly given that he has tried to purchase the opal prior to its disappearance. Mitchel's ownership, categorisation and control of these precious stones is a means of policing desire, using his excessive wealth to control the market and interfere with criminal cases. Mitchel's belief that gems are the sources of crime equates jewels with women as dangerous objects of desire as he believes that he can improve the morality of society by removing these objects of temptation from the commodity market. His retention of the jewels is a shift away from traditional hierarchies of power to a new, sanitised pedagogy of which he has promoted himself to overall leader/master creator, by dint of the fact that he has the financial power to do so. Far from decreasing anxieties of ownership and desire, anxieties that are symbolic of sexual desires, he merely complicates the situation by making normative assumptions about the beliefs and desires of his fellow man and trying to control beyond the legal and moral restrictions already legitimately in place. His power is the ultimate hypocrisy because he gains pleasure by denying others yet sees himself as an educator providing society with a moral service. As Michel Foucault points out, "pleasure and power do not cancel or turn back against one another; they seek out, overlap, and reinforce one another. They are linked together by complex mechanisms and devices of excitation and incitement" (Foucault 48). Jewels evidently excite the men within the story, as natural objects of financial value and as objects of aesthetic beauty which can bring them power, functioning by extension as metaphors for sex.

Sartorial observations are more than gratuitous embellishments here even though Ottolengui describes dress in insufficient detail to make assured statements about the female sexuality through clothing. The bare arms act as a red herring and add to the haptic sense of the scene of a notably physical crime, with dress providing an instrumental role in revealing skin, emphasised by the specific reference to décolleté necklines. The opal

itself can be read as analogous to the sexualised female body through Mrs Gray's manipulation of the jewel and her attempts to buy and sell it. This is evident when the plot is analysed with hindsight: Mr Gray attempts to steal the stone from his wife but is thwarted in the attempt because another man gets there before he does. At the exact same time, Mrs Gray has arranged for the jewel to be 'stolen' by Mr Livingstone, possibly to allow Livingstone to carry out a fraud, though no firm motive is established. She has already refused Mitchel's offer to buy her stone and lies when quizzed by the detective in order to protect Livingstone. She only admits her guilt when Mitchel advises her that her husband will be ruined and tells her of the opal's alleged powers to reveal the deception of a lover. The opal is symbolic of her fidelity and her manipulation of the stone suggests sexual promiscuity. The opal is an object of want for all the men in the story, inspiring jealousy, possessiveness and the need to control and its final resting place in the possession of Mr Mitchel removes it from the common market, returning order to the narrative. The opal is a vital part of the narrative because it provides the catalyst for the crime but as an item of jewellery, it increases the thrill factor for the reader through the sexual inferences imbued through its physical theft and recovery.

The Lust for Knowledge: The Sexualised Body

Le Fanu, Wilkins Freeman and Ottelengui all codify sex through indirect or implicit references to dress or accessories, using cultural associations and seemingly insignificant sartorial details coupled with a readerly drive to uncover and expose. Maurice Leblanc's 1911 short story "The Red Silk Scarf"⁶⁶ employs much more overt references to dress and describes more flamboyant and evocative clothing as evinced by the story's title, which may be attributed to several reasons. Firstly, the later publication date of the story

⁶⁶ "The Red Silk Scarf" was translated from the original French and first published in the UK in *The New Magazine* in September 1911.

occurred at a period of great change in sartorial fashions in which “the dominant trend was away from the full hourglass figure with the narrow waist and toward a vertical line and a relatively unconstructed waist” (Steele 71). These changes encouraged freedom of movement and by extension sexual freedom as women moved away from the restrictions of corsets towards silhouettes that minimised their femininity. Secondly, the story was originally written by a French author for a French readership. The story first appeared as “L’Écharpe de soie rouge” in August 1911 in the French magazine *Je Sais Tout*⁶⁷ in a country renowned for its love of fashion but also for a more relaxed approach to sex, particularly in literature.⁶⁸ The magazine was aimed at a male readership and in 1911 featured sections devoted to “great facts,” the army, hunting, and commerce and industry, as well as the “novels and news” section that featured Leblanc’s stories. The readership allowed for greater lenience in the use of sexually provocative inferences, not least because the story was billed under the headline “Les Confidences d’Arsène Lupin” (the secrets of Arsène Lupin), suggesting a man-to-man intimacy. Finally, Arsène Lupin was a well-established character by 1911 having first appeared in 1905 as a Gentleman Burglar, an oxymoronic appellation that infers a degree of social decorum despite his criminality. The stories emphasise Lupin’s polymorphic abilities, his miraculous facility to escape any situation and his impenetrable disguises, all crucial to his success and his popularity with the reading public.

Lupin triumphs over the long-suffering detective Ganimard because he is able to decipher sartorial codes where Ganimard cannot. “The Red Silk Scarf” relates the murder of a French music-hall singer known only as Jenny, who dresses eccentrically in brightly

⁶⁷ An electronic version in the original French of *Je Sais Tout* from July-December 1911 can be found online on the catalogue of the National Library of France.

⁶⁸ The mid-century French fiction of Flaubert and Baudelaire depicted overtly sexual, independent women, much to the disgust of the British reading public, who denigrated the stories as “offensive to public morality” (*Daily News*). In reality, the French tolerance to literary immorality was in itself illusory; both Flaubert and Baudelaire were prosecuted for offending morality (Ward, 142).

coloured homemade clothes and is murdered by her equally flamboyantly dressed suitor. Her profession, her appearance and the material clues in the case imply a sexual motive to the killing. The first clues to her murder are discovered in a barge having been thrown from a bridge and consist of torn newspaper, a glass inkstand, a fragment of broken glass, shredded cardboard and “a piece of bright scarlet silk, ending in a tassel of the same material and colour” (161). The odd assortment of objects is clearly figured as a code that must be read to unravel the mystery, drawing parallels with a series of crosses and circles drawn on the pavement at the opening of the story, a false code rendered deliberately unreadable by Lupin to lure the unsuspecting Ganimard to a meeting point. Lupin interprets the objects in sartorial terms and infers that: “yesterday evening, [...] a showily dressed young woman was wounded with a knife and then caught round the throat and choked to death by a well-dressed gentleman, wearing a single eyeglass” (162). His assumptions are determined by his knowledge of dress, deducing that the fragment of broken glass fits the design of a single eyeglass, which he proclaims is “essentially an aristocratic article of wear” (162). He concludes that the man is dressed well as a logical deduction that the eyeglass is in keeping with the rest of his attire and indicating Lupin’s familiarity with upper-class sartorial codes. Lupin determines that the woman is dressed showily, declaring that her “eccentricity in the matter of dress is pretty clearly indicated by this bright-red silk scarf” (162). His judgement highlights the suggestive power of colour and the expectations of women to assume demure dress. Red⁶⁹ is primarily associated with passion and danger or a combination of the two, as in Nathaniel Hawthorne’s 1850 tale of adultery *The Scarlet Letter* which sees a woman publicly upbraided by the stitching of the letter ‘A’ for adulterer on to her clothes, and in the

⁶⁹ Red was also associated with liberty and personal freedom during the French Revolution, with many radical parties donning red caps representative of those worn by freed Roman slaves. It also came to be associated with socialist and workers groups and is still favoured by the Labour Party in British Politics today.

designation of scarlet lady/woman of Biblical origin to refer to an immoral woman. Metaphorically, the sanguine inference of the colour seems to anticipate the blood that will flow from her body. Jenny's showy silk scarf represents her willingness to mark herself as an individual but that drawing attention to oneself in this way is not only socially reprehensible but also risky. There is a sense that by dressing in such a way she has attracted unwanted attention and provoked her attacker, like a red rag to a bull.

A more conventional basis of femininity is shown by the victim's dressmaking skills as the reader is informed that Jenny made the scarf herself and that she takes pleasure in making her own clothing. Yet even this fact is tinged with a sexual undertone since she particularly delights in making frocks and hats that heighten her good looks and make her more sexually desirable. The use of sensuous silk, an expensive fabric, seems incongruous with the wealth accrued through her employment as a music-hall singer, suggesting that she has secured an additional source of income or been given the fabric as a gift by an admirer. However, as in "The Long Arm" the material is forensically significant because its absorbency retains bloodstains, showing where the knife was wiped and the distinctive marks of a handprint. The incomplete state of the scarf is attributed to the stained part of the scarf being cut off, "leaving the other end, no doubt, in his victim's clenched hands" (163). This image of a lone woman clutching her ostentatiously expensive silk scarf whilst dying on a deserted Parisienne bridge, having been despoiled by a man she had arranged to meet, seems to be an allegory of sexual violation invited by the victim. The description of the corpse wearing a "low-cut bodice" (166) virtually affirms that she is complicit in the act. Her desperate retention of the scarf symbolises her desire to keep hold of her innocence, a protection of her property both material and bodily. The fate of the other end of the scarf, carelessly tossed over the bridge is an allegorical representation of the stereotyped fate of many fallen Victorian women who saw suicide as their only escape from social shame, drowning themselves the most

easily available method of destruction.⁷⁰ Here, it is the murderer that carelessly discards her stained scarf and with it the stains of his guilt and her reputation. The traces of his body, his bloody fingerprints on the scarf, must be the most compelling evidence of his guilt, particularly given that he is (unusually) left-handed. His actions remove all traces of his crime and all hope of her survival; the red of the scarf has been replaced by the angry red marks of his violence around her neck, her body as fragile as the delicate piece of cloth.

Jenny's ingenuity of dress, in the making of a scarf with a hidden compartment, is contrasted against the conventional and ineffective way in which her murderer uses dress as a disguise to mask his intentions and conceal his identity. She is reportedly in the habit of receiving late-night visits from "a society man" who "took every precaution to avoid being seen [in her company], such as turning up his coat-collar and lowering the brim of his hat" (167). The mystery man's need for anonymity indicates either that his intentions are improper or that he feels that his association with Jenny would be detrimental to his reputation, hinting towards a sexual connection between the pair, despite Jenny's naïve supposition that "he wants to marry me" (167). Jenny fails to read his intentions in much the same way that he fails to decipher her sartorial code and thus locate the object of his desire—her jewel. Dress thus conceals as much as it reveals when the viewer already has an image in mind.

⁷⁰ Popularised by John Everett Millais' image of Ophelia (1851-52) and G.F. Watts' 1850 painting 'Found Drowned,' the romantic notion of fallen women resorting to suicide through drowning had little statistical basis but nevertheless persisted as a recurrent image throughout the Victorian period. As Valerie Meessen points out "a strong interest was taken in female self-murder in the nineteenth century, and representations of women in the act of committing, or having committed suicide were ubiquitous in Victorian culture. The dominant image in this discourse was that of the fallen woman drowning herself, and from the 1840s to roughly the 1880s an iconography evolved around this theme. The figure of the drowned woman consequently became an essential trope of 'a new iconographic vocabulary' in the visual arts, and a narrative was constructed around these representations that was retold again and again in literature of the time" (7-8).

The scarf is more than a fashion accessory but like the azteck opal, functions as a metaphor for sex, using secret compartments to hide forbidden treasures. The scarf contains a medal that depicts an image of “Our Lady of Good Succour” (176), a Roman Catholic title for the Virgin Mary, an ironic choice of icon given the victim’s subsequent violation. It is this portion of the scarf that is later discarded by the murderer, the lucky talisman unable to save the wearer’s innocence but perhaps lucky in its ability to contribute to the exposure of the murderer. Paradoxically, the concealment of the medal also reveals to Lupin the location of a missing jewel, a rare Russian sapphire, in the opposite end of the scarf, the exposure on which the plot hinges. The location of the sapphire provides the mystery element to the plot as all of the men in the narrative (Lupin, Ganimard and the murderer Derocq) are looking for it and value it for differing reasons. Derocq presumably wants the sapphire for monetary reasons to support his aristocratic lifestyle and resorts to violence to obtain it. Lupin wants the sapphire partly for its economic value but also for the satisfaction of making Ganimard retrieve it for him, an assertion of his power over the “dunderheads” (177) that make up the police force, and Ganimard wants it to solve the case and improve his reputation within the force. Their perception of value is in direct contrast to that of the female victim who retains the stone principally for sentimental and aesthetic reasons. The men appear to achieve excitement, if not satisfaction, in the chase to obtain the jewel, whilst Jenny’s pleasure lies in the retention of it, with the jewel again suggesting Jenny’s sexual availability. This performative aspect of the narrative aligns the men’s sexual drive with the reader’s drive for knowledge, heightened by Jenny’s absence from the story since her story is told for her and she is never allowed the chance to express or defend herself. There is an undeniably sexual element to the chase, with both the scarf and the sapphire being aligned with the female body, reinforced by the provocative use of language. Lupin describes the location of the sapphire within the scarf:

all you have to do is to take a skein of red cord and braid in a wooden cup, leaving a little recess, a little empty space in the middle, very small, of course, but large enough to hold a medal of a saint [...] at that moment he finished pushing back the silk cord and from the hollow of a cup he took between his thumb and forefinger a wonderful blue stone, perfect in size and purity” (176)

His analysis resembles an intimate medical examination: unfastening the ties of the tassle, he exposes the tight hidden space beneath and inserts his fingers to retrieve the essence of purity. His surprise that the police “had the silk all this time and not one of [them] ever thought of feeling it” (177) indicates an inclination towards touch that he assumes that his fellow investigators naturally share. Paradoxically, it also indicates how detached they are from the physicality of the murder, assuming that vision alone is enough to decipher the clues, a method that Ganimard has already proved to be ineffective by his failure to read Lupin’s deception at the opening of the story. This incapability is highlighted by the ending of the story, a handwritten note from Lupin to Ganimard that warns against “excessive credulity” (179), suggesting that what is seen visually is not necessarily true or accurate and that proof should always be obtained. The solving of a mystery relies not merely on visual perception but on multi-sensual interpretation to achieve the ultimate satisfaction and clothing once again alerts the reader to the haptic aspects of crime.

Conclusion

Clothing functions as a discourse of desire in all of these texts. The earliest of the texts, “The Murdered Cousin” published in 1851, features the fewest descriptions of dress because it creates excitement through traditional Gothic tropes of sensation and horror, such as the hunted victim, darkness and isolation that bring an erotic undertone to the

narrative. Through Margaret, clothing is represented as a form of armour that conversely renders undressed Emily as the victim. Emily's undressed dead body demonstrates the potential of the narrative to descend from obvious sexual threat to downright depravity, a suggestion that is enhanced by the reader's position as voyeur. The many published revisions of "The Murdered Cousin" reinforce the shifting interpretation of sex within society as the story is fashionably reworked to suit the readership with the changes in narrative producing a many-layered palimpsest that clothes the references to sex.

"The Long Arm" utilises a similar thirst for excitement through the explicit description of the bloody murder in which physical power is just as crucial as in "The Murdered Cousin." However, unable to rely on her gender as Arthur and Edward may, Phoebe uses clothing to exert control over the murder victim and over his friends and family. Considered alongside Leblanc's seamstress Jenny, Phoebe is completely alien; though the two women are both talented dressmakers they are poles apart in terms of looks, character and social expectations, though both women meet the same fate and are dead by the end of their respective narratives. Phoebe's dressmaking skills provide her a means of social control that brings her pleasure, reaching the most extreme conclusion with her symbolic use of the shears as murder weapon whilst Jenny pays for her indulgence of fashion with her life. In Jenny's case, the triviality of fashion seems to exemplify the insignificance of her murder whilst in Phoebe's case, the frippery of dress covers up the significant desire for violent retribution.

Sexual anxieties are created and exploited through the interpretations of dress and the exploration of the meanings that lie secreted within them, both literally and metaphorically. "The Red Silk Scarf" generates readerly anxiety through the garment of the title that almost overtakes the victim in terms of prominence in the story. The story is ostensibly just another instalment in the homosocial relations of Lupin and Ganimard,

with the murder barely constituting a subplot (the theft of the sapphire is arguably the main plot, with the murder an incidental effect). However, the particularly distinct qualities of the scarf, its relation to its owner and her relation to the murderer create a sexual dimension to the story that is related through the symbolic use of the scarf and through its material properties. Reading of dress is crucial to uncovering the mystery of the story because it allows Lupin to establish what has happened, whilst Ganimard fails to decipher clothing as clue even when its significance is pointed out to him. Derocq is so intent on acquiring the sapphire that he does not read Jenny's attention to detail in her dress despite the irony that she wears the distinctive scarf to look more attractive to him. Lupin is the only character who realises the significance of the clues, deciphering their social and cultural meanings to reveal the identity of both the victim and the murderer.

All of the crimes take place because of the drive to possess, and clothing is vital as a means to stoke this desire, particularly in 'forbidden' relationships, since in marriage possession is already won. Dress becomes symbolically representative of the body with prized jewels in particular aligned with the most prized jewel of Victorian femininity, the untouched vagina. The need to possess is an instinctive animal urge that by degrees creates a power imbalance of consumer and consumed and ultimately, criminal and victim. The motives in "The Long Arm" and "The Azteck Opal" are similar in that male-female desires incite the crime; Phoebe murdered Martin because of his desire for Maria and Mrs Gray arranges the theft of the opal because of her desire for Mr Livingstone. However, the use of clothing as an explorative discourse of sex is completely different in the two narratives, with "The Long Arm" using fragments of clothing as clues to expose the murderer, with the female pseudo-detective recognising the importance of the clues where the male professional detective does not. The story uses clothing to incite questions of gender expectation through the wearing of dress and display of the body, comparing Phoebe's bodily monstrosity with Sarah's womanly allure and relying on the

interpretation of dress as an indication of character. These contrasting traits of feminine/masculine and attractive/monstrous are symbolically represented by the material properties of cloth through Sarah's soft silk and Phoebe's coarse overalls enhancing the sensory experience for the reader. But it also plays with these conventions since Sarah's desire for truth rather than her feminine passivity catalyses the plot and Phoebe's wearing of male dress to carry out a male act almost completely destroys her sexuality. "The Azteck Opal" also plays with expectations of dress, with the women on board the yacht displayed in sexual terms by their dress as objects of desire in the same way that the opal is encased and displayed to enhance its desire. Sartorial and moral codes are completely disregarded in the temporary darkness and reading becomes impossible without the visual stimulus. Sexual tensions are enabled by the physical touching permitted by dress and inadvertently revealed by the detective's reading of sartorial codes.

Clothing codifies sex in all of these stories because it allows or encourages touching on literal and metaphorical levels. Emily can be seen as a sexual victim because she is physically murdered while naked by the bare hands of her brother. Martin is murdered in a similar fashion, with the coarse utility of the murderer's dress functioning as a metaphor for the distortion of her femininity, further juxtaposed against the haptic pleasure of the silk accidentally despoiled in the process. The Azteck opal symbolises the forbidden sexuality of a married woman and the theft is made possible by the conflicting accounts of dress and the portability of the small jewel. Its shifting opalescence is allegedly linked to the morality of the owner, a key material property that aids in the solutions to the mystery. The red silk scarf possesses the same haptic pleasure as Sarah's dress and the retention of the scarf in the hands of the victim indicates a sentimental, as well as material, attachment. Though the red colour is seen as indicative of her eccentricity, the silk suggests a more conventional femininity, increasing the sense

of sympathy the reader feels towards the tragic victim. Once again, writers use dress to convey conflicting emotions within the same story, simultaneously concealing the body but revealing tantalising glimpses of its sexual potential.

Chapter Three: Anxieties of the Imagination - Fashioning the Fictional

Female Detective

On July 27, 1878, a news story entitled “The Disguised Female Detective” was published in the American magazine *The National Police Gazette*. The article discussed the case of a twenty-three-year-old woman, Alice Trevelyan, who appeared in court on the charge of “violating a corporation ordinance by masquerading in male attire” (2), a crime she attributed to her alleged role as a female detective. Miss Trevelyan’s appearance is comprehensively described:

Her hair was cut short and was parted on one side. Her dress consisted of a light-grey summer suit, the cut being a short sack. In her outside breast-pocket was carefully arranged a handkerchief in the style sometimes affected by young men. A jaunty straw hat [...], also formed part of her attire (2).

Miss Trevelyan, the reader is informed, had arrived in Boston only a few days before: “she came in her present attire, and with her pleasant affectation of masculinity, a show of money and nothing to do. The stranger was the very embodiment of a fast youth ready to go the pace” (2). Her extravagant lifestyle catches up with her when, having failed to pay a cab fare, she is detained by the local police force. When questioned, Miss Trevelyan claims to be “a private detective connected with the agency of Fulton Street and engaged in hunting up to \$8000 worth of diamonds” (2), a story considered too far-fetched by her captors. Instead, they conclude that “there is some strong motive, or more probably, a species of romantic madness to account for her conduct” (2) and believing her to be insane, she is given to the care of her family in order to keep her from the asylum.⁷¹

⁷¹ Her fate is reported in an article in the *New York Times* which refers to “the young female imposter, who was arrested in male attire, claiming at first to be Alice Trevelaine [sic], and afterward to be a female

Miss Trevelyan's choice of explanation suggests that she believes that her sartorial and behavioral non-conformity can be legitimately explained through the role of the female detective, implying that the employment requires actions that eschew the conventions of society and encourage the subversion of gender boundaries, including sartorial codes. Given the 1878 date of the article, her claim is undoubtedly unusual with female detectives not being officially recognised in the US until the twentieth century. Though Michele Slung proposes Kate Warne as the first real-life female detective in the US, working for the private agency of Allan Pinkerton in the 1860s, Joseph Kestner cites Isabella Goodwin as the first official detective affiliated with the police in 1912 though "she had been a police matron since 1896" (6). Trevelyan's explanation is perhaps influenced by recent trends in literature such as Seeley Regester's⁷² *The Dead Letter* (1864) and Anna Katherine Green's *The Leavenworth Case* (1878) both of which are considered to be amongst the earliest forms of US detective fiction. Significantly, a character named Alice Trevelyan [sic] features in Edward Ellis's *Ruth the Betrayer: or the Female Spy* (1862), an early detective story published by John Dicks as a penny dreadful in fifty-two parts between February 1862 and 1863.⁷³ The simultaneous birth of the female detective in US and UK literary markets lays testament to the popularity of the crime fiction genre across international borders and as such, examples from both English and American authors are considered in this chapter.

Alice Trevelyan's fantasy lifestyle reflects the role of female detectives in fiction, given their presence in literature long before their real-life employment. As Joseph Kestner

detective in disguise" (8). The paper describes her as "not quite 20 years old" but from a respectable, though not prominent family and thus her real name is withheld "out of respect for her poor mother" ("The Female 'Detective'" 8).

⁷² The pseudonym of Metta C Victor.

⁷³ Though the story was printed in parts, they do not stand alone but form a grand narrative and thus this story is omitted from this study. However, the penny dreadful format of the story evinces the transition from lower-class literature to a more mainstream genre, though the popularity of the crime fiction genre would not peak for another three decades. See *Nineteenth Century Collections Online* for an online version of this text, complete with illustrations.

argues, “since women had no place at all in the police, detective or otherwise, [early female detective] texts are engaging in a fantasy of female empowerment completely at odds with actuality” (13). Whereas readers of crime fiction were accustomed to male police officers and detectives through earlier tales by Edgar Allan Poe, Charles Dickens and Wilkie Collins, the female detective could offer no factual basis for comparison and was thus an imaginative construction brought about by authors and illustrators, ostensibly for the purpose of entertainment. This study does not analyse reader responses per se, since such facts are difficult to establish and notoriously unreliable but explores how crime writers shaped the character of the female detective in the cultural context. Little critical focus has been placed on the appearance or the dress of female detectives to consider how their aesthetic may relate to this fantasy and how the reader may be encouraged by the writer and even by the publisher to interpret such appearances. For example, the publication of “The Disguised Female Detective” in a periodical described as “one of the most lurid and sensational journals of the era”⁷⁴ (Reel 1) suggests the story was aimed at a readership who would find it not merely entertaining but almost titillating. The female detective guise is given as a plausible and appealing explanation for the fantasy of a young woman transgressing hegemonic social discourses and behaving with “a mixture of shame and effrontery” (2).

This chapter explores representations of the female detective in short stories, from her inception in the 1860s through to the turn of the century, in order to assess how representations of a character type who existed in fiction prior to real-life coincide with social and sartorial expectations of the period. In an era when dress became more closely associated with employment than ever before, for example, with the creation of civilian

⁷⁴ The Irish editor Richard Kyle Fox took over the magazine in 1876 and moved the journal away from its roots as a publication of crime to a masculine hub of “crime stories, sporting promotions, and woodcut illustrations (and later, photographs) of scantily clad, often athletic, or talented young women” (Reel 4).

uniforms for railway staff and post-office workers, this chapter observes similarities in dress or attitudes to dress across the profession. These observations determine the significance of sartorial aesthetics in the construction and shaping of the character in the latter half of the nineteenth century. Discussed chronologically in the order that they first appeared in their respective short stories, the female detectives are analysed with reference to key themes including the use of disguise and cross-dressing and the tensions between self-expression, social respectability and their professional status with reference to the literary media in which they featured and its readership. By examining both written and pictorial descriptions, considering the depictions within the texts and the accompanying illustrations including book covers, this chapter explores Victorian anxieties about gender, mannish women and ladylike behaviour to argue that in stark contrast to Miss Trevelyan's strikingly masculine look, fictional female detectives did not uniformly adopt masculine attire.⁷⁵ On the contrary, the female detective was subject to a degree of sexualisation which played on the anxieties of the body already identified in Chapter Two and created a sense of titillation, exacerbated by images designed to entice the reader visually, often using their dress as a means to do so. Unlike the trademark deerstalker and cape of the most well-known of Victorian detectives, Sherlock Holmes, female detectives are not renowned for any particular sartorial defining features but instead wore clothing befitting their gender and the period in which they were created. This conformity to sartorial standards suggests a tension between women's social expectations and their professional occupation that was heightened by the transgressive use of disguise and their competing motivations such as financial position, the desire to maintain respectability and the literariness of the texts themselves. Penny dreadfuls, for example, were associated with a lower-class readership and thus we may expect to see

⁷⁵ There were also a number of female criminals who adopted disguise and/or male clothing during this period, including the subject of "The Mysterious Countess" mentioned later in this chapter; however, this is beyond the scope of this chapter.

more transgressive social and sartorial behaviour in their portrayal of female detectives than in a female detective featured in a family periodical. Evaluating the depiction of the female detective through fiction, considering how she was portrayed and how she might have been perceived by the reader serves a number of critical functions. Firstly, the analysis offers new insight into the female detective figure across four decades, charting the changes in her appearance in the context of the shifting social attitudes around her. Secondly, the focus on one particular female role offers a concentrated view of issues that affected women more widely across the period, including attitudes towards women in the workplace, expectations of dress and appearance and women's struggles to achieve equality and make themselves heard within a patriarchal society. The female detective figure is emblematic of the complex and often contradictory discourses that surrounded women in the second half of the nineteenth century.

The First Female Detectives

There has been substantial scholarship in recent years that aims to identify the first female detective in literature, with contenders including Catherine Crowe's Susan Hopley from *The Adventures of Susan Hopley* (1841), Wilkie Collins's Anne Rodway from *The Diary of Anne Rodway* (1856), Edward Ellis's Ruth Trail from *Ruth the Betrayer: or the Female Spy* (1862) and even the wife of Mr Bucket in Charles Dickens's *Bleak House* (1852).⁷⁶ Each claim to originality is beset with anxieties about the status of amateur versus professional detection and the ultimate role of the female detective in the resolution of the mystery, as well as wider gender debates that centre on pivotal social concerns such as class, changes in marriage and divorce laws and women's role in the home and the workplace. Little, if any, scholarship considers female detectives in the light of

⁷⁶ See Luisa T. Cole's thesis "Lady Detectives and Marriage: Grant Allen's Model for Liberation."

expectations of appearance and sartorial codes. Moreover, many studies tend to emphasise the detective's deviance from traditional patterns of behaviour across all of the stories in which they featured, reading the character's adventures as one grand narrative whereby her final resting place (usually marriage) is key to understanding her characterisation. Indeed, this was perhaps part of the reader's expectation of the genre as Michelle Slung succinctly summarises, finishing off the story of the female detective "at the matrimonial altar, in order to reassure the Victorian public of her ultimate femaleness" (xx). In this chapter, consideration is given to characters explicitly described as detectives within the texts, be it amateur or professional, who featured in serialised and stand-alone short stories, beginning with the first female detectives to emerge in the Victorian period.⁷⁷ Scholars largely agree that Andrew Forrester's⁷⁸ *The Female Detective* and William Stephens Hayward's *The Revelations of a Lady Detective* constitute "the earliest female detectives, properly speaking" (Gavin, "Feminist Crime" 259), notwithstanding earlier traces of female crime and detection in Gothic and Sensation fiction. Published in May and November 1864 respectively,⁷⁹ the collections both feature first-person narrators undertaking a range of criminal cases given as individual stories and collected together as a casebook. The two books were published as yellowbacks, "small, flimsy and semi-disposable" books (Worsley 215-6) often sold at railway stations as easily digestible light reading that subsequently became associated with frivolous or racy themes. The stories are frequently critically compared given their similarities in publication date, title and

⁷⁷ These short stories may be serialised and printed in book form, such as *Revelations of a Lady Detective* (1864) but the stories stand alone as individual narratives.

⁷⁸ Thought to be the pseudonym of James Redding Ware (1832-1909).

⁷⁹ The date of Hayward's *Revelations of a Lady Detective* is given variously as 1861 or 1864, with some critics suggesting that the 1864 version may be a reprint of an 1861 edition fleetingly mentioned but now unknown or the result of a mix-up with a library stamp (Knight). Joseph Kestner cites some of these conflicting sources in *Sherlock's Sisters* (6). Similarly, at least one story from *The Female Detective* appeared in print earlier than 1864: J.R. Ware reprinted "A Child Found Dead" with remarks in 1865, apparently in response to the original article said to have appeared in "Grave and Gay" periodical, published by J. Berger in July 1862. However, there are no female detectives featured in this earlier article.

theme and their almost standalone presence as detective works in the 1860s, with the next wave of female detectives not reaching the literary market until the 1890s, as discussed later in this chapter.

The Female Detective introduces Mrs G—, later named as Mrs Gladden “the name [she] assume[s] most frequently while in [her] business” (Forrester 65) though evidently not her real name. Mrs G— is a professional detective who features in seven criminal cases described by a contemporary advertisement as “startling and tragic in their strong domestic interest and in their extraordinary ingenuity” (“Sctmubr ' [Summer] Fashions” 1).⁸⁰ This reference to “domestic interest” underplays the seriousness of the crimes that Mrs G— investigates, which include the selling and purchasing of a child in “Tenant for Life,” a grisly secret-society murder and dismemberment in “The Unraveled Mystery” and the investigation of an unexplained death that almost leads to Mrs G—’s own demise in “The Unknown Weapon.” Mrs G—’s experiences are no different to those of male police officers or detectives in crime fiction; she is not given any special treatment and is immersed in all of the same particulars of the crimes and investigations as her male counterparts might expect to be. Certainly, there is little acknowledgement of her sex in her actions and as Kathleen Klein points out, the character “seldom identifies herself as a woman” (23). Furthermore Mrs G—’s personal domestic circumstances are deliberately masked in the stories in an attempt to obscure her gender: her education and schooling are unknown, she assumes a pseudonym, alternates between Miss and Mrs and does not fully disclose her parental status, and thus by “refusing to clarify her identity as a woman, the author redirects attention to her position as a detective” (Klein 18). This is borne out by her appearance which is not mentioned at all within the stories, with the detective

⁸⁰ The advertisement follows on from a series of listings for summer fashions for ladies’ dress, with the publications section featuring such feminine titles as *Blushing: Its Cause and Cure* and *The Young Ladies Journal*, “an illustrated magazine of fashion, fiction, fact, fancy & useful needlework.” This suggests that the book was considered appropriate for a female readership.

declaring in the introduction that she “shall take great care to avoid mentioning [her]self as much as possible” (Forrester 2) for “it can matter little who [she is]” (1). Character and personality are suppressed in favour of plot, consistent with the formulae of the police-procedural style narrative from which the genre developed, in which focus is placed on fact and the uncovering of evidence, portrayed as if the notes of a real police-officer.⁸¹

In terms of dress, the only reference to Mrs G—’s gender is made in her recollection of a stupid but “idiotically [...] honest” (240) rural policeman whose “mind could not grasp the idea of a police officer in petticoats” (240). The reference to petticoats is made by Mrs G— rather than the policeman and suggests she perceives that society conducts a reductive reading of female police to a mere garment that is imbued with derogatory characteristics. In the 1860s petticoats were usually worn over crinoline frames and thus constitute an undergarment not designed to be seen, particularly by men. The use of the term as a colloquial reference to female police indicates an invasion of women’s private spaces, perhaps an ironic reflection of women’s interjection into traditionally male employment. There is also an implicit reference to the tactic of women investigating women, previously difficult to achieve because of the stigma associated with men investigating women’s private lives and domains. Whether Mrs G— actually wore petticoats is unclear. The cumbersome nature of crinolines and full petticoats made them an item of aesthetic fashion rather than practical wear, despite the tendency as the decade progressed for the fullness of the skirt to move towards the back, “giving greater ease of walking” (Buck 28), a phrase that demonstrates that simply getting around was no mean feat in the early 1860s. There is no sense elsewhere in the stories that Mrs G— is dressed

⁸¹ A noteworthy example is William Russell’s *Recollections of a Police-Officer* published in Chamber’s *Edinburgh Journal* in August 1849. The stories purport to be the notes of Thomas Waters and recollect the events of numerous criminal investigations around the UK. They were published in book form in the UK in 1856 as *Recollections of a Detective Police-Officer* and in the US in 1852 as *Recollections of a Policeman*, evidencing the strong transatlantic link in the development and marketing of the crime fiction genre (Knight 30).

in such traditional and perhaps cumbersome fashion, or that her work is impeded by her dress, though as Valerie Steele points out, “Victorian women’s fashion far from immobilized its wearers. Crinolines might have been “incommodious incumbrances,” but they were lighter than multiple petticoats” (59). In fact, petticoats even assist the investigative process in “The Unknown Weapon” as Martha, a female detective assisting Mrs G—, “swept the drapery away with her petticoats, and showed a *black corner*” [original emphasis] (294) of a box for which they have been looking. In this story at least, dress provides the female detective with an advantage that a male detective could not have had.

It may be assumed that since Mrs G— attracts no undue attention by her attire she must be dressed appropriately, if not fashionably, for the period, and thus carries out her duties despite the possible restrictions of her dress. Though she must don a range of disguises to infiltrate households, there is no description of these or any indication that she must possess numerous outfits in order to do so, probably owing to the general lack of narrative detail offered by the stories rather than a deliberate omission. However, Mrs G— gladly uses the sartorial expectations of womanhood as a useful masquerade for her profession, allowing her friends to “suppose [she is] a dressmaker” (2) and using the guise of “a milliner and dressmaker who had just come to the neighbourhood” (35) “presumably in order to penetrate the inner reaches of a suspect’s or witness’s boudoir” (Slung xvii). Mrs G—’s excuse is more than mere bluff, however. The success of the repeated ruse depends on her ability to deceive and consequently she “took lessons as an improver in both these trades [dressmaking and millinery]” (Forrester 42), suggesting that she continues to develop key feminine skills alongside the masculine skills of detection and policing. These feminine skills are just as important to W.S. Hayward’s detective, Mrs Paschal in *Revelations of a Lady Detective* (1864) who is required to dress and undress a suspect in “The Mysterious Countess.” These are evidently feminine skills in which she is well-

versed, though as the title of the book indicates, she is of a high social class. Hayward's stories make explicit the social status of their heroine from the outset – the detective is assuredly a lady even if she earns her living. This status places her in a particular social milieu for which, according to the renowned clothing historian C Willett Cunnington “correct conduct was the outward expression [that] was largely symbolised by her costume” (*English* 1). However, Hayward's detective would be unable to work successfully if her name and status were widely known and thus, she must dress beneath her title and outside of the sartorial conventions of her class, perhaps apt given that her conduct is outside of conventional expectations of female behaviour.

Again, Mrs Paschal is described as part of the “petticoated police” (18) and even “a Jonathan Wild⁸² in petticoats” (244) though her role is more official than that of Mrs G—as she serves under Colonel Warner, “head of the Detective Department of the Metropolitan Police” (17). She is also better equipped, possessing a wardrobe “as extensive and as full of disguises as that of a costumier's shop” (23). Dressing-up, or rather down, is a vital requirement of her occupation and she has no qualms about the role she assumes, taking on the position of “third lady's-maid” (25) in “The Mysterious Countess” because she “did not care what situation [she] took as long as [she] obtained a footing in the household” (23). However, Mrs Paschal makes explicit reference to the unsuitability of women's dress to her role in the short story of “The Mysterious Countess.” In hot pursuit of a female criminal in a hidden underground passageway, Mrs Paschal “took off the small crinoline [she] wore, for [she] considered that it would very much impede [her] movements” (33). Referring to the crinoline as an “obnoxious garment” (33) Mrs Paschal makes clear her feelings for the expectations of dress although

⁸² Jonathan Wild (1682-1725) was a notorious thief-taker who operated on both sides of the law, often claiming a reward for returning goods he had arranged to steal or running protection rackets. The reference here refers to Mrs Paschal's unofficial role and perhaps also her new and unorthodox methods of discovering perpetrators.

her wearing of the garment in the first place indicates the social burden to adhere to such expectations.⁸³ She also describes the need to “raise [her] dress, and step[...] on [her] toes” (30) to quietly pursue her suspect, drawing attention to the impracticalities of floor-length dresses, though evidently, she has taken the wise precaution of choosing a dress made of a non-rustling fabric.⁸⁴ Dagni Bredesen argues that Mrs Paschal’s public removal of her crinolines evinces dedication to her job but is also a conscious titillation factor on the part of the author, the gesture seeming to be “as much a nod to her (predominantly male) readership as a matter of exigency” (27). Colonel Warner in “The Secret Band” subtly reiterates this feminine stimulus when he emphasises his confidence in Mrs Paschal’s detective skills “because men are thrown off their guard when they see a petticoat” (63). His comment implies that men change their behaviour around women, becoming more trusting or disclosing information they may not tell other men but also implies that women are sexually distracting and may use their sexual allure to their advantage.

Mrs Paschal is plainly stated to be a widow, a status that provides the “socially sanctioned freedom of movement [... to] facilitate her detective work” (Bredesen 21) but that also came with certain expectations of dress. Though the reader is not informed precisely how long Mrs Paschal has been widowed, her well-established reputation in the detective force, a role that she only took on from economic necessity after the loss of her husband, indicates some significant time has passed. Nevertheless, as Willett Cunnington highlights, “a special uniform was reserved for the widow, of black crepe, worn for a year and a day, when she “slighted her mourning” and went into black, which it was good taste

⁸³ Hayward refers to crinoline in “The Nun, the Will, and the Abbess” in the description of the innocent victim Evelyn who was “dressed with charming simplicity. A plain white muslin dress of fine texture encircled her body. Her skirts were not puffed out and made voluminous by the modern invention of crinoline” (131). The inference here is again that crinoline deforms the natural shape.

⁸⁴ Rustling dresses provide vital clues to the perpetrators in other crime fictions including *The Leavenworth Case* (1878).

to wear for the rest of her days” (*Fashion* 19). There is no evidence within the story to suggest that Mrs Paschal herself conforms to this standard, indeed there is no reference to the colour of her dress at all. Ironically, she does criticise the Countess Vervaine’s disregard of mourning conventions, considering the casting off of her widow’s weeds in less than half of the allotted time as symbolic of her criminality, as Bredesen succinctly summarises: “Her refusal to conform to mourning etiquette [...] is all the proof that Mrs Paschal needs to convince her of the countess’s criminality” (25). Mrs Paschal has no qualms about using dress as a signifier of morality despite her own non-conformity.

Mrs Paschal’s usual day dress is not mentioned but she is seen wearing certain outfits while working undercover, including “conventual dress” (158) - the habit of a novice nun - in “The Nun, the Will, and the Abbess” and in “Incognita” she is given a “brown moiré”⁸⁵ and “quilted bonnet” (268) along with some gloves to accompany her employer (who is also the suspect) on a fashionable walk in the park. In this latter story Mrs Paschal is advised not to “mind patching [her] dresses up” since her new employer can give her up-to-the-minute clothes “ever so much better, too, than [she] has been in the habit of wearing” (251). However, it is unclear if this is a comment based on the visual judgements of the few times she has met Mrs Paschal, or a general assumption based on their relative social positions. Though Mrs Paschal is not depicted in male dress like Alice Trevelyan, she is clearly willing and able to don disguise and her dress is key to her success as a detective.

Like Forrester, Hayward declines to describe the female detective’s aesthetic appearance in any detail, though there are more references to dress in *Revelations* than in *The Female Detective*, primarily in the dress of suspects or victims. Partly, this leniency of sartorial description must be attributed to the novelty of their occupation and the lack of guidelines

⁸⁵ “A type of fabric (originally mohair, now usually silk) that has been subjected to heat and pressure rollers after weaving to give it a rippled appearance” OED.

or expectations that must be followed by the writers when describing their characters. Partly, perhaps this is owing to the gender of the authors, whose knowledge of female dress would likely have been inferior to that of women writers by the very nature of experience. Though the gender of both Mrs Paschal and Mrs G—is intermittently acknowledged, there is a tendency, in terms of their attention to dress, to treat them “more as neuter than female: they are honorary men” (Klein 29). The detectives are “devoted exclusively to their work, unconcerned with the political or social implications of their professions” (Klein 17) and tend to avoid bringing overt attention to gender. They refer to their sex “only when conventional attitudes would suggest women’s traditional skills might be useful” (Klein 17) such as the skills of hairdressing and millinery that allow them to gain employment within target properties. However, the books share one common source in the construction of the female detective’s style in the use of distinctive covers

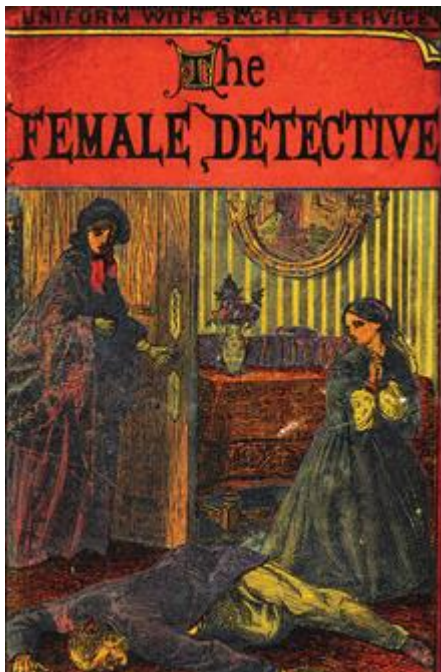


Figure 10: *The Female Detective*. Via goodreads.com, 18 Apr 2018.

showing full-length colour illustrations of the detectives.

The cover of the 1864 Ward & Lock edition⁸⁶ of *The Female Detective* [Figure 10] depicts a woman, presumably the female detective, in a full burgundy outdoor dress, dark bonnet and pale gloves entering a crime scene.⁸⁷ The dress appears to be of plain material (possibly silk given the reflection of light) with no obvious detailing or pattern and is covered

⁸⁶ Artist unknown. There is no evidence to suggest the author had any involvement with the use of this image for his work; nevertheless, the readership would have interpreted this image as part of their imaginative construction of the female detective character type.

⁸⁷ I am indebted to Carolyn Oulton for her observation that this scene reverses Augustus Leopold Egg’s 1858 painting *Past and Present No1*, in which a fallen woman lies at her husband’s feet after he has discovered her infidelity. In Egg’s picture, the door stands open to symbolise the woman’s impending expulsion from the home and the breakdown in conventional domestic order whilst here the door is open to show the female detective’s entrance to the home in an effort to restore order.

by a large cloak or mantle that conceals her feet as well as any sense of her figure. The dress is modest and unremarkable, despite the gaze of the almost hidden male, possibly a policeman, behind the detective (far left). Drawing attention to dress or appearance threatens to detract from the work of the female detective, whose occupation is typically depicted as all-consuming and beyond the usual frivolities of traditional feminine occupations.⁸⁸ Furthermore, an excess of detail would provide a depth of character that threatens to reveal the innermost character of the detective, disarming her omniscient status as a spy. Familiar details of dress could also provide a levelling field with which a reader may potentially make a connection, generating an understanding with a character type that exists at this point in time only in fiction and from whom the reader is supposed to feel dissociated in the interests of novelty. From a marketing perspective, the female detective needs to retain an air of mystery to preserve her novelty; she must be believable but not ordinary. Excluding Mrs G— from the sartorial sphere and the world of fashion imbues her with aesthetic modesty, a backdrop against which her boastful and sometimes egotistical claims to crime fighting stand assured. It is these features of her personality that create the character, indeed, “that she speaks with the voice of frankness and authority is *all* that characterizes her” (Slung xvii) [emphasis added]. Mrs G— does not need fashion to make her stand out from the crowd since her occupation is novel enough and she does not feel the need to fit in with others except where it suits the detection process to do so.

⁸⁸ Excesses of dress tend to be linked to a shallowness of character or weakness of plot, such as those in Mrs Henry Wood’s *Johnny Ludlow* stories discussed in Chapter Five.

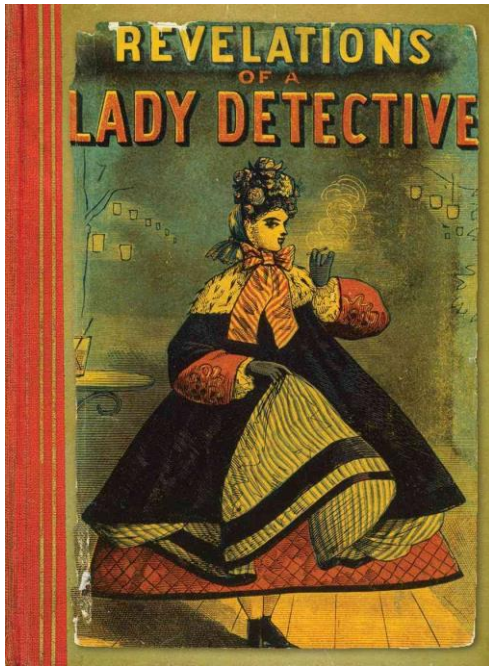


Figure 11: *Revelations of a Lady Detective*. Image via British Library Collection items online, 18 Apr 2018.

More striking is the 1864 cover (artist unknown) of the George Vickers edition of *Revelations of a Lady Detective* [Figure 11] featuring the “rather racy” (Worsley 216) prominent image of a lone woman, covering approximately four fifths of the page. Her central position under the title leaves the reader in no doubt that this is intended to be the image of a lady detective, whilst her raised dress exposing her calves suggests she has something more to reveal than the details of her cases.⁸⁹ Alluringly holding up the hem of her skirt in one gloved hand and clutching a cigarette in the other, whilst her drink languishes on the table next to her, the image presented is that of a “fast woman ready to go the pace,” (“The Disguised Female Detective” 2) the feminine counterpart of Alice Trevelyan’s fast young man seen at the opening of this chapter. According to Willett Cunnington, the term “fast” became popular in the 1860s: “a fast young woman has an inordinate love of gaiety, a bold determined manner, a total absence of respect toward her elders, [...] a flippant style of conversation and a glaring and sometimes immodest dress” (*Fashion* 174). Her dress is certainly glaring: starting with her elaborate headwear, which features roses and a small arrangement of exotic fruit arranged atop a lace-lined short-fronted bonnet tied with ribbons and plumes at the back. About her neck she wears a large red and white striped bow, framing her heavily painted face. A royal blue fur-trimmed coat with buttoned red cuffs and contrasting striped lining sits above a red quilted

⁸⁹ Lucy Worsley draws similarities with the image and that of ‘Haymarket Princesses’, prostitutes who worked around the theatre district of Haymarket, and suggests that the revealed ankle in the picture is an age-old sign of the prostitute. Dagni Bredeson springs to Mrs Paschal’s defence, stating that “because none of the cases require Mrs Paschal to go undercover as a prostitute, the jacket design bears little correlation to the book’s contents” (28).

petticoat beneath which can clearly be seen the bare flesh of her ankles, her feet clad in pointed Balmoral ankle boots. The complete outfit is one of high fashion, her triangular silhouette and wide-bell sleeves mark the fashion of the early 1860s, a style that changed abruptly in 1863 with the introduction of the flat-fronted dress. She epitomises an age which saw “the walking dress shortened and revealed not only feet but ankles; and not only ankles but petticoat [...] and the red flannel petticoat of the period [that] doubtless expressed the feelings of the wearer” (*Fashion* 196).

All in all, the image suggests an up-to-date young woman pushing the boundaries of her sex in terms of her behaviour and her style, drinking and smoking whilst unchaperoned, sporting elaborate and eye-catching attire and revealing bare flesh, all of which were far beyond respectable behaviour for any class in the 1860s. However, as Worsley emphasises, “it could be that the author never selected or even saw the cover art, and, on the basis that ‘sex sells’, it shows a lady rather more racy than the detective herself featured in its pages” (216). The image is fashioned as a titillating means of marketing the text, particularly for the male readership, and bears no relation to the story itself. Nevertheless, for a readership who could never have seen a female detective in the flesh, images like this must surely have contributed towards the overall aesthetic of the character type in popular opinion, especially given the cheap purchase price and wide availability of the books.



Figure 12: *Revelations of a Lady Detective*. Image via Lapham's Quarterly.org, 12 Dec 2018.

By contrast, the 1884 C.H. Clarke edition [Figure 12] features a more mature and conservatively dressed lady wearing a much later style of costume that typified early 1880s fashion. The dress is fitted in a princess style “sleekly fitting over the upper hips” (Yarwood 237) with the front of the bodice left open to show the underlayer and sleeves “simple and fitting” (Yarwood 239). Her hair is “swept up to a fairly high coil of plaits or a bun” (Yarwood 245) with a fashionably small bonnet “perched far back on the head” (245).

She is, however, without gloves and is not

wearing the black mourning expected of a widow. She also appears to have been caught alone with a man, though she seems reassuringly horrified by the encounter. The image is noticeably less controversial, the colours are less bright, no flesh is visible, and the lady is going about her daily business before being accosted rather than inviting inappropriate attention. Her body language points to her vulnerability; backed against the wall the danger of her position both literally and figuratively is clear. The age of the female also fits more closely with Mrs Paschal as described in the book - “Incognita” in particular makes reference to “Old Paschal” (274). However, the position of her body in the centre of the page, drawing the eye to her curvaceous figure and her open posture, which holds wide her cape to reveal her dress underneath, makes implicit reference to the revelations of the title. This cover is clearly aimed at a different reading market than that of the yellowback and bears a closer relation to the text in the actions pictured (Mrs Paschal is caught spying by a male suspect in “The Secret Band” and is apprehended by the suspect

and sentenced to death). Moreover, it presents the image of a female detective who seems ordinary, indistinguishable from others, sartorially and socially acceptable, even respectable, signifying not only the widespread popularity of the book some twenty years after its first publication but a more general acceptance of female detectives.⁹⁰ It also signifies a change in the way that the female detective is marketed to the reading audience, no longer simply a morally dubious novelty but a more respectable form of literature with a wider reading audience. This is borne out by the advertisements featured on and in the books. The back cover of the 1864 edition features a list of around twenty other available yellowbacks including *Deserted Wife*, a title described as “Uniform with ‘Lady Detective.’” The 1884 edition, entitled *Revelations of a Lady Detective* on the cover but *The Experiences of a Lady Detective* on the title page, features advertisements for “Keating’s Powder” and “Nurse Edda’s Wonderful Baby Soother” on the back cover plus adverts inside for “Dr. Bell’s Patent Voltaic Belts.” These later domestic products suggest a female readership rather than the predominantly male commuter readership served by the yellowback form.

As the earliest incarnations of the female detective, Mrs G— and Mrs Paschal make use of generic conventions of disguise and role-playing that constitute unconventional behaviour in women. However, both use the dress of lower-class women rather than men, even though they are frequently in situations in which traditional women’s dress may prove obstructive. There are limited descriptions of their appearances within the stories, but the details revealed to the reader affirm the femininity of the detectives, such as the references to petticoats and their skills in dressmaking and hairdressing. Though the

⁹⁰ Great changes to women’s rights in the intervening period between the two editions may also have encouraged increased acceptance of the female detective. The Married Women’s Property Acts (1870 and 1882), the opening of the first women’s college, Girton College at Cambridge (1873), The Matrimonial Causes Acts (1878 and 1884) and even the 1877 trial of Annie Besant and Charles Bradlaugh for publishing Charles Knowlton’s *The Fruits of Philosophy* (because it discussed birth control) all contributed to the emerging independence of women in daily culture.

reader may not yet be sure of their authenticity as police officers, the female detectives are assuredly portrayed as women. However, with no real-life entities to which to compare them, fantasy elements are furthered and clearly visible in the Vickers image, as Ellen F Higgins notes in her review of the British Library 2013 reprint of *Revelations of a Lady Detective*:

A female detective—even a female crime writer—was a scandalous occupation [...]. In the tradition of sensational literature, Vickers took full advantage of this anomaly as seen in the original cover design: a woman is pictured as smoking, also scandalous behavior. The twenty-first-century publisher [including the British Library reprint] follows suit (104).

This comment overlooks the 1884 book cover that does not present such a scandalous image, particularly significant given that the peak of female detective appearances in literature in the 1890s had not yet occurred. Even at this early stage in the development of the female detective character, the contradictions between text and paratexts are evident. Tensions between respectable (or acceptable) femininity and the professional activity required in the course of the female detective's duties are palpable, positively shown by key feminine skills such as dressmaking and negatively depicted in the incommensurable crinolines of Mrs Paschal. The use of female disguises (rather than male) mitigates their transgressive behaviour to some degree since gender boundaries are maintained but the conservative personal descriptions of the detectives promotes the female detective as a figure of fantasy. For the female reader, Mrs Paschal's throwing off her crinolines and the independent agency of the detectives to earn a living and pursue adventure promotes fantasies of empowerment and signals women's capabilities beyond the domestic sphere. For the male reader, more used to seeing subservient women in

their ‘rightful’ place in the domestic sphere, the female detectives suggested a new type of active woman with yet unknown capabilities, who simultaneously appeared as both threatening and titillating.

Female Detectives of the 1870s and 80s: Before the Boom

Despite Klein’s assertion that Forrester and Haywood’s stories are “anomalies [that] apparently led to neither imitators or followers” (29) the 1880s reprint of *Revelations* shows there was still enough appeal in the story to justify the publishing costs, even if this market was incomparable to the later clamour of 1890s detective fever. Certainly, as Ian Ousby points out, the 1870s and 1880s were “a period of minor talent and minor works” (128) with no significant contributions to either male or female detectives in fiction. But even in these minor works, a few female detectives did exist. One such figure is “*The Lady Detective*,” an unattributed short story published in London by General Publishing Company of 280 Strand. This edition [Figure 13] is dated in the British Library catalogue to 1888 though there are no clues to the date within the text. Unusually

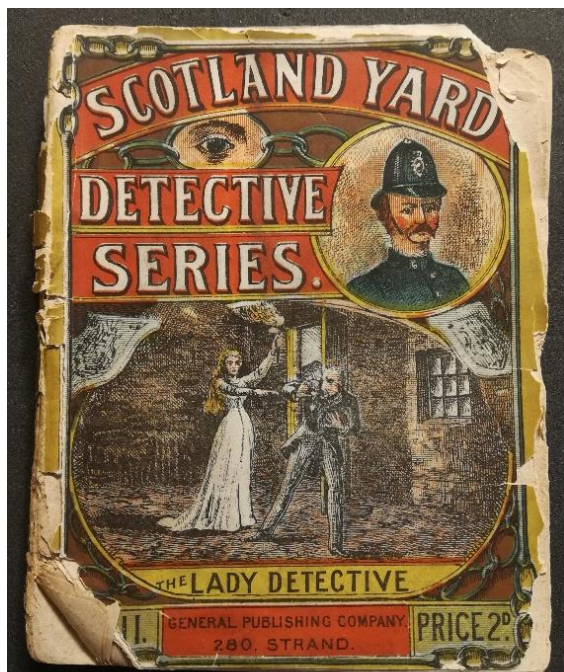


Figure 13: *The Lady Detective*. Photographed in situ at the British Library, 12 Jan 2018.

the copy contains no advertisements (except for other books by the publisher) or illustrations within its cheap and flimsy pages. The tiny volume, which stands about four and a half inches tall and is clearly made to be placed in the pocket, constitutes volume eleven of a twelve-volume mini-series entitled *Scotland Yard Detective Series*, all of which are characterised by the same format but with

a different central illustration on the cover of each.⁹¹ The story is almost identical to a dime shocker of the same name attributed to US author Harlan P. Halsey under the pseudonym *Old Sleuth* in 1880 and features the antics of female detective Kate Goelet. However, there are some subtle differences in this edition that indicate that the story has been reworked (somewhat clumsily) for a UK market, proving an ongoing demand for female detective fiction on both sides of the Atlantic. The *Scotland Yard* edition places the scene of action in London rather than the New York setting described by Klein in her analysis of the US edition⁹² and the title of the text on the inside (though not on the cover) is *The Beautiful Lady Detective*, placing immediate focus on the attractiveness of the title character. The female detective is introduced under the pseudonym Rebecca Brown and in disguise, “dressed in the most grotesque manner and looking exactly like some old-style farmer’s wife” (5). Rebecca/Kate carries a note that explains her role: “the bearer, under whatever guise, is the man you wanted to have. If anybody can manage the matter, this is the one” (8). The note states the obvious conclusion to which the hirer of the detective, and presumably the reader, has jumped – that men are assumed to be the principle agents of amateur detection. Kate is evidently a master of disguise and accustomed to her work, though like many other female detective stories, her superiors explicitly invite her in to the case because of her gender. In cases where a woman is thought to be involved, either as suspect or providing the motive for a man’s criminality, female detectives were employed to crack the case on the assumption that their gender allows easier access to information (through women’s gossip circles, closer relationships with servants and such like) and supposing that women would confide their problems in other women, allowing the female detective greater powers of persuasion.

⁹¹ The eleven other volumes in series order are: *The English Detective*, *The Scottish Detective*, *The Irish Detective*, *The French Detective*, *The Indian Detective*, *The London Detective*, *The Naval Detective*, *The Army Detective*, *The Murder Detective*, *The Dynamite Detective* and *The Boy Detective*.

⁹² See Chapter 2 “Woman Detectives in the American Dime Novel: 1880-1904” in Kathleen Klein’s *The Woman Detective: Gender & Genre* for a full description of the plot.

The story is somewhat drawn-out, perhaps owing to its length,⁹³ and is more akin to the earlier cheap penny dreadful style of fiction in its high drama than the more sophisticated plots of sensation fiction. The female detective is neither presented as conservative nor as a feasible character as either detective or as a woman; the melodrama of her exploits renders her unrealistic and her miraculous escapes from death are particularly unlikely. She therefore does not need to use dress to blend in since she already stands out as extraordinary, so long as her disguises are sufficient to allow her access to the suspects. Some of Kate's disguises are reminiscent of the earlier female detective stories already discussed, such as that of a French lady's maid skilled in the art of hairdressing, though she also has a transgressive penchant for dressing as a man, a disguise which she often adopts "for convenience and better security's sake" (102). She is depicted as "a slenderly-formed man" (86) on horseback, a Frenchman and as Slim Mac: "a slender man, with a pale face, [who is] poorly dressed" (107). Her skills of disguise are integral to her survival rather than her success; indeed "Kate Goelet, who always went prepared to make such wonderful transformations in her appearance" (85) is almost constantly in peril of her life, successfully foiling successive plots within the same story to stab, poison and strangle her. However, in terms of dress, there is a notable moment that points to a new style of crime fiction, more akin to the later gadgets of spies in Edwardian and twentieth century crime fiction. When cornered by an assailant "she touched a spring that caused two slender stilettos, fully six inches in length, to shoot out from under her sleeve at her armpits" (25), a mode of defence that reverses the incommensurable crinolines of the 1860s female detective, transforming dress into an active weapon to assist the detective. Her sartorial ingenuity is, however, weakened by her eventual fall into the typical romance plot in which her lover, initially a suspect in the case, declares, "I have

⁹³ I include it here because the story was published in one small volume evidently intended to be read in one sitting, though at 128 pages it is notably longer than many other of the stories definitively described as short stories. See the introduction for more on the difficulties of the definition of form.

never been deceived for one moment. A lover's eyes can not [sic] be so easily blinded. I have known you all along, in all your disguises as my beautiful, brave, patient, heroic, and loving Kate" (127), a claim not substantiated by his actions in the preceding pages. As Klein states, "Kate Goelet's primary identification in the plot [is] as a woman in love rather than a woman detective" (39) and the conventional happy ending falls into a pattern identified by Lucy Sussex amongst others in which "the heroine-sleuth [...] revert[s] to passive femininity, and a happy marriage with the man she has saved" (36). The transgressive woman is firmly contained within the boundaries of feminine respectability.



Figure 14: *The Lady Detective*. Detail from *Scotland Yard Detective Series*. Photographed in situ at the British Library, 12 Jan 2018.

There is another similarity to the earlier texts in the choice of the cover image that, like Vickers's *Revelations of a Lady Detective*, bears no relation to the female detective within the pages. The image depicts a woman dressed in white who appears only briefly in the text attempting to kill the same person as the female detective, in an almost comic

scene in which they collide while hiding behind the bed-curtains of their victim.⁹⁴ The image [Figure 14] depicts a fashionably dressed woman holding aloft a blazing torch and some other implement, perhaps a gun, which she points in the direction of the well-dressed male figure. Though decidedly not the detective that features within the pages, the image is certainly appealing, showing the curvaceous figure and long blonde free-flowing hair of an attractive woman, a sexualised image evoking angelic and demonic

⁹⁴ The scene invokes Wilkie Collins's best-selling sensation novel *The Woman in White* (1860) and echoes Bertha Mason's nighttime exploits in *Jane Eyre* (1847).

properties simultaneously and indeed the woman is depicted as mad within the text. The overall sense of the image is one of alluring and titillating female dominance over men, affirming the association of the female detective with social, if not sartorial, transgression. Like Vickers's cover, this sexualised and eye-catching image is evidently a marketing ploy but undoubtedly contributes towards the developing public image of the female detective and once again, portrays the female detective as an object of male fantasy.

Though there are other female detectives in this period, they feature only in the pages of novels, such as Valeria Woodville in Wilkie Collins's *The Law and the Lady* (1875) and Miriam Lea in Leonard Merrick's *Mr Bazalgette's Agent* (1888) both of whom function as accidental amateur detectives rather than the professional detectives presented by Forrester and Haywood. This ebb in female detectives at this point is perhaps owing to the lack of printed vehicles to market such stories as periodicals had yet to become established as the popular medium for short stories.⁹⁵ The move away from portraying women as professional detectives suggests ongoing anxieties about 'proper' occupations for women but also reflects changing roles in real life policing as the Detective Department gave way to the newly formed Criminal Investigation Department, staffed entirely by men, in 1878. By the 1890s however, the female detective emphatically returns in the short story form, flooding the marketplace with a host of aesthetic and sartorial depictions that begin to cement the view of the female detective as a credible character in the minds of contemporary readers.

In the 1870s and 80s the female detective thus exists in something of a paradoxical state largely demarcated by the literary genre in which she featured and the associated readership. The penny dreadful/dime novel fiction evidently saw a ready market both in

⁹⁵ I am indebted to Christopher Pittard for this observation.

the UK and the US, but the exaggerated and unrealistic depiction of the female detective arguably encouraged the titillation of male readers, ably assisted by a format that could be readily hidden in one's pocket. On the other hand, Kate Goelet's stiletto-wielding dress again promotes feminine empowerment and suggests that women can be sartorially appropriate, if not fashionable, and still defend their honour, rather literally. Yet the decrease in the number of professional detectives across all genres and the return to passive femininity that go on to mark the first female detectives in the early 1890s complicates a clear chronological progression in the development of the character either culturally or sartorially. Again, there are tensions here between text and paratext and the balance between sartorial conformity and believability/depth of character remains precarious.

Mrs George Corbett's Newspaper Detectives of the 1890s

One of the earliest female detectives of the 1890s featured not in the pages of the newly popular periodicals,⁹⁶ but within the literary columns of local newspapers. From October 31 1891 Mrs George Corbett (Elizabeth Burgoyne Corbett) began a series of ten short stories entitled "Behind the Veil or, Revelations of a Lady Detective" that ran weekly in the *Leicester Chronicle and the Leicestershire Mercury* and the *Liverpool Mercury*.⁹⁷ Despite the title, the stories offer a weak portrayal of the female detective figure who does not even appear in many of the stories and about whom the reader is told nothing. The gender of the detective, named as Dora White in the second tale, is largely incidental and is only relevant in two of the stories: one in which she must pose as a dressmaker and one in which she accidentally discovers a missing person while purchasing a bonnet. The

⁹⁶ Such as *The Strand* founded in January 1891.

⁹⁷ The planned ninth story "Who Was the Heir" which should have featured in the *Leicester Chronicle* on Dec 26 1891 does not appear to have been published.

description of this event in story seven, “A Point of Honour,” seems almost saccharinely shallow in its presentation of women, as Dora proclaims: “I like pretty bonnets but do not care to pay extravagantly for them [...]. Looking in a shop window in Tottenham Court-road, my eyes were charmed by the daintiest bonnet I had ever seen” (12 Dec 1891). Through this description Corbett’s detective is not sexualised but infantilised and the reader is presented with a woman whose chief detection skill lies in the art of shopping. It is hardly surprising then that Dora White escapes the notice of scholars of female detectives;⁹⁸ indeed, there is little of note to constitute any depth of character whatsoever and though she is resolutely female, she is arguably not a detective.

Mrs Corbett’s second attempt at depicting a female detective shows a more convincing character in detective Dora Bell though she too lacks a comprehensive description to make her seem professionally viable. The *Experiences of a Lady Detective* began in April 1892 in a literary miscellany column in *The Leeds Mercury* depicting Dora as an agent for Messrs. White and Bell, a London-based private inquiry office who employ a number of female detectives. Dora Bell is much more hands on than the earlier Dora, going undercover in the first story, “The Gracely Jewels,” to rent a room in a slum tenement so that she can keep the undesirable occupants under surveillance. She alters her appearance accordingly; her dress

was an old, rusty black thing, of ancient style and poor material. [She] wore an apology for a shawl over [her] shoulders. This garment had once been a bright tartan, that by dint of repeated washings in soda and other deleterious compounds we had succeeded in making it look as shabby as we desired. [Her] hair was carefully braided close to [her]

⁹⁸ Leslie S.Klinger makes brief mention of Mrs George Corbett’s short story collections featuring Dora White and Dora Bell, primarily to point to the confused nomenclature of the series. The stories themselves do not attract merit. See *In the Shadow of Agatha Christie: Classic Crime Fiction by Forgotten Female Writers 1850-1917* Pegasus Books, 2018.

head, and covered with a black wig with a straight fringe cut low down on the forehead. [She] also darkened [her] eyebrows and [her] complexion, and wore a tawdry hat of the orthodox “duchess” shape, supplemented by shabby elastic-sided boots” (6).

The transformation renders Dora “a genuine denizen of Whitechapel” (6) and emphasis is placed on dowdiness as well as dirtiness, suggesting by default that Dora’s usual mode of dress is much more stylish. Indeed “scrupulously plain attire” and “absence of “fringe” (6) are key to her acceptance as a respectable maid in a later story, “Maimed for Life,” signifying the fringe as a marker of disreputability. Dora’s physical manipulation of the shawl to fade and add wear to it indicates her desire to act the part but also the utilisation of feminine skills and an aversion to mixing with the lower classes as she takes pains to produce something that she could easily have bought from a second-hand clothes dealer. The reference to ‘we’ implies the assistance of her mother mentioned earlier in the story, the pair undertaking physical work to pretend to be working class even though they have maids to do their own washing. They are merely acting in a feminine domestic drama in which poverty can be worn and then quickly discarded, highlighting their own social distance from the subjects of the cases.

However, by the third story of the series, Dora is becoming more convincing as a professional detective with passion for her work, asserting in “Catching a Burglar” that “the line of demarcation between what you call a ‘real’ detective and myself is invisible to me. It is my vocation” (6). Like Mrs G—, Dora takes lessons in feminine skills (in this case, hairdressing) to make her disguises plausible but also takes delight in feminine occupations, expressing her delight in “Kleptomaniac and Thief” at “indulging in all the glory of being privileged to do unlimited shopping in an establishment whose resources and splendours seem to be limitless” (6). Unlike the earlier detectives, Bell is resolutely

not ‘an honorary man’ and is not involved in the physical arrests of suspects but works effectively as a spy, an occupation for which she is paid and that she uses to support her mother and younger sister, though they are well-off and have seemingly little need for her income. Dora is thus presented as a conservative character who keeps a respectable distance from the unsavoury characters over whom she keeps watch and who uses feminine behaviours such as shopping and washing to assist her endeavours.

Corbett’s characters offer another dimension to the construction of the female detective in that they draw away from the swashbuckling adventure-seeking bravery of Mrs G and Mrs Paschal, portraying detectives with no interest in the pursuit of justice and indeed little interest in the detection process at all. Unlike Kate Goelet, the two Doras are not titillating characters in unlikely circumstances but engage with traditional constructs of femininity to which the detective function is a minor and insignificant detail. The newspaper form precludes the use of illustrations, contributing to the flat and insipid presentation of the female detective offered in Corbett’s stories that were demonstrably written for financial gain rather than any literary ambition.⁹⁹ Corbett’s use of the lady detective trope seems primarily calculated as a means of attracting readers to promote her own financial gain, spurred on by the popularity of the Sherlock Holmes stories that first appeared in 1887 and “at a time when the flourishing of periodicals created a surge in publication of short-stories as a genre and detective short fiction in particular” (Gavin, *New Woman* xiii).

1890s Periodical Detectives: *Loveday Brooke*

⁹⁹ Elizabeth Burgoyne Corbett made multiple applications to the Royal Literary Fund to support her family (including three children) as a result of her husband’s unemployment and lists several pages of novels and articles she has produced. See MS Archives of the Royal Literary Fund 2259. World Microfilms. From *Nineteenth Century Collections Online*

If Corbett's characters were arguably more female than detective, then the next prominent female detective to emerge was undoubtedly more ladylike than ever before. Slung suggests that early detectives were "possessed of a collective sensibility that could indeed best be described as "ladylike" (xix) reflected by the repetition of 'Lady Detective' in the stories' titles and leading to such characters being "overendowed with feminine charms to compensate for their mannish profession" (Slung xix). A logical extension of this deduction is that female detectives would also dress in an overtly feminine way, yet this is categorically not the case in Catherine Louise Pirkis's *The Experiences of Loveday Brooke, Lady Detective*, first published in 1893. Pirkis's stories saw a return to the professional female detective as prominent central character, who, as Elizabeth Carolyn Miller points out "is paid for what she does, and though she might find pleasure in the thrill of her occupation, the primary motivation behind her detective work is to be paid" (47). Featuring in seven stories¹⁰⁰ in *The Ludgate Monthly* from February to July 1893 with sixty-seven accompanying illustrations by Bernard Higham (Gavin) Loveday Brooke is described "in a series of negations" (Gavin, *New Woman* 8):

She was not tall, she was not short; she was not dark, she was not fair; she was neither handsome nor ugly. Her features were altogether nondescript; [...] Her dress was invariably black, and was almost Quaker-like in its neat primness (Gavin, *New Woman* 8).

These negations are interpreted by critics including Klein, Skaris and Burke¹⁰¹ as an asset to the necessary invisibility required in her profession, assisted by her gender, her status as a spinster and her age, since at a little over thirty, "she is past the age at which Victorian

¹⁰⁰ The final story, Missing was published in *The Ludgate Illustrated*. All seven stories were bound together as *The Experiences of Loveday Brooke: Lady Detective* published in March 1894.

¹⁰¹ Eva Burke suggests that "the omniscient narrator of the Loveday Brooke tales draws the attention of the reader to her apparent ordinariness and the ease with which she appropriates and experiments with certain gendered roles in her investigative endeavours" (49). This insight offers a stark contrast to the decidedly manly appearances of Dupin and Holmes given by Poe and Conan Doyle.

women were ‘seen’” (Gavin, *New Woman* xx). Therie Hendrey-Seabrook further argues in “The Accomplished Forms of Human Life”: The Art and Aesthetics of the Female Detective” that this absence of character allows the reader to imagine themselves in to the role of the female detective, who by the early 1890s had become “a living, moving reality,¹⁰² though she [had] not yet gone into fiction as a stock character” (“Police in Petticoats” 56). All these critics, both contemporary and modern, tend to see her nondescript demureness as a feminine humility that allows her to be foregrounded as both a detective and a woman without transgressing social codes. Yet the deliberate absence of detail and the analogy to Quaker-like primness suggests a deliberate attempt on a sartorial level to steer away from the extravagant bonnets beloved by Dora White or even the cumbersome crinolines of Mrs Paschal, towards an unfashionable and unfeminine portrayal of the female detective. This shift is problematic on several levels. Accepting Adrienne Gavin’s assertion that Loveday Brooke “is one of the most inherently successful of fictional New Women” (*New Woman* ix) her dress is notably *not* radical or modern and she is *not* an advocate of the Rational Dress Society, which was formed in 1881 and came to be associated with bloomer-adorned bicycling New Women. Though not all New Women plumped for rational dress, Loveday deliberately fades into the background and continues to carry out her work in traditional forms of dress that must have been a hindrance to her work¹⁰³ to some degree. Indeed, the early 1890s saw a decrease of practicality in women’s dress in the form of “a lengthening and enlargement of the skirt with more trimmings, to impart a more feminine appearance” (Willett Cunnington, *English* 379). Willett Cunnington links this stylistic change directly to the rise of female

¹⁰² Female detectives were readily employed by private inquiry offices as amateur detectives though they did not work in an official capacity for the police until the 1920s.

¹⁰³ In “The Murder at Troyte’s Hill” for example, Loveday is seen grappling a long a pathway in the darkness, “here and there the roots of the old laurels, struggling out of the ground, threatened to trip her up” (Gavin *New Woman* 41). Difficult enough for a man in trousers to traverse, this terrain must have been more difficult with the addition of an ankle-length dress.

employment and the New Woman since “it is the custom that whenever woman has made some notable advance into man’s domain she will reassure him by adopting, for a spell, an ultra-feminine style of dress” (*English* 369). Loveday’s style of dress indicates a desexualisation, reinforced by the reference to Quakers, since as Suzanne Keen points out, “Plain and simple clothing seems, to both Victorian and contemporary eyes, part of the package of reticence, reserve, and repression associated with the evangelical wing of nineteenth-century dissenting sects” (211). Further, she proposes that wearing modest clothing advocates the restraint of desire and control over the female body and conversely “that Quakerish clothing expresses both a promise of spirited sexuality and an admonition about the class-crossing potential of the respectable female contained within it” (211). According to Keen, Loveday’s nondescript appearance signals bodily control and respectability that suggest marriageability and reforming tendencies. This spirit is evident in Loveday from the command she takes over the cases she investigates. As a detective, Loveday does enact social reform, perhaps empowered by the social exclusivity, that is her distance from any defined social group, that her non-descript dress provides.

The lack of sartorial and aesthetic details provided about Loveday cannot be attributed to a lack of knowledge or interest on the part of the author but is clearly an intentional part of the construction of the female detective character. This is evidenced by the publication of another story by C. L. Pirkis alongside the Loveday Brooke stories in *The Ludgate Monthly* in which the title character is frequently described in terms of her dress. Though not a crime story, “Rhea: A Woman of the World,” published in November 1893, introduces another potential New Woman and in this story the title character refuses a marriage proposal on the premise that love is merely a product of social custom. Rhea makes her society debut alongside her stylish aunt, Lady Glencross, who clearly enjoys the luxuries of dress, described in detail by Pirkis:

“Lady Glencross’s brocade made a pretty spot of colour against a background of greenery, as she stood for a few minutes watching the dancers. She was a tall, fair, pale woman, with keen, deep-seated eyes, and a pleasant “society-smile.” She had taken especial pains with her dress that night. It was of a delicate shade of salmon-pink, looped back with brown orchids, over a petticoat richly embroidered in silver. Her hair, drawn low on her forehead, was crowned with a diamond tiara, and the Glencross diamonds and emeralds sparkled on her white neck and arms” (74).



Figure 15: "Violet Eyes and White Tulle." Illustration by Scott Rankin from "Rhea: A Woman of the World." *The Ludgate Illustrated Magazine*, Vol. 6, London (Nov 1893): 73. ProQuest, 13 Mar 2018.

These sensual descriptions of dress are accompanied by striking illustrations by Scott Rankin [Figure 15] that emphasise feminine allure through dress such as the “violet eyes and white tulle” (3) of the debutante, pictured here. The combination of these images and the textual description leaves the reader in no doubt that the stories are written by a woman, appealing to female readers with the descriptions of dress and male

readers with alluring images. Pirkis certainly did have a knowledge and appreciation of dress and thus the lack of detail given to Loveday’s appearance suggests a deliberate avoidance of the subject that seems to concur with the Victorian viewpoint that “women detectives wear no distinct uniform, and make their calls without attracting any

disagreeable attention” (“Police in Petticoats” 56). This aura of invisibility, though reassuring in the sense that the female detectives’ intentions are socially honorable, also has the potential to be construed as threatening, producing an army of spies with the power to discover secrets and undermine power hierarchies, particularly patriarchal systems that thrive on the passivity and obedience of women.

Loveday dons chiefly female disguises, as Gavin notes, posing as an “amanuensis, ‘lady house decorator’, servant ‘of the upper class,’ or teacher or nursery governess seeking a position” (*New Woman* xviii) but these typically do not involve radical changes of dress. Indeed in “The Redhill Sisterhood” Loveday effects a minimal concealment using her existing dress, declaring that “my veil is something of a disguise, and I will put on another cloak before he has a chance of seeing me again” (55). The potential excitement in the use of transgressive disguises is unacknowledged by Loveday, who seems primarily motivated by solving the case as a whole than the means which she might employ to do so. She simply has no need to use more radical disguises; “she gets on with her job, outshining male detectives [...] excelling in a gendered profession” (Gavin, *New Woman* xvi) largely by posing as an ordinary respectable female. Her ordinariness removes suspicion and allows her to spy within mixed-gender settings, situations that possess an air of danger without compromising respectability.¹⁰⁴ Loveday does however travel alone and walks through the streets alone at midnight (Gavin, *New Woman* xviii) so is not entirely without danger though there is never a sense that she is vulnerable, perhaps a reflection of her decisive actions and the close contact she keeps with her employers, in combination with her desexualised image. Loveday is sartorially conventional and does not attract male attention within the text; indeed, she is notably one of the few female

¹⁰⁴ By contrast, Kate Goelet spies on an all-male secret society and is captured and tied to a chair, giving rise to morally licentious suggestiveness in which her likely murder by the jeering group of men is probably a best-case scenario!

detectives who is not involved within a romance plot. She is a professional first and foremost and must be read by her actions rather than by her dress. As Carla Kungl explains, her ordinariness is key to her success: “when seeking to establish professional authority for their female detectives [authors]...relied primarily upon socially accepted traits as a means of incorporating women into male-dominated spheres,” (81). This familiarity is affirmed by the illustrations that accompany the series in which Loveday looks attractive and well-dressed but lacks the coquettish eye-contact seen in the Rankin illustration [Figure 15] or any eccentricity that makes her stand out from the other characters featured in the drawings.



A HABIT OF DROPPING HER EYELIDS.

*Figure 16: "A Habit of Dropping Her Eyelids." Illustration by Bernard Higham from "The Experiences of Loveday Brooke, Lady Detective." *The Ludgate Monthly*, 4. London (1892): 402. ProQuest. Web. 1 Apr. 2018.*

Higham's illustrations [Figure 16] are strongly shaded, lack detail, and often feature Loveday in an active position or with other characters. Without exception she is fully covered by dress in the current style, such as the enlarged sleeves and slim waist shown here alongside the "Driving, Racing or Sports Costume" (Willett Cunnington, *Fashion* 415) hat that suggests physical activity and a distancing from the domestic sphere. Her clothes provide functional but modest attire sufficiently far from the excessively large sleeves and ultra-narrow waists at the height of fashion in the early 1890s and yet not eccentrically old-fashioned. Loveday is undoubtedly a fully-functional detective who displays enough

femininity to warrant her title as lady detective without recourse to the shallow fripperies seen in Corbett's detectives or the petticoat-discarding thrill-seeking "honorary men" of the 1860s. The absence of sartorial detail suggests an effort to disengage with traditionally flippant interpretations of women, particularly significant within the periodical press that typically featured large illustrations, advertisements for dress and celebrity gossip features that focussed on well-dressed wealthy subjects alongside stories of female detectives.

There is no doubt that the lady detective provided a captivating figure to periodical readers in the 1890s, evidenced by the sheer number of female detectives who appeared in numerous periodicals in this period (considered later in this chapter) as well as journalistic articles investigating the 'truth' behind this novel profession. In 1894 an article entitled "A Lady Detective's Experiences" was printed in *The Sketch* purportedly interviewing a professional detective. The unnamed journalist expresses surprise at the first sight of the detective: "I could scarcely believe that the quietly dressed, essentially refined-looking, blonde young woman who gracefully entered the room where I had been anxiously awaiting her could be the "officer" in question" (704). Evidently, the journalist has a specific idea of the female detective in mind that contradicts the reality. The article emphasises women's abilities to use their skills and charms and crucially, the importance of class, as the interviewee affirms that "I am by birth a lady, and if I were not I should have twice the difficulty I have ever experienced in achieving success professionally" (704). She perceives her education and knowledge but also her relationships with servants and the working class as vital to her role, as she, like the fictional female detectives discussed here, spends six weeks in the disguise of a maid during one assignment. This real-life lady detective differs from Loveday Brooke in one significant degree, however, in that she embraces the use of disguise. She confesses that it

is a part of my vocation I particularly delight in – various disguises [...] I have brought it to a science, and take as much pride in it as a ‘character artist’ on the stage. It is not all a question of wigs, grease-paint, or putting cotton in one’s cheeks (704).

To convince the skeptical journalist, the detective smooths her hair, changes her facial expression and puts on glasses with a result that the journalist could “scarcely believe [her face] to be the same” (704). Whereas Loveday Brooke works quietly and diligently in her professional capacity to earn her living, her real-life counterpart exults in the transformations her career offers, viewing her disguises as masquerade integral to her role. By rendering a complete transformation, the detective can remove her title as lady and operate within an entirely altered class and environment that brings with it a new set of conventions and expectations. Her statement that “it is not all a question of wigs, grease-

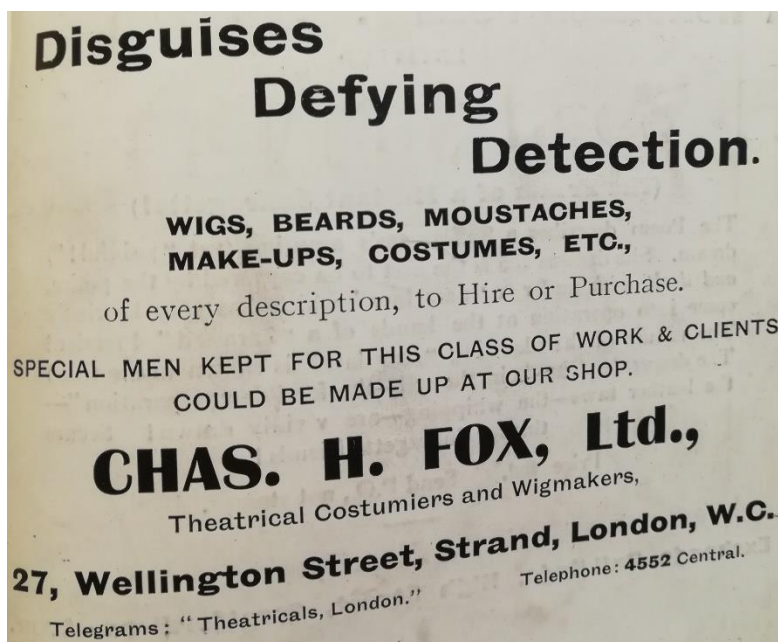


Figure 17: *Disguises Defying Detection*. Advertisement from end pages of *Incognita* by William Stephen Hayward, London: C.H Clarke (1884). Photographed in situ at the British Library, 12 Jan 2018.

paint, or putting cotton in one’s cheeks” suggests popular opinion supports this notion that detectives were associated with extensive aesthetic disguise, demonstrated by this advertisement¹⁰⁵ [Figure 17] in the 1884 edition of William Stephen Hayward’s *Incognita*.

¹⁰⁵ Significantly, this advertisement appeared beneath an advert for ‘London’s leading woman in detective work Kate Easton’ who specialised in divorce cases.

Loveday Brooke may have portrayed a sartorially and socially respectable detective, but she did not provide the exciting transgression that the public was starting to expect from detectives of both sexes. The incoming wave of New Woman detectives, however, would reinvent the female detective character once again, utilising not the novelty of her profession but the novelty of her womanhood and the corresponding circumstances surrounding her employment.

New Women Female Detectives of the Late 1890s

As perhaps the first female detective to be serialised in periodical fiction Loveday Brooke paved the way for a host of critically recognised female detectives that appeared in the late 1890s including George R Sims's Dorcas Dene, Grant Allen's Lois Cayley and Hilda Wade, Fergus Hume's Hagar Stanley, Matthias McDonnell Bodkin's Dora Myrl, Clarence Rook's Nora Van Snoop, Beatrice Heron-Maxwell's Mollie Delamere and Meade and Eustace's Florence Cusack. Yet many of these detectives were not professional detectives at all but accidental detectives employed in other vocations: Hagar Stanley runs a pawn shop, Hilda Wade works as a nurse, Lois Cayley is lady's maid and Mollie Delamere is, unusually, a pearl-broker. The aptly named Nora Van Snoop turns detective for one story only in order to bring to justice her fiance's murderer and despite the cunning manner in which she entraps the perpetrator, promptly dissolves into hysterics and resigns her post once the offender is captured.¹⁰⁶ Notwithstanding Miss Van Snoop's apparent feminine weakness, these women are largely independent and self-assured, marking a return to the thrill-seeking brave women created by Haywood and Forrester. However, typically there is a male figure reassuringly nearby, sometimes acting

¹⁰⁶ Nora Van Snoop is described as "not exactly pretty, for the symmetry of her features was discounted by a certain hardness in the set of the mouth. But her hair, so dark as to be almost black, and her eyes of greyish blue set her beyond comparison with the commonplace" ("The Stir Outside the Café Royal" 224). Her unusual and eye-catching features suggests she may have had limited success as an undercover detective.

as narrator such as Mr Saxon in the ‘Dorcas Dene’ stories and Doctor Lonsdale in the ‘Florence Cusack’ stories.

By the 1890s, female detectives had all but lost their novelty value in fiction and the stories in which they featured were barely distinguishable from other periodical adventure narratives in terms of style and content. This is reflected in the titles of many of the stories, which no longer focus on the detective but now emphasise the content of the narrative, with such titles as “The Missing Prince,” “Mrs Reid’s Terror,” “Was it a Forgery?” and even “The Episode of the Wife Who Did Her Duty.” Perhaps unsurprisingly there is an aesthetic shift towards a female detective who more closely resembles the New Woman figure of the fin de siècle. This shift is particularly noticeable within the images on the covers of the published full editions wherein there is a general move away from the sexualised images of the female detective seen earlier in the period. The cover images [Figure 18], all published by the same publisher, Grant Richards, tend to depict modish but not overtly fashionable women in a range of active positions who, unlike their predecessors, do not look directly out at their reader but peer preoccupied towards a distant point, expressive of the cerebral effort befitting their position:



Figure 18: Cover images of Grant Allen’s 1890s female detectives. Cover of *Hilda Wade*, London: Grant Richards, 1900 via lwcurrey.com booksellers. Cover of *Miss Cayley’s Adventures* [centre], London: Grant Richards, 1899 via Project Gutenberg. Cover of *Miss Cayley’s Adventures* [right], London: Grant Richards, 1899 via blog “the Riverside” of University College Cork, Ireland. Sourced 10 Jan 2018.

This change of design is not necessarily exclusive to female detectives but nevertheless shows a shift in the way that they are depicted to the reading public, with an increased focus on their actions rather than their appearance or their transgressive behaviour. Some of these later detectives, such as Hagar Stanley in *Hagar of the Pawn Shop*, did not feature on the covers at all, suggesting that the female detective genre was sufficiently defined and popular by this point to negate the need to attract readers by an eye-catching or provocative cover. That is not to say that the female detective had become culturally acceptable or socially desirable. A review of *Dora Myrl, The Lady Detective* in the Irish publication *Freeman's Journal* in 1900 stated that even by the turn of the century “to the average reader a Lady Detective is not by any means, presumably, an agreeable person” though the reviewer begrudgingly concedes that the detective in question “can be not merely a most useful entity, but quite an agreeable and companionable acquaintance” (“Literature” 2).

This loss of novelty value and the associated decrease in visibility of the female detective coincided with a period in which the New Woman, a figure that Ann Heilmann refers to as “a vibrant metaphor of transition” (1), increased visibility of women more generally. The female detective’s rejection of the New Woman label marks an interesting cultural symbolism which suggests that the New Woman debate was kept separate from the representation of the female detective in literature. Indeed, all of the female detectives of the 1890s refuse the appellation, with Dorcas Dene’s mother Mrs Lester contemptuously dismissing the modern women she reads about in the pages of *Queen*, “wondering out loud what on earth young women were coming to with their tailor-mades and their bicycle costumes” (G. Sims 23). Her contempt illustrates that she does not view her own daughter as a modern young woman and that Dorcas’s wardrobe is devoid of the New Woman abominations which Mrs Lester disparages. Therie Hendrey-Seabrook lists further examples in ““The Accomplished Forms of Human Life”: The Art and the Aesthetics of

the Female Detective” and observes that any alliance with the New Woman figure is “quite categorically denied, often in loud and clear protest” (203), arguing that the fin de siècle flux of female detectives were simply female versions of Sherlock Holmes, taking advantage of the detective fiction literary boom rather than socio-political gender debates. This is difficult to prove conclusively because it is impossible to define the intended or actual readership of female detective fiction. There is no evidence to suggest that the female detective embraced the New Woman label at a time when such themes were highly prominent and popular in literature. This is perhaps because female detectives were already a new type of woman in fiction and the assumption of the New Woman term and its associated attributes may well have undermined the independence of the female

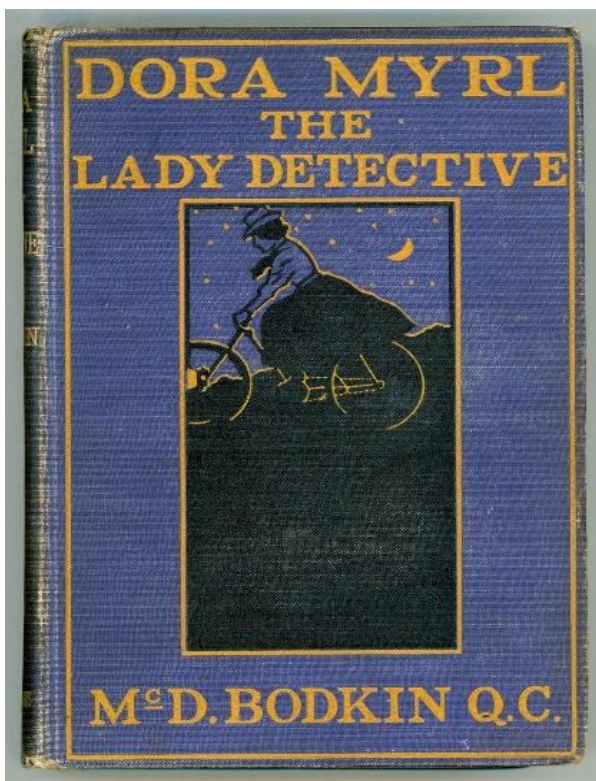


Figure 19: Cover of *Dora Myrl, The Lady Detective*. London: Chatto and Windus, 1900. Via Christie's.com. Sourced 10 Jan 2018.

detectives. This other new woman type evident in the female detective from the 1860s is a positive concept of the independent, professional, educated and intuitive New Woman, as opposed to the negative stereotyped caricature of the coarse, smoking, bicycling New Woman of the 1890s. Of course there are hints of the stereotype in Vickers's smoking Lady Detective of the 1860s and the cover image of Dora Myrl [Figure 19] thus there was nothing to be gained by the writer or reader in portraying her as new in this sense. In effect, the female

detective existed as an unacknowledged forerunner of the New Woman before such heated debates about the figure arose.

In terms of dress, there is a move in the cover illustrations towards functional dress that permits the detectives' athletic tendencies or demonstrates their professional employment status to some degree. Of the five images shown here, three show the female detective with a stick or umbrella as if she is about to embark on a journey, overtly illustrated on the cover of the *Dora Myrl* edition through the ultimate New Woman symbol, the bicycle. As the covers show, aesthetically these detectives are all ladylike, avoiding showing their petticoats and remaining fully covered from head to toe. The changes in women's fashions as the century drew to a close brought about "one of the era's deepest fears: that as women's clothes became less straitlaced, so might their morals" (M. Sims xxii). However, the images shown here suggest this was not the case. Dora is *not* wearing a short bicycling dress on the cover¹⁰⁷ but maintains her modesty in a full length skirt and though both detectives wear blouse and skirt rather than a dress, typical of the modern style, they are plain and largely unobtrusive and do not draw the eye unnecessarily towards the body. The stories are marketed within an established genre and now seek to emphasise the actions of the heroines rather than presenting them as figures of novelty or fantasy.

Dorcas is dressed in the style of 1895 [Figure 20], her blouse with front box-pleat "worn inside the skirt, with a belt [...]. The size of the sleeve is 'monstrous', requiring 2 ½ yards of material; the huge puff is often double [...and is] either close-fitting from the elbow or as a wide bishop sleeve to the wrist" (Willett Cunnington, *English* 395). Finished with

¹⁰⁷ In an interesting reversal of the earlier Vicker's image, Dora wears short bicycling dress in the stories but is dressed more modestly in the cover image.

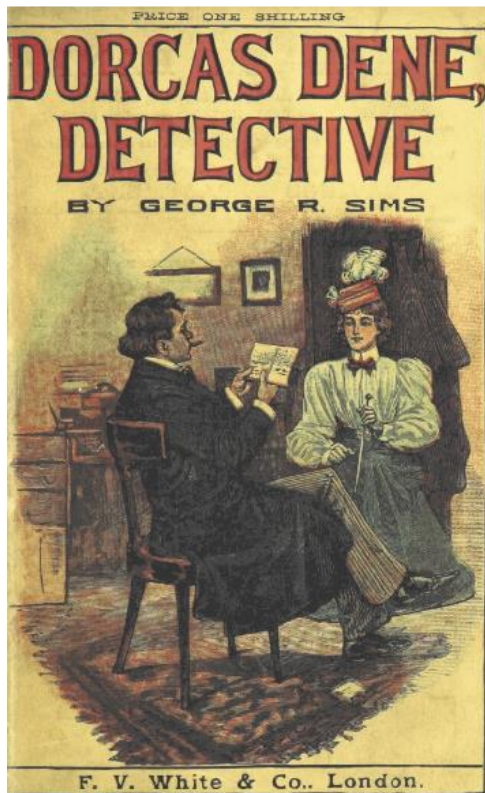


Figure 20: Cover of *Dorcas Dene, Detective. Her Adventures*. London: F.V. White & Co, 1897. Via Christie's.com. Sourced 10 Jan 2018.

eye-catching red bow and hat with large feather plume that emphasises height (tallness was a desirable feature for women in the 1890s) Dorcas looks every inch the modern woman. Yet within the stories almost nothing is mentioned of Dorcas's usual attire or appearance beyond a reference to her possessing "a blonde [complexion] with soft brown wavy hair" (44). Instead, the reader observes Dorcas in a wide range of disguises which almost seem to be justified by her former career as an actress, an employment which is highlighted to the reader from the outset of the stories. Dorcas Dene featured in eleven short-stories in the first series

of George R. Sims's collection entitled *Dorcas Dene, Detective* published in 1897 and a further nine short stories in the second series published in 1898. The stories are narrated by Mr Saxon, a dramatist who has previously employed Dorcas as an actress before her marriage, and subsequently bumps into her again eight years later, by which time she has become a successful detective. Dorcas's career, like those of Mrs G— and Mrs Paschal before her, is explained as the virtue of necessity: following an illness Dorcas's husband is rendered blind and is unable to work as a painter, forcing her to find a means to pay their rent. Intending to return to the stage, she is persuaded by a retired superintendent of the police to become a lady detective, a career that utilises the same skills as acting but offers greater financial remuneration. This contextual detail is vital for the development of the female detective character as Michael Sims makes clear in his introduction to *The Penguin Book of Victorian Women in Crime*:

One of the most important questions to be settled by each author is how the character came to find herself working in such an unladylike profession. Dorcas Dene begins as an actress and moves into investigation only after her husband loses his sight and thus his ability to support her [...]. Therefore outraged readers could see women's transgressions beyond Victorian norms as nobly heroic efforts to preserve the family (xiii).

As an actress, Dorcas occupies a liminal position on the edge of feminine respectability and thus her progression from actress to detective is perhaps less of a leap than from the aristocratic ladies seen previously as female detectives. Nevertheless Dorcas demonstrates awareness of the controversy of her profession when first approached to become a detective, gasping “‘You—you want me to be a lady detective—to watch people?’ [...]. ‘Oh, I couldn’t!’” (G. Sims 6). She is persuaded that her actions will in fact restore social order rather than disrupt it and that the process is merely “a business transaction in which an angel could engage without soiling its wings” (6). From this point on Dorcas engages wholeheartedly with her new employment and particularly enjoys masquerading in a number of disguises including a “neat hospital nurse’s costume” (28), assuming the “outward appearance of an American tourist” (44), and dressing as a parlour-maid, a German landlady, an “old gipsy woman” (106) and a flower-seller. All of her disguises are decidedly feminine, even where they are lower class, reinforced by the reiteration that her usual mien is “young and handsome” (1) and to which the reader always sees Dorcas return.¹⁰⁸ Indeed her admiring chronicler Mr Saxon pays homage to the “brave and yet womanly woman” (22) and lays emphasis on his complete surprise

¹⁰⁸ This is not always explicit with other female detectives. Though the reader may see a detective donning her disguise there is little mention of the disguise being removed, perhaps as this is not relevant to the plot but also because it would be improper to dwell on the female detective undressing.

when he discovers the stranger in the story to be none other than Dorcas in disguise. Despite his confidence as to the convincing depth of her costumes, Saxon is reluctant to be seen with Dorcas when she is undercover, through a sense of distaste rather than to protect her cover. In “The Helsham Mystery” Dorcas is disguised as “a dark-skinned old gipsy woman” (10) in order to join the cast in a play. Meeting her after her investigation Saxon “glanced hesitatingly at her costume” (11), a disapproving reaction that Dorcas has foreseen and guarded against: “the cloak I brought with me will cover all this, and I have a thick veil in my pocket” (11). In “The Handkerchief Sachet” Dorcas has bronzed her face and donned a white sun-bonnet to pose as a poor flower-seller. When she meets Saxon later in the evening, he is relieved to discover she is “not, [he is] glad to say, attired as a hawker of flowers”(53). His reaction shows an unwillingness to be seen associating with the lower classes and serves as a reminder that Dorcas herself is above such lowly positions despite the financial necessity of her employment. Saxon is even more perturbed in “The Mysterious Millionaire” when Dorcas divulges a plan to burgle a house wearing goloshes over her boots to minimise sound and wearing a bulls-eye lamp around her waist. The non-plussed narrator exclaims “You look like a female policeman [...] you’re not going through the streets with that on!” (73).

Given her husband’s blindness, Saxon must act in some degree to safeguard Dorcas’s visual and aesthetic respectability to align with the claims to femininity repeated throughout the stories. For instance, Dorcas declines to take on a divorce case in “The Co-Respondent” on the grounds that she “didn’t think they were a woman’s work” (Second Series 48) and makes very clear at the start of her career that she will resign her post if she “found that it involved any sacrifice of [her] womanly instincts” (6). As Kathleen Klein notes, Dorcas’s “womanly apprehensiveness” (63) is incompatible with her self-proclaimed status as a brilliant female detective who solves many of her cases virtually single-handedly. Though she consults with her husband, mother and even the

dog in an effort to find the solutions to the mysteries she investigates, Dorcas almost always has a strategy of her own which proves successful. Her relationship with her husband is based on traditional patriarchal values despite the apparent role-reversal in terms of employment; Dorcas “must work hard to persuade her husband of his masculine superiority despite his blindness” with the result that “her self-effacing behaviour [...] is taken for granted by the narrator and author as though a natural and reasonable attitude of married women” (Klein 64). It is hardly surprising, then, that Dorcas embraces disguising her natural self with such gusto, though her transgressions are always brief and fully reversed. As a female detective Dorcas exhibits the professional bravery and acumen of her 1860s predecessors when wearing disguise and yet she is always rendered socially acceptable by returning to her respectable appearance as soon as possible. Dorcas is first and foremost a female detective even though she is not presented under the lady detective title and her femaleness is affirmed by her status as a married woman.

If Dorcas Dene straddles the border between independent New Woman and traditional Victorian housewife, appearing sartorially more the latter than the former, Matthias McDonnell Bodkin’s turn of the century lady detective, Dora Myrl embodies the spirit of change which defines the fin de siècle. Featuring in twelve stories published in *Pearson’s Weekly* from 27 May to 26 August 1899 and subsequently as one bound volume¹⁰⁹ in 1900, Dora is presented from the outset definitively as a woman; she is a “dainty little lady” (1) displaying a “winsome figure [...] all alive and alert” (1). This description implies visual approval radiating with desire, presenting Dora in a much more sexualised light than the other female detectives of this period. Yet Dora is also very much the New Woman stereotype, summed up by Carolyn Christenson Nelson in *A New Woman Reader* as a woman who was “educated at Girton College, Cambridge, rode a bicycle, insisted on

¹⁰⁹ The stories were not published in the same order in the volume as the periodical.

rational dress, and smoked in public: in short, she rejected the traditional role for women and demanded emancipation” (ix). Dora exhibits many of these characteristics but the descriptions of her dress suggests a closer alignment to traditional femininity than the New Woman label might evoke and indeed the attention to detail offered in her dress is surprising. On page two of the stories Dora is described as wearing “an audacious toque, with a brace of scarlet feathers stuck in it” which is “perched amongst thick coiled hair” (Bodkin 2). This image is not only evocative of that of Dorcas Dene on the cover in Figure 20 but serves as a clear indication that Dora is sartorially bold and confident in her choice of dress and more importantly that she chooses to express herself (or rather, be portrayed by the author) in sartorial terms. This early focus on dress does not define her in the frivolous femininity category seen elsewhere in this thesis, however, as her dress is carefully described in modern terms. The toque style of hat became popular in the 1890s because bonnets were incompatible with cycling (Willett Cunnington, *English* 414). The fashion emphasised creating height by using elaborate embellishments “to compel man to look up to woman with increased respect, or at least attention” (Willett Cunnington, *English* 414). Dora certainly draws the attention of the narrator who describes how “the short skirt of her tailor-made dress twitched by the light wind [and] showed slim ankles and neat feet cased in tan cycling shoes” (2). Again, this description educes an ultra-modern woman but the sexualisation of her image is palpable, drawing attention to her ankles in a manner reminiscent of Vickers’s cover of *The Lady Detective* more than thirty years earlier. Though her behaviour may be accused of mannishness, it is clear that the male narrator finds much in her appearance to render her wholly womanly.

Dora trains as a physician but finds the vocation too slow, taking up various jobs as a “telegraph girl, a telephone girl, [and] a lady journalist” (6) which emphasise her conviction to communicate and be heard publicly within the sanctity of female employments. Dora becomes a private detective after solving a mystery while working as

a companion, proving that the baby her employer thought was swapped in infancy was in fact her own child. Energised by the process and thrilled at her success, Dora sets herself up as a private detective and even has business cards created with her title as Lady Detective, establishing both her class and her femininity in her chosen profession. However, the decision to exclude this from the main title of the book suggests that this appellation is less important than at the birth of female detective stories in the 1860s and that the concept of the female detective as ‘ladylike’ was more complex than the designation suggests. Dora is much more free to embrace many of the earlier traits of the female detectives partly because of increased acceptance of the female detective and the changing roles of women more widely, particularly in employment. Nevertheless Dora is undoubtedly still described in ladylike terms with regards to her dress, appearing in “How He Cut His Stick” in “a tailor-made skirt” (53) at a period when mass-produced off-the-peg clothing became widely available. She is described as “that nice little girl in pink” (83) by a naïve suitor in “The Last Shall be the First” and is complimented on her “bright face and trim figure” (95). Reiterating these earlier depictions, “Hide and Seek” describes Dora as

a dainty little lady [...] dressed in a neat tailor-made costume of some dark tartan softened by a nestling lace frill instead of a hard man’s collar at the throat. She wore a sailor hat with a gay ribbon and feather (210).

The contrast between male and female clothing here emphasises the softness of her throat and accentuates feminine sartorial creativity with the embellishments moderating the formality of her costume. This image is resolutely not the masculine manner of Alice Trevelyan but a deliberately fashionable statement of a ladylike enjoyment of dress.

Dora, like Dorcas Dene, is eager to don disguises, dressing as Madame Celestine the palm-reader in "The Palmist" and she even appears on several occasions dressed as a man, as "a nice looking lazy young lad [...] in the District Messenger Brigade Uniform" (131-132) in "A Railway Race" and as a Frenchman described as a "cute little chap" (165) in "The Pauper's Legacy." Even in these masculine guises Dora retains a degree of attractiveness which reflects her usual feminine beauty and points to the transient nature of the disguise, which like that of Dorcas Dene, is always removed by the end of the story. But it is not the masculine behaviours of Dora which stand out beyond other female detectives in this period but the details given in her descriptions within upper-class society, which forms the majority of her clientele's social circles. Like the lavish descriptions given to the dress of society-girl Rhea in C.L. Pirakis's stories, Dora is sensuously clothed in sartorial description by Bodkin, perhaps surprising given the gender of the author. In "Was it a Forgery" the narrator comments that

her pale blue tea gown that matched her complexion to a wish was the triumph of a Paris dressmaker. There was a vague glimpse of a neat foot and ankle at the skirts, her glossy hair was coiled in the latest fashion, and her bright eyes sparkled with gay humour. Sir Gregory was to be pardoned if in this bright young beauty he forgot the lady detective (170-171).

Dora is described in terms of sexual desire, attention given once again to her feet and ankles, but she is also fashionably and femininely modern, far removed from the mannish New Woman stereotype which epitomised the period. The implication is that Sir Gregory is so astounded by her beauty and implicitly, her sexual allure, that he forgets the association with her unladylike profession. The reference to the glimpse of the neat foot asserts the male gaze and traditional hierarchies of male sexual dominance over women

and yet Dora's profession, in which she is required to closely watch others, including men, unbalances this dichotomy. Whether the narrator implies that she is beautiful *despite* her unladylike profession or that her beauty is sufficient to make him drop his guard, leaving him open to her professional talents of discovery is unclear. However, as Joseph Kestner points out "Bodkin is not afraid to have his female detective challenge diabolical male sexual predators" (180) and Dora's aesthetic beguiling of Sir Gregory belies her professional talents.

Bodkin uses Dora's dress to her advantage beyond this quasi honeytrap convention however, utilising the physical properties of dress in at least two of the stories. "The Clue" expands on the literal meaning of clew as ball of thread¹¹⁰ to uncover the hiding place of a blackmailer:

For weapon of offence and defence she carried nothing but half a dozen yards or so of the finest silk thread, in colour as near as might be to the prevailing tint of the rich carpet, coiled in a loose clue under her glove (109).

Dora covertly drops the thread in the suspect's jacket pocket so that he trails it behind him as he goes to check the safety of a letter he is hiding, utilising a range of motifs that have already appeared in popular crime fiction including Poe's "The Purloined Letter" replicating the obvious place of concealment and Conan Doyle's *A Scandal in Bohemia*, inducing the criminal to lead the detective to the missing article. As Kestner highlights, the suspect, Sir Charles Phillimore, is another male predator with a reputation for seducing women and thus Dora's initial approach to Sir Charles is perhaps surprising. She dresses herself with special care "not the art that conceals art, but rather desiring that the special care should be manifest to the experienced eye of Sir Charles" (109). Dora wants to be

¹¹⁰ See Chapter Five for further explanation and examples of the thread trope.

noticed; she wants to attract the gaze of Sir Charles but crucially not in disguise and not under any suspicion of fakery. She initially believes that she can utilise her feminine beauty to persuade Sir Charles to hand over the letter and effectually transforms herself into alluring bait to do so. Her plan is, however, unsuccessful since Sir Charles is aware of her talents, mocking her profession as “an unraveller of mysteries” (107), which proves ironically to be the means which she uses to end his control over her and the victim.

The most ingenious use of female dress to solve a mystery occurs in “Weighed and Found Wanting” in which Dora uses the beads on her dress to expose a jewellers’ fraud. The jeweller is using steel beads and magnets in a somewhat baffling attempt to convince a diamond-seller that his gem weighs less than anticipated. Dora suspects the fraud and uses the jet beads on her dress to prove that the scales have been tampered with. As Kestner declares “Dora Myrl is able to solve the case by a using a woman’s dress accessory, which only she could do” (179) but this statement fails to expose fully the contradictions in social and sartorial expectations that this case engenders. Moreover, as already demonstrated, women’s dress assists many of the female detectives and thus Dora is by no means unique in this regard.

Dora’s appearance in the jewellers’ shop is comprehensively described:

she stood there with her pretty crook-handled parasol resting on the mahogany counter [...]. Dora Myrl looked a gay society butterfly – nothing more. She was daintily dressed in a green water silk dress with an elaborate trimming of shiny beads of steel and jet, and a wonderful toque, with bright red feather in it, perched amid her glossy wavy hair (232).

The description repeats details seen elsewhere, drawing attention again to her dainty figure, the toque with red feather which almost becomes her trademark headgear and her

sensually evocative glossy hair. Her designation as a gay society butterfly is matched by her fashionable dress, with soft, clinging materials in vogue from the mid 1890s to the end of the Victorian period. Yet the phrase “nothing more” carries with it connotations of shallowness that suggest that being part of fashionable society negates the individual’s ability to perform a useful function and thus her dress removes any suspicion of her true career. Her subsequent ability to solve the mystery with an impressive grasp of science is not simply utilising a woman’s dress as only Dora could do (as a female detective) but validates her role as a logical thinker who detects the fraud that men could not see. Her use of dress is simply a tool for exposure, it does not solve the case as Kestner suggests.

As Kathleen Klein astutely summarises, “over and again [Dora] is described as “dainty”; combined with “lady” or “ladylike” it is the most frequent description of her and her activities. Detailed descriptions of lovely pastel tea gowns and dresses are used to overemphasize her femininity” (60) undermining her professional competence. Her uneasy status between New Woman and feminine heroine is further complicated when she is married off in a later Edwardian novel, though she remains unmarried at the end of the Victorian periodical serialisation. Carla Kungl affirms that it was relatively unusual for a male writer to leave his heroine unmarried, though “women writers who employed the spinster in their detective fiction used the stereotype to challenge and complicate the gender constructs of their society” (83). Unmarried professional women like Loveday Brooke and Dora Myrl provided a source of anxiety “because they harboured the possibility of unsanctioned social and sexual activity” (Kungl 86) a threat that seems especially pertinent in the more provocative descriptions of Dora Myrl than in the non-descript appearance of Loveday Brooke. Though Dorcas Dene is of course married, there is a source of anxiety because her husband cannot physically see his wife stepping outside of the domestic sphere into professional employment as a detective. Yet Dorcas succeeds as both a woman, in that she is married, and as a detective in her professional success

though her lack of children suggests that she does not wholly uphold Victorian expectations of womanhood. Though social expectations of the female detective were undoubtedly more liberal by the last decade of the century, there were still no real-life female detectives and thus any attempt to redefine the rules of femininity alongside professional authority must necessarily be considered primarily as literary invention. Ultimately, the image of the female detective was not what a female detective was, since she did not really exist, but an image of what the writer, the illustrator, the publisher and the readers would like her to be and this naturally fluctuated with the desires and fashions of the era and the readership.

The female detectives of the mid and late 1890s demonstrate contradictory characteristics and looks that reflect the diversity of the character type more widely and the innovative nature of crime fiction, which constantly seeks to reinvent itself to retain the element of surprise. There are some common features in these detectives such as the emphasis on performative skills, either in their use of disguise or in their willingness to pose as someone else but these are not necessarily particular to the 1890s (Mrs G— and Mrs Paschal are obvious earlier examples). Each of these later detectives maintains a degree of respectability, justifying their roles through economic necessity, working with the full support of their husbands and families and pursuing justice with a sense of moral purpose, all whilst maintaining an appropriate degree of ladylike behaviour. Yet there is variation in the way that they dress and how they are depicted to the reader, from the nurse's uniform of Hilda Wade to the theatrical disguises of Dorcas Dene and bicycling dress of Dora Myrl. Dress contributes to both character and plot in these later detectives in that the reader is encouraged to read something about the characters' behaviour from their dress (such as conformity or non-conformity) and this dress enables their work, be it as a disguise or to maintain professional respectability. Gender is once again under the spotlight from the perspective of the women's marriageability, with an increased

emphasis on the women as women rather than detectives, reiterated by the increased personal details offered to the reader.

Conclusion

In conclusion, authors that constructed and developed female detectives seemed to tread a fine line. In making their characters too sartorially conscious, too fashionable or describing them in too much detail they risked over-feminising the detective, emphasising the female at the expense of the detective. Failing to provide any description, especially before female detectives had become a factual reality, failed to lend realism with the result that so-called 'petticoat-police' were considered unconvincing and inefficient characters. Yet by creating strongly defined characters they risked the charge of manliness, transgressing gender boundaries sartorially and behaviourally at the cost of their femininity, creating 'honorary men'.

This balance hinged upon making the female detective character believable but not ordinary, as credibly interesting to as many readers as possible. Early female detectives were undoubtedly extraordinary women. With no counterparts to which to compare them, either real-life or fictional prototypes, they posed particular difficulties, as well as promising opportunities, to the crime writer. On the one hand, the lack of type allowed freedom of expression and the creation of characters who could solve incredible crimes, traverse dangerous terrains and emerge virtually unscathed. Though the characters were potentially without restraint, cultural and social expectations dictated certain behaviours to make these women credible as women even where they may be incredible as detectives. Placing emphasis on their gender via typically gendered spheres such as dress and fashion, domesticity and romance risked highlighting the depths of their transgressions and rendering the plots implausible. How different might Mrs Paschal's character have

been if the reader had witnessed her washing the petticoats she so readily discards? How could Mrs G— escape from the window of the library in which she is trapped in “The Unknown Weapon” if she had been wearing a fashionably sized crinoline? On the other hand, this extraordinariness without defined limits offers the potential for fantasy, both in terms of the appearances and actions of the female detectives and hence the titillating scenes and images discussed in this chapter.

Once the novelty of the role begins to fade and female detectives become more widely known in fiction and also in real-life as amateur detectives (as this advertisement [Figure 21] from 1884 suggests) the female detective characters become more



Figure 21: Kate Easton "The Lady Detective." Advertisement from end pages of *Incognita* by William Stephen Hayward, London: C.H. Clarke (1884). Photographed in situ at the British Library, 12 Jan 2018.

believable as crime-fighters. However, to prevent the extraordinary becoming ordinary, focus shifted to the women themselves rather than their actions as detectives, with each new female detective reinventing some characteristic of their predecessors. The increasing number of fictional female detectives from the 1860s through to the fin de siècle allows greater interpretation of the character but is clear that the progression of character type is far from linear. The female detective becomes more physically active, better and more ingenious in the use of disguises, more intuitive and better able to read clues, though she did not necessarily possess all of these attributes and they were not presented in a neat chronological progression. Readers are given more information about the lives and interests of the female detective characters, a greater depth of character, understanding of their motivations and typically a more defined aesthetic, which allows the detectives to embrace aspects of femininity without jeopardising their credibility as

detectives. Much of this shift can be attributed to changing social attitudes towards women, brought about by legal reforms such as the Matrimonial Causes Acts and the Married Women's Property Acts, the rise of women in employment and so forth but also the development of detective fiction within the crime fiction genre. As John Scaggs makes clear, "individual works of crime fiction are built from the devices, codes, and conventions established by previous works of crime fiction" (3) but as realist texts these conventions must also be built upon social and historical structures which make the stories seem plausible to the readership. Moreover, the increasing visibility of the textual media in which they featured, particularly the highly illustrated periodicals, made these women detectives into snapshots of modernity easily digestible in the short story format.

Though the material in this chapter is organised chronologically, the analysis of the female detective from the 1860s to the turn of the century suggests that the figure of the female detective did not develop in a linear fashion but was characterised by complexities and tensions throughout her existence in Victorian short fiction. These tensions are especially palpable between the textual and paratextual portrayals of female detectives, and between the female detective's transgressive use of disguise and her adherence to social and sartorial expectations for women. There were no particular defining features of the female detective in this era. She did not possess the deerstalker and invernness cape that came to define Sherlock Holmes, nor did she possess the grizzled hair, lean and wiry figure, piercing eyes and pointed chin that constituted his more stereotyped male counterparts. But for the most part she was aesthetically pleasing, even attractive, dressed in the modern style and though never emphatically fashionable, unquestionably modish and sartorially appropriate. Yet there are also flourishes of sartorial flair, embellishments that signify an enjoyment of dress and fashion, the potential triviality of which may seem at odds with the gravity of her profession: from Mrs Paschal's crinoline to George Vickers's ankle-flashing, fruit-wearing lady detective, to bonnet-loving Dora White,

Dorcas Dene's ostrich-plumed hat and Dora Myrl's tailor-made cycling dress. All evidence an interest in dress that accentuates their femininity without jeopardising their believability as detectives. These characters are all plausible but not ordinary and serve as an interesting counterpoint to the extraordinary and vivacious criminal masters of disguise who appeared in the serialised short stories of the fin de siècle who form the focus of the next chapter.

Chapter Four: Anxieties of Fashionable Modernity in Fin de Siècle

Serialised Crime Fiction

“It is by no means an uncommon occurrence, in an inclement climate, for people to go ill clad in order to appear well dressed”
(Veblen 103).

Still frequently cited as the dominant analyses of fashion by leading modern academics including Elizabeth Wilson, Jennifer Craik and Anne Hollander, Thorstein Veblen’s *The Theory of the Leisure Class* (1899) and Georg Simmel’s *Fashion* (1895)¹¹¹ revolutionised theoretical approaches to dress within the tumultuous wake of shifting social identities, political ideas and aesthetic tastes of the fin de siècle. They interpreted fashion as a class-based system that allowed the expression of individuality whilst maintaining the status quo of civilised society, analysing the movement of consumer culture across social strata and the resultant shifts in the visual delineation of social class, especially in terms of dress. This disjuncture between individualism and conformity innovated change by the individual’s desire to appear distinct from others but also acted as a form of social equalisation. Through a shared set of sartorial standards such as the expectations of Sunday dress or the uniforms of the railway staff, social groups were simultaneously segregated and united according to a whole host of external factors including geographical location, vocation and class. Changes in employment, shifts in the distribution of wealth and rising social mobility increased the amount of time and money available to lower classes with which they could emulate their social peers. The blurring of traditional class boundaries created conflicts of status and power which fashion both mediated, by decreasing the visual difference between ranks, and exaggerated, by the

¹¹¹ First published in 1895 as an essay entitled “Zur Psychologie der Mode” (On the psychology of fashion) with numerous subsequent revisions and translations including *Philosophie der Mode* (1905) and *Die Mode* (1911). This essay uses the 1904 essay published in *The International Quarterly*.

speeding up of fashion, as the upper classes sought to distance themselves from their social inferiors with new styles. The publication of these two theories within a few years of each other indicates the desire to make sense of contemporary society from economic, anthropological and sociological perspectives, to establish order and explain disorder in a rapidly changing world. Disorder and social exclusion were intimately linked with immorality and crime, sensationalised by the proliferation of print media that charted high profile criminal cases alongside stories of fashionable celebrities, global news and the obligatory advertisements for everything from top hats to toothpaste. These binary oppositions between order and disorder, public and private, individuality and conformity mark just a few of the dualities that Simmel suggests constitute human nature, a concept which is dissected and exploded by the illusory identities and false social order assumed by both the criminal and the amateur detective in late Victorian crime fiction. This chapter maps the theories of Simmel and Veblen in popular serialised stories of the period, Arthur Conan Doyle's *The Adventures of Sherlock Holmes* (1892) and *The Memoirs of Sherlock Holmes* (1894), Grant Allen's *An African Millionaire* (1897) and Guy Boothby's *A Prince of Swindlers* (1898). It focuses chiefly on their central characters, Sherlock Holmes from Conan Doyle's stories, Colonel Clay from Grant Allen's stories and Simon Carne (alias Klimo) from Boothby's stories. The indeterminate class and status of these shape-shifting characters, their performative tendencies of emulation and disguise, their consumption of material goods and their ability to read and manipulate sartorial patterns illustrate many of the prevailing tensions of the decade through dress. This chapter suggests that despite the central characters occupying what would seem to be polar opposite employments and presenting opposing unfashionable and ultra-fashionable appearances respectively, their shared sense of drive to achieve their goals relies on their ability to observe, interpret and manipulate sartorial and social codes at a given moment in time. These codes, as Veblen and Simmel illustrate, were subject to constant flux that peaked in the 1890s as the

proliferation of printed media, advertising and off-the-peg clothing coincided with the decline of industry, Imperialism and religion generating anxieties of class, wealth, faith and identity - the perfect breeding grounds for crime.

The Theories: Thorstein Veblen's *The Theory of the Leisure Class* and Georg Simmel's *Fashion*

The theories of Veblen and Simmel chart a close relationship between fashion and modernity. Veblen's analysis evaluated American culture at the close of the nineteenth century to trace the evolution of social stratification from the tribal survival instincts of our ancestors to the superfluous accumulation of goods associated with late Victorian commodity culture. Material goods, he argued, carried assumptions of reputability that was heightened by fashion, propelling the need to acquire possessions with limited utility, ostentatious display and limited lifespan simply because they were not universally available to all. In terms of dress, this was reflected by luxurious materials, clothing ill-suited to the climate or geography or garments that prohibited manual labour and innovative designs that must be discarded once copied by the lower classes in order to preserve their uniqueness. Beautiful objects must necessarily be costly and evocative of that specific mood and moment of time in order to have social worth. Thus, according to Veblen, modernity prized social success as a series of aesthetic judgments based upon economic values of fashion rather than utility, merit or even beauty. Dress constitutes "an expression of the pecuniary culture" (111) and as such it is those who have disposable income, the leisure classes, that form the chief focus of Veblen's study. However, by the late Victorian period this categorisation incorporates vast swathes of the middle classes as well as the upper classes, with occupations such as banking, clerking, professional sport, the clergy and the armed forces all falling into this category by Veblen's definition

since their work does not involve manual labour and their income allows sufficient subsistence to indulge in leisure activities to some degree. Their clothing symbolises their removal from economically productive labour since it is neither protective nor symbolic of subservience¹¹² and can be altered or renewed as the fashion changes while also signalling their inclusion or exclusion from what Dick Hebdige would later term status groups in his twentieth century analysis *Subculture: The Meaning of Style* (1979). Fashion and dress more generally can thus be used to demarcate visually the assimilation or differentiation from dominant cultural principles and their associated belief systems that Hebdige associates with youth in the twentieth century but which Veblen (and Simmel to some extent) associate with employment and productivity in the late nineteenth century. Within the late Victorian fiction analysed in this chapter, these subcultures transgress and dissect hegemonic suppositions of fashion as each character utilises dress to align themselves temporally within a particular subculture; they are literally and culturally (in terms of how they are perceived) redressed according to their teleological designs, a concept which Simmel suggests separates the trendsetters from the fashion followers and an idea explored at greater length in this chapter.

Simmel also considered social stratification from a contemporary perspective, perceiving fashion to be instrumental in formulating the relationship between the individual and groups. The ever-changing nature of fashion and its arbitrariness both stemmed from, and partially satisfied, man's inner conflicts, foremost of which he considers to be the choice to stand alone or interact with others. This decision to act independently or conform to group expectations is significant within the stories studied here since it reflects the criminal's decision to choose to commit an illegal act rather than maintaining a legally

¹¹² Though the clergy and the armed forces wore uniforms these denote subservience to God and the ruling monarch respectively who constitute the apex of the traditional social hierarchy and as such, their allegiance is seen as an honour rather than a duty.

and socially acceptable lifestyle. Furthermore, it infers that moral pathways could, like fashion, become an artificial construct of society with shifting boundaries and changing perceptions that altered according to time, class, education and so forth. A poor woman's theft of lace from a shop for example could be construed as a sign of the degeneration of her class, a material desire for goods 'above her station' in life reflecting the individual's vanity and selfishness. The same theft by a rich woman might be construed as kleptomania, a particular concern of the fin de siècle which attempted to explain shoplifting by upper-class women as a nervous disease for which they could not be held accountable. Crime fiction contrasts these dichotomies of independence/conformity against moral/immoral behaviour, using clothing and accessories as a vehicle to do so as shown throughout this study. As such, seemingly innocuous metonymic items of apparel take on an increased significance as Holmes points out, highlighting to Watson "the importance of sleeves, the suggestiveness of thumbnails or the great issues that may hang from a bootlace" ("A Case of Identity" 476).

Like Veblen, Simmel sees dress as indicative of social class that therefore sanctions the individual's inclusion within a certain set, or generates the distancing from another, engendering the desire to emulate or set new trends. Both of these early theories proposed that fashion constituted a vital component of social interaction with the production and consumption of goods increasingly functioning as the basis of honour and esteem amongst all levels of society. Whereas wealth had previously represented hard work, business acumen and/or hereditary honour, by the late Victorian period wealth in itself became admirable, instigating a drive towards visual demonstration of affluence through what Veblen calls conspicuous consumption, publicly lavish expenditure on luxuries to attain or show social status. Veblen argued that the leisure class, that is to say those with disposable income, therefore became role-models to be emulated by the lower ranks of society producing disharmony and dissatisfaction at both ends of the social scale which

manifested in constant cycles of fashion. The upper and leisured classes constantly sought to reinvent themselves and re-present their economic and social wealth inducing envy, the emotion that Simmel argues marks the distance between one's self and one's ideal. Simmel also cites emulation as a definitive motivation of the period, suggesting that imitation allows homogeneity without losing individuality, opposing forces that he considers to be the driving force of fashion. He argues that these oppositions are both socially and politically driven, and that the principal difference between them is that "the imitator is the passive individual, who believes in social similarity and adapts himself to existing elements, [while] the teleological individual, on the other hand, is ever experimenting, always restlessly striving" (132). It is this conceit of restlessly striving experimentation that unites the central characters of the fictional texts in this chapter and their determination to infiltrate, assimilate and penetrate the social circles of their clients and victims aided by their ability to transform, mould and manipulate their appearance according to the expectations of specific groups and subcultures. It is agency and not determinacy that empowers these fictions, the active motivation of the central characters to usurp the social desires that Simmel and Veblen argue drive contemporary society in order to fulfil their own designs, manipulating and assisted by the anxieties of an ever-changing society.

Fashionable Fiction: Consumption and Commodities in the Periodical Press

Allen and Boothby use emulation as the primary methodology to allow their fictional gentleman-thieves to enact fraud in *A Prince of Swindlers* and *An African Millionaire* as Simon Carne and Colonel Clay carry out an elaborate array of criminal schemes on their upper-class victims. In his introduction to *A Prince of Swindlers* Gary Hoppenstand designates Allen's Clay as the first gentleman-thief, a late nineteenth-century fictional

conception which offered a fashionable inversion on the hero-detective, typically using protean powers of disguise to deceive wealthy victims who are consistently presented as shallow, stupid and deserving of their victimhood. Both protagonists featured in interconnected short stories in popular periodicals of the day: Allen's stories in *The Strand Magazine* between June 1896 and May 1897, collated into *An African Millionaire* in the same year, and Boothby's stories featuring in *Pearson's Magazine* from January to September 1897 published in book form as *A Prince of Swindlers* in the following year. The serialisation of the stories and the links between the individual stories within the series shows a desire to attract the reader over a protracted period. This established a loyal market eager to buy in to the product for a fixed period of time thus creating an immediate community which, as Simmel says, "will vanish as rapidly as it came" (303) once the serialisation is complete. The stories are thus themselves rendered as fashionably transitory commodities. The appearance of the narratives in best-selling periodicals is indicative of their autonomous status as items of mass consumption, a self-awareness that is parodied by Simon Carne's alter ego, the famous private detective Klimo. Klimo is the ultra-fashionable modern celebrity who graces upper-class society with his eccentric but effective skills; his credentials as a successful detective are verified by his rental of a mansion in fashionable Park Lane and his patronage by high class clients confirms his reputability. His arrival is prefixed by his image appearing on so many advertising hoardings that "the man, woman, or child who had not seen his posters, or heard his name, was counted as an ignoramus unworthy of intercourse with human beings" (27). In actual fact his ability to solve crime stems from his involvement in the orchestration of the crime in the first place and his image, like that on the posters, is merely a fashionable illusion which "emphasises the image associated with a commodity rather than the commodity itself" (Whitlock 19). Klimo's artful publicity is ironically paralleled by the vast array of advertisements that appear within magazines like *The Strand* as short fiction lay

LEWIS'S WONDERFUL VELVETEEN at 2/- a yard can only be obtained DIRECT from LEWIS'S in Market Street, Manchester. Ladies are asked to write (on an ordinary post-card) for PATTERNS, POST FREE. Fast pile, fast dyed. Every inch Guaranteed. If a dress should wear badly, or be in any respect faulty, Lewis's will Give a New Dress for nothing at all, and pay the full cost for making and trimming. *Weldon's Ladies' Journal* says: "Lewis's Wonderful Velveteen is the Finest Imitation of Real Silk Velvet ever shown. Thoroughly durable." The price of this Beautiful Velveteen, in Black and all the most beautiful colours now worn, is 2/- a yard. This quality is sold by the best drapers at 3/6, 4/6, and 5/6 a yard, but Lewis's Manufacture this Velveteen themselves, and sell it direct to the public at 2/- a yard. Lewis's pay Carriage on all orders to any part of Great Britain and Ireland.

LADIES, WRITE FOR PATTERNS OF Dainty Dress Fabrics

For Present Wear. **WONDERFUL** in Value, Style, Beauty, & Variety. **LEWIS'S CYCLING SERGE DRESSES.** The Largest and Best Selected Stock in the Kingdom at Strictly Wholesale Prices. *"As glorious as the Venus of the Sky"* Shakespeare

7/- The Full Dress Length.

Please mention THE STRAND MAGAZINE, and Address—

LEWIS'S, in Market St., MANCHESTER. Venus at her Brightest.

The Oldest and Best. "Loved of all Ladies."—SHAKESPEARE, "Much Ado," Act 1, Sc. 1.

Figure 22: Advertisement for Lewis's Velveteen. *The Strand Magazine* 13a Jan- June [1897]. 847. Internet Archive. Web. Sourced 11 Sept 2016.

sandwiched between adverts for such commodities as hair dye, shampoo and soap, which warn the purchaser to beware of worthless imitations while simultaneously lauding emulative reproductions. Lewis's Velveteen [Figure 22], for example, is marketed in *The Strand* as "the finest imitation of real silk velvet ever shown!" The juxtaposition between fashion and appearance is beset by anxieties about genuineness and imitation products, hopelessly entangled with economic and class-based judgements that blur the boundaries between conspicuous waste and conspicuous consumption. As Ruth Hoberman notes, *The Strand* played a significant role in the construction of respectable middle-class consumption: "Its cover depicted a busy London street corner filled with businesses and strollers, while its advertisements, contests, photographs, features, and stories encouraged readers to define themselves through the objects they bought and owned" (2). At the same time that the reader is invited to make judgements about the morality of the false celebrity Klimo and the consumer society in which he thrives, the reader is encouraged to spend freely on imitation products and wondrous new inventions that will allegedly transform their lives. The mass production of goods was offset by the hype created by marketing in

advertisements and store displays which, Hoberman argues, allowed shoppers to attain the feel-good factor previously associated with unique, high-value or high provenance goods. Klimo's success and the popularity of advertised products, including the fiction itself, hangs not on their efficacy but on their social reputability amongst a "coterie with shared tastes and judgements" (Hoberman 8).

The Strand Magazine also famously provided the platform for Conan Doyle's serialisation of the exploits of his amateur detective Holmes.¹¹³ First appearing in print in 1887,¹¹⁴ Conan Doyle's famous consulting detective has become synonymous with the fin de siècle in popular culture thanks to his predilection for railway travel, innovative scientific experiments coupled with the use of modern forensics and almost superhuman ability to observe and decipher the subtlest of clues, often from the dress and appearance of an individual. The first edition of *The Strand* promised to contain "stories and articles by the best British writers" (Newnes 3) which would be "illustrated by eminent artists" (3) and Sidney Paget's rich illustrations helped cement the image of Holmes in the mind of the reader, even though his appearance did not strictly



Figure 23: *He examined them minutely.* (1892). Photographic reproduction of watercolour by Sidney Paget. Internet Archive via Victorian Web. 6 Sept 2016.

¹¹³ The first outing of Sherlock Holmes was in the novella *A Study in Scarlet* published by Ward, Lock & Co in 1886 and subsequently reprinted a year later in *Beeton's Christmas Annual*. Conan Doyle was under contract with the same publishers for another novella, *A Sign of Four* published in *Lippincott's Magazine* in February 1890. His work did not achieve popular success however until the serialisation of short stories that began with "A Scandal in Bohemia" in *The Strand* in July 1891. The first twelve stories (with the exception of *the Cardboard Box*) were collected in *The Adventures of Sherlock Holmes* and published in October 1892.

This essay primarily considers Conan Doyle's short stories published in *The Strand* between 1891 and 1893, later collated as *The Adventures of Sherlock Holmes* (1892) and *The Memoirs of Sherlock Holmes* (1894).

reflect Conan Doyle's narrative details. As Stephen Knight has noted, Holmes's appearance in "The Cardboard Box" "sporting a natty striped jacket and straw boater" (60) [Figure 23] is almost as notable as the story's gruesome subject matter (the box of the title containing severed ears) even though the text itself merely remarks that Holmes has "changed [his] dressing-gown" (1116) with no further description of his dress. Holmes's fashionable image here is not conceived by his creator but invented by the artist, whose illustrations have become so synonymous with the character in popular culture as to generate an iconography continuously reinvented with every subsequent portrayal, from the deerstalker added by Paget but never explicitly mentioned in the text to the calabash pipe championed by William Gillette in the 1916 film version (as well as earlier stage versions from 1899) purportedly because it was easier to see in silhouette and rest on the chest than the straight clay pipe that Conan Doyle depicts. For the most part, Holmes's clothing is not described in detail at all and he is not depicted as materialistic, he remains traditionally conservative in his mono-coloured dressing gowns or dark coloured suits and does not appear fashionably dressed or aesthetically flamboyant. In terms of dress at least, Holmes's conspicuous consumption was thus an illustrated invention of Paget's, commissioned by the Strand's art editor William Boot and condoned by the publisher George Newnes, which knitted together ideas of fashion and consumption and evoked the commodity culture epitomised by the advertisements at the beginning of the periodical.¹¹⁵

¹¹⁵ There have been numerous studies of Holmes's propensity for smoking and drug use that emphasise consumer practices though not in the same milieu as Veblen's notions of consumption. See Susan Zieger's "Holmes's Pipe, Tobacco Papers and the Nineteenth-century Origins of Media Addiction."

Conspicuous Consumption: Criminal Aspirations

As well as contributing towards the commodity culture of the late nineteenth century through their mode of publication, all of the stories illustrate Veblen's concept of conspicuous consumption to some degree through their depictions of ostentatious goods or excessive wealth. Conan Doyle's stories remain largely reluctant to engage in this commodity culture but even the "tweed-suited and respectable" (437) Holmes cannot avoid being called in to retrieve a priceless missing gem in "The Blue Carbuncle," to locate a missing racehorse involved in a betting scam in "Silver Blaze" and indulging in the luxury of "carte blanche" (436) expenses to resolve the King of Bohemia's blackmail case. Allen and Boothby's short stories are much more overt in their display of conspicuous consumption with such stories as "The Duchess of Wiltshire's Diamonds," "The Episode of the Game of Poker" "How Simon Carne Won the Derby," and "The Episode of the Old Master." Unlike Holmes, who works for a fee but does not appear to covet material goods, Clay and Carne work to acquire as much personal wealth as they can especially through high status goods such as works of art, yachts and property. Their aspirations reflect what Tammy Whitlock suggests is a growing trend in the late nineteenth century as "status-announcing useless goods, once associated only with the genteel classes, formed the foundation of middle-class consumer culture" (26). In terms of dress, jewellery plays an important role within the narratives as items which Veblen may describe as conspicuous waste in that they "serve for pure ostentation only" (69) fulfilling only the utility of socially expected habit and convention. This is evident in Allen's "The Episode of the Diamond Links" and Boothby's "The Duchess of Wiltshire's Diamonds" by the use of fake jewels in place of the real ones which serve to fool their unsuspecting owners, who appear more entranced by the idea of the jewels as items of conspicuous consumption than their reality. In "Diamond Links" Colonel Clay poses as "a fresh-faced young parson, on his honeymoon tour with his nice wee wife, a bonnie

Scotch lassie with a charming accent” (17). The curate looks to be modest in his appearance but appears at dinner one evening wearing “first-rate diamond” (21) cufflinks, catching the eye of Amelia Vandrift, wife of the African millionaire of the title who “had been long wanting two diamonds like these” (21) to complete a diamond necklace set. Seeing Amelia’s covetous look, the curate explains that the cufflinks are “Oriental paste” (22) erroneously retrieved from the siege of Seringapatam (also the supposed source of Collins’ precious gem in *The Moonstone*) and as such have little monetary value. Suspecting that the curate is deceived and that the paste is in fact real stones Amelia and her husband Charles examine the jewels in more detail and conclude that they are the missing stones from Amelia’s own necklace (which also originates from Seringapatam, verifying their suspicions). The curate declines to sell the faux jewels citing sentimental reasons and the fact he knows them to be imitations, stating piously that “it wouldn’t be right of [him] to sell them to [the Vandrifts] under false pretences” (28). The curate is eventually cajoled into selling them after relentless pursuit by the Vandrifts, a ruse that Clay has artfully orchestrated all along. In fact, the gems are identical to the missing stones because Clay has stolen two others from Amelia’s necklace which he has substituted with fake decoy stones, which he presumably has had made before the swindle commences. The Vandrifts have simply bought back their own stolen property. When the swindle is revealed it is the Vandrifts who are perceived as the guilty party since believing the gems to be real they “tried to get the stones from an unsuspecting person for half their value,” (32). This is despite the curates’ protests that the stones are imitations, bypassing moral fortitude to accumulate possessions for what Veblen describes as the “conventional basis of reputability” (Veblen 19). Clay’s deliberate wearing of the cufflinks to attract the Vandrifts’ attention exaggerates the conspicuous element of the stones to expose the absurdity of such value systems – the Vandrifts fall in to Clay’s trap because he knows that they have a magpie-like attraction to ostentatious items without fully comprehending

the systems by which others interpret taste, judge value or assign status. The story serves to highlight the dangers of judging by appearances, indicates the proliferation of imitations and reinforces that if something looks too good to be true, it probably is.

Precious stones occupy a singular distinction in Veblen's theory because they "owe their utility as items of conspicuous waste to an antecedent utility as objects of beauty" (87) which renders them desirable and "monopolised objects of pride to their possessors and users" (87). In short, the real diamonds are valuable because they have beauty *and* value; they show that the possessor has the pecuniary means to buy such items and "lend éclat to the person of their wearer (or owner) by comparison with other persons who are compelled to do without" (87). But once the item is known to be imitation and thus inexpensive it ceases to remain aesthetically pleasing since by this point in time, the two factors are inextricably interwoven as marks of what Veblen calls "honorific costliness" (88). Dress is particularly susceptible to this value-blending because fashion introduces a "code of reputability" (88) which presupposes an aesthetic truth, taken up by the upper-class members of society who have the means to adjust their attire to keep up with changing trends. It is Clay's prediction of Amelia's desire to appear fashionably conspicuous which catalyses the plot and it is Amelia's need to wear jewels which are both beautiful and valuable that renders her the victim of the swindle. She could have had replacement imitation stones made as easily as Clay did if she simply wished to wear the necklace for its appearance; the fact that the stones must be real diamonds indicates her vanity and her need to retain social status even if this means duping what she believes to be an innocent clergyman. Clay effectively pre-empts the Vandrifts' thoughts and movements by identifying their tendencies towards conspicuous consumption and in doing so predicts the cycle of fashion that they will use to ostentatiously display their social wealth and position.

Boothby describes an even more elaborate scheme in “The Duchess of Wiltshire’s Diamonds” as Simon Carne uses both imitation jewels and an imitation box to relieve the noblewoman of her diamond necklace. The necklace is evidently of significant social and fiscal value, described as the “famous necklace” (34) from the outset, the jewels are repeatedly associated with the illustrious Duchess and had “for so many years had been the joy and pride of the ducal house of Wiltshire” (50). The value of the jewels is thus the fact they are unique, they are not fashionable per se but setting the fashion to be imitated, fixing the fashion of the Duchess’s social class by the exclusion of other groups who cannot afford such goods. As Simmel confirms, “the only motivations with which fashion is concerned are formal social ones” (134) and it is the social provenance of the necklace in addition to its aesthetic qualities that make it famous – its social reputation renders it fashionable. The necklace is described with both artistic and monetary value: “the setting was a fine example of the jeweller’s art, [...] the value of the whole affair was fifty thousand pounds, a mere fleabite to the man who had given it to his wife, but a fortune to any humbler person” (37). The aesthetic quality of the piece is, like that of the diamond cufflinks, inextricably linked with its pecuniary value but also with its honorific social value which clearly shows the conspicuous waste of the owners who have such an excess of money as to consider fifty thousand pounds inconsiderable. Yet the Duchess is not merely beguiled by costly goods but clearly has an educated appreciation of their workmanship and origin, evinced by references to her extensive Indian art and china collection, much admired by Carne. The Duchess keeps the diamonds in an exquisitely carved Oriental wooden box which “of its kind was a unique work of art” (36) immediately rendering the box fashionable since it has not yet been subject to imitation and cannot be bought by others. Carne manipulates the Duchess’s pride of owning such a rare object to request a closer inspection, enabling him to produce an exact copy of the box with which, armed with an ingenious false bottom, he can steal the diamonds. The

ability of Carne's servants, explicitly described as "artificers" (39) to produce an "exact counterfeit" (40) of the distinctive box from Carne's drawings indicates the prevalence of imitation within contemporary society, its social significance magnified by the simultaneous threats of lowly servants being able to emulate gentry and the colonial threat of the servants' Indian origin against the Duchess's symbolism of the British aristocracy.¹¹⁶ Moreover, the fraud functions as an example of Simmel's notion that the lower classes always copy the fashions of the upper classes, with the servants copying the Duchess's box which has been acquired from the home culture of the servants in the first place, complicating Simmel's simple class divide with anxieties of colonial possession. Simmel argued that the lower-classes imitate the fashions of the class above them in an attempt to step closer to their wealth and assumptions of their lifestyle, yet "the fashions of the upper stratum of society are never identical with those of the lower [...] they are abandoned by the former as soon as the latter prepares to appropriate them" (133). Carne's ability to buy a replica false necklace from the supremely fashionable Burlington Arcade with ease and Clay's pre-emptive acquisition of replica gems suggests that imitation jewels were readily available, indicating firstly that emulation of the upper classes was deliberately encouraged and aimed at those with lower income and secondly that such jewels had become fashionable without being wholly abandoned by the upper classes, in contrast to Simmel's theory of fashion transference.

Precious jewels are conspicuous by their absence in Conan Doyle's stories, only appearing in "The Adventure of the Blue Carbuncle" as an incidental discovery when Holmes is asked to reunite a lost hat and goose with its owner. The jewel, the Countess of Morcar's blue carbuncle,¹¹⁷ is well known to Holmes only because he has "read the

¹¹⁶ This notion of class and empire is explored at length with reference to Boothby's fiction in Clare Clarke's study of *Late-Victorian Crime Fiction in the Shadows of Sherlock*.

¹¹⁷ The OED observes that a carbuncle is usually red or fiery in colour thus the blue stone in this story is exceptionally rare. The choice of stone is perhaps a deliberate attempt to draw attention to its derivation as the carbon of which it is composed appears resonant with its name, a point emphasised by Holmes's

advertisement about it in *The Times* every day lately” (545), from which he can assess the material qualities of the stone in terms of size, shape and value which make it unique. Like the Duchess of Wiltshire’s diamonds, the stones have an aristocratic attachment which adds to their honorific value but rather than a historical family connection to add value, the stone is associated with undisclosed “sentimental considerations in the background that would induce the countess to part with half her fortune if she could but recover the gem” (545-546). This sentimental attachment discredits the notion of the stone as conspicuous waste because it implies that the stone has not been purchased primarily to be worn but that it has been given or inherited as a gift and thus the value of the stone to the countess is beyond its material or commodity value. The colour of the gem makes it especially desirable by Veblen’s value system since “rarity and price adds an expression of distinction” (87) which renders its aesthetic beauty “pecuniarily honorific” (88) creating a reciprocal circle of desire in which beauty, scarcity and value underpin each other. However, though Holmes acknowledges that the stone is “a bonny thing” (“Carbuncle” 547) which glints and sparkles, for him its beauty is overridden by its origins and by the envy and covetousness that it instils in those that do not possess it. “Every good stone” he says, “is a nucleus and focus of crime [...] they are the devil’s pet baits” (547) which bedazzle successive generations, echoing the superstitious suspicion attached to *The Moonstone* nearly a quarter of a century earlier. Whereas historical provenance adds honorific and pecuniary value according to Veblen’s analysis, for Holmes, age is merely indicative of generations of immorality as “in the larger and older jewels every facet may stand for a bloody deed” (547). In fact, “the stone is not yet twenty years old” (547) suggesting that it was mined and cut according to a recent fashion and that it has been in the commercial marketplace relevantly recently, recasting the stone not

reference to it as “crystallised charcoal” (“Carbuncle” 547). The word’s secondary meaning as a boil, pustule or other lesion of the skin is also perhaps suggestive of the irritation and discomfort which the stone has the potential to bring and the “sinister history” (547) to which Holmes later refers.

as an ancient family heirloom but as a modern acquisition, perhaps a token of love which may explain the countess's mysterious sentimental attachment. For Holmes though, the stone is already imbued with negative connotations since "there have been two murders, a vitriol-throwing, a suicide and several robberies brought about for the sake of this forty-grain weight of crystallised charcoal" (547), a legacy which pitches the value of human life against the relatively trivial value of an inanimate object. His reduction of the stone into its constituent chemical renders the commodification of the gem absurdly ridiculous and highlights "the dissociation of a commodity from its means of production" (Whitlock 19), which Whitlock argues forms an integral drive towards acceptance of mass consumption in the 1890s. Whereas Clay and Carne are only too ready to disregard the origins and ownership of the jewels they covet, focussing simply on their monetary value and their own desire to possess and repossess items in order to show their own wealth and to signify their criminal successes, Holmes eschews such mercenary designs and desires only to resolve the mystery which he has been asked to solve. His interest in the goods, objects and people he investigates is restricted by his professional employment and the intellectual challenges that constitute that particular case. He learns from previous cases and marks down his observations for use in future cases, not for any personal desire to make emotional connections or from any inherent human nosiness but as a scientific voyeur to increase his professional abilities. He does not have any intrinsic curiosity in people or things such as the celebrity culture manipulated by Klimo, except where they are attached to the mystery he has been asked to solve. Furthermore, he is not motivated primarily by material gain, at odds with the overarching attitude of the fin de siècle fervour for consumerism presented by Allen and Boothby and theorised by Simmel and Veblen. Indeed, Holmes's decision to allow the guilty party to go free and let the case collapse in the final outcome of "The Blue Carbuncle" signifies his independent moral philosophies that disregard established social structures and attitudes and signify his

dissociation from and critique of the uniformed state-controlled police. In this sense at least, Holmes is the antithesis of fashion as he shuns conspicuous consumption and expresses his individuality against and in spite of the status quo of society.

Imitation and Emulation: Fashionable Fraud

As Clare Clarke points out in her evaluation of *Late-Victorian Crime Fiction in the Shadows of Sherlock*, Carne “mirrors the behaviours and appearances of the group he wishes to infiltrate and so assumes the trappings and demeanour of a typical wealthy English gentleman” (172) suggesting that he, like Clay, is so good at being fashionable that he is indistinguishable from others in his assumed social class. The ability of both criminal characters, Carne and Clay, to seamlessly transform into respectable members of society is assisted by their acquisition of conspicuous goods to assert their social standing and by their use of physical materials to change their aesthetic appearance. Though not always explicit in either text, the variety and authenticity of the disguises the criminals use (or indeed Holmes), particularly in terms of modern and fashionable dress, indicates that they must go shopping or order goods on a regular basis, contributing substantially to the commodity culture on which they rely to carry out their crimes. Indeed, Clay and Carne’s fraudulent actions constitute a grotesquely distorted version of shopping and by extension, modern consumerism, as crime becomes a leisure pursuit from which they acquire money and/or goods, driven by an impulse to outwit their victims, an act not propelled by necessity but characterised as a source of pleasure and pride. The leisure classes and the criminal classes coincide through the figure of the gentleman-thief, the attractive anti-hero who appears to have means without industry and always dresses impeccably. Simmel’s teleological individual, the experimental and dynamic nonconformist who is always restlessly striving to reinvent thus reaches its foremost conclusion in the career criminal.

Holmes is also driven by the need to outwit, psychologically and intellectually triumphing over the inept police force and in particular “that imbecile Lestrade” (500) whose dull-witted approach to detection parallels the Vandrifts’ repeated failure to detect Colonel Clay in *An African Millionaire*. Like his later criminal counterparts, Holmes also assumes the trappings and demeanour of the groups he wishes to infiltrate in order to assimilate with a particular subculture and he must also use physical materials, usually items of dress, in order to disguise himself successfully. Far from the luxurious outfits and expensive apparel that Carne and Clay adopt, Holmes recurrently assumes lower class garments in order to blend in with the social circles of his clients or to infiltrate networks of information that are spread by the gossip of the working classes. Whereas Carne and Clay employ conspicuous fashion to become accepted into the subcultures they infiltrate, Holmes engages in the opposite tactic, dressing in a deliberately unfashionable style to remain inconspicuous and “appear [...] simply as a creature of the group” (Simmel 132). This encourages the rest of the group to divulge freely the information they hold as they assume a “form of cooperation” (Simmel 133) and thereby presume that all others act as they do, therefore exonerating any sense of blame or responsibility for their actions. This social adaptation is exploited by Holmes who employs a group of street boys,¹¹⁸ the Baker Street Irregulars, to act as intelligence agents on his behalf, paying them handsomely for their services to undermine their social peers. Like the pickpocketing gang of children in *Oliver Twist*, the Irregulars pass by unnoticed on the London streets inhabiting the liminal space on the periphery of society, assisted by their unsightly appearance that higher-class people do not wish or choose to see – a sartorial invisibility resulting from poverty that makes them the ideal candidates as spies. Holmes’s payment for information and the service of providing it establishes a pecuniary value which disregards social honour and

¹¹⁸ Holmes refers to his “Baker Street boys” in “The Adventure of the Crooked Man” (July 1893) and they also appear in *A Study in Scarlet* and *The Sign of Four*.

trust, a common concern in the sensation fiction of the 1860s in which servants were often suspected of divulging private information about the families for whom they served in order to earn money for drink or other such wasteful practices and commodities. By the 1890s, this conceit has diversified from the idea of the spy in the household to include the spy more generally ‘in our midst’ penetrating all social circles both inside and outside the domestic setting. However, the notion that such dishonesty is still linked to material gains in the form of conspicuous consumption is clearly illustrated in “The Adventure of Silver Blaze” in which a maid is offered a bribe to deliver a note to a stable-boy because she “would not be too proud to earn the price of a new dress” (660). The implicit inference that the maid should wish to escape her social position, even temporarily, by swapping her workwear for a fashionable frock evidences the importance of aesthetic respectability. It also suggests a personal vanity and/or social aspiration more commonly found in earlier fiction such as Elizabeth Gaskell’s *Mary Barton* (1848) in which women in particular can be seduced away from moral pathways by material goods and narcissism. The desirability of goods and the chance to be fashionable is supposed by the male criminal offering the bribe to take precedence over employee loyalty, a perspective that seems old-fashioned by the fin de siècle at a time when dress was readily available and could be bought relatively cheaply. However, the maid’s subsequent refusal proves that such assumptions (largely based here on class and gender) were inherently more complicated than the criminal supposes, reflecting Simmel’s hypothesis of the fundamental duality of human nature in which the maid’s individual response overrides her conformity to group expectations.

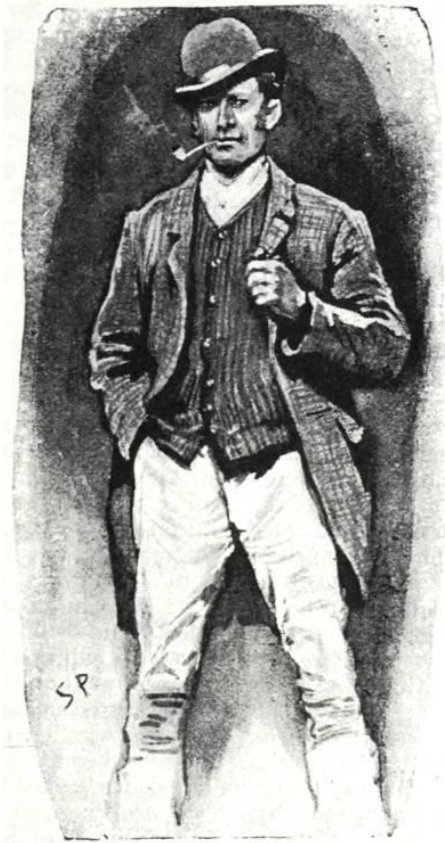


Figure 24: "A drunken-looking groom."
Photographic reproduction of watercolour
by Sidney Paget 1891. Internet Archive via
Victorian Web. Sourced 3 Sept 2016.

Holmes's "amazing powers in the use of disguises" (437) are seen in the first of the stories, "A Scandal in Bohemia" in which he appears as "a drunken-looking groom, ill-kempt and side whiskered, with an inflamed face and disreputable clothes" (437) [Figure 24] in order to mingle with the local ostlers to obtain information about his upper-class target Irene Adler. Unlike Clay and Carne, Holmes does not attempt to match the social class of well-connected and highly respected Adler but infiltrates the lower classes whom he assumes to be less suspicious and more willing to accept him, suggesting that Holmes is more comfortable as a member of the lower classes than as a fashionable

pretender. This is reiterated by his subsequent disguise as

an amiable and simple-minded nonconformist clergyman. His broad black hat, his baggy trousers, his white tie, his sympathetic smile and general look of peering and benevolent curiosity were such as Mr John Hare¹¹⁹ alone could have equalled (441).

In this disguise Holmes becomes a member of the leisure classes but not a fashionable one, opting for generic simplicity that almost excludes him from such judgements, his priestly garb removing him from suspicion and from judgements of sartorial modernity. As a non-conformist clergyman (which encompassed numerous denominations by the fin de siècle including Methodists, Calvinists and Baptists), he dons an indistinct apparel

¹¹⁹ A popular and successful actor and London theatre manager.

which allows him to fade subtly into the background. The potentially sacrilegious assumption of this disguise, wearing vestments without being ordained, is qualified in the text by Holmes's seemingly good intentions to solve the case on which he is working, yet the choice of dress as a means to gain entry to an unsuspecting woman's house signifies an uneasy criminality in which emulation is used for immoral purposes while also expressing contemporary social concerns regarding the superficiality and relevance of religion.

Indeed, Veblen devoted an entire chapter of his *Theory of the Leisure Classes* to "Devout Observances," arguing that those with religious beliefs tended to be from the sporting or delinquent classes¹²⁰ who indulge in conspicuous waste through "the consumption of ceremonial paraphernalia" (199) including elaborate dress, shrines and sacraments "which serve[...] no immediate material end"(199). Veblen's critique draws parallels "between the consumption which goes to the service of an anthropomorphic divinity and that which goes to the service of a gentleman of leisure chieftain or patriarch" (200) to express contempt at the priest's consumption of goods for his own comforts and ambitions, enacted and justified (erroneously in Veblen's view) under the guise of a Higher authority. Religion, he suggests, is now primarily the domain of those "low in economic efficiency, or in intelligence, or both" (209) implying that a clerical disguise will therefore be readily accepted by the populace on account of the limited intelligence of those most likely to respond to it. Clay and Carne also visually emulate clergymen in "the Episode of the Diamond Links" and "A Case of Philanthropy" respectively, utilising the air of respectability associated with a "dignified-looking clergyman" (Boothby, 135) and perceived inherent goodness to disguise their nefarious intentions. This is particularly

¹²⁰ A term not specifically defined by Veblen but used frequently throughout his study and associated with the lower-class individual with his "unscrupulous conversion of goods and persons to his own ends" (237). Similarly, the sporting man generally refers to hunting, shooting and other such "rant and swagger" pastimes that Veblen associates with childish temperaments.

disturbing in Boothby's story as Carne uses an atypical level of violence (compared to his usual character) while dressed as a "respectable Church of England clergyman" (141), holding the barrel of a revolver to a Marquis's head and threatening to "blow his brains out" (137) and sadistically heating an ominous poker in the fire to intimidate his victim if he fails to comply with Carne's demands. In this story, the crime remains unsolved because the neighbours accept the disguise as belonging to an honourable member of the community and are thus not alerted to view Carne as a possible source of suspicion even after the crime has come to light. The use of ecclesiastical dress in all three serialisations functions to camouflage the true actions of the characters by providing a timeless moral façade exempted from sartorial and fashion-based judgements that allows transition between all social groups and subcultures. This perception is representative of a more traditional, perhaps even outmoded manner of thinking, which interprets sartorial codes not with the suspicion, awareness of ambiguity and fashionably manipulative viewpoint of the well-informed fin de siècle consumer but with an inherent honesty and sincerity of an earlier generation.



Figure 25: Title illustration for "The Episode of the German Professor." *The Strand Magazine* Xii Jul-Dec 1896, 504. Digitised via Internet Archive Online, web. Sourced 1 Sept 2016.

All three characters use a range of dress as a means of imitation with Clay utilising the most diverse appearances, dressing convincingly as a Mexican seer, a curate, a German count, a Scottish Lord, a

German professor [Figure 25] and even an English detective. As his name suggests, Clay's almost inhuman ability to mould and transform into any character, coupled with

his hybrid half English, half French nationality “attacks boundaries of identity, physicality and race [...] and makes him a dangerous figure for late Victorian detective fiction” (Pittard 121). In fact, Clay does not appear out of disguise until the final story in the series, ‘The Episode of the Old Bailey’ in which he deliberately shuns conspicuous dress and is led into the dock “neatly and plainly dressed” (173) in his real identity, under the mundane moniker of Paul Finglemore. In his deceptions Carne relies on temporary disguises such as the “two suits of clothes, a pair of wigs, two excellently contrived false beards, and a couple of soft felt hats” (117) worn by himself and his valet and accomplice Belton to steal fifty thousand sovereigns from a locked safe in ‘The Wedding Guest.’ The matching outfits here and in numerous other exploits dissolves the social disparity between the pair and binds the two individuals by an immoral uniform that operates as a clear distinction from Belton’s usual subservient appearance. Though Belton is ordered to assist Carne in his criminality, his enthusiasm for the projects, his ingenuity and the extent of his knowledge suggest his willing complicity, aiding Carne’s success but also giving him “the satisfaction of not standing alone in his actions” (Simmel 132) using dress as a means to reinforce their partnership. Clay also has an accomplice in his crimes and in his disguises, a female who poses as his wife and appears variously disguised as Mrs Granton “a nice little thing, very shy and timid, but by no means unpresentable, and an evident lady”(66), as Jessie Brabazon “a bonnie Scotch lassie with a charming accent” (17) nicknamed White Heather¹²¹ by the narrator, as Mrs. Elihu Quackenboss “a pretty and piquant little American, with a tip-tilted nose and the quaint sharpness of her countrywomen” (126) and as Madame Picardet, of whom little description is given, although this appears to be her true identity and the moniker which she is most frequently assigned in the stories. Both Clay and Picardet’s disguises are readily accepted by all of

¹²¹ Because of its scarcity in the wild white heather was popularly conceived as a symbol of good luck in the late Victorian period. See Paul Kendall’s article on heather on the *Trees for Life* website for more on the folkloric significance of the plant.

the other characters in the stories, as they not only change their sartorial fashion but their mannerisms and behaviour to suit their guises:

[T]hat was characteristic of all Colonel Clay's impersonations, and Mrs. Clay's too—for I suppose I must call her so. They were not mere outer disguises; they were finished pieces of dramatic study. Those two people were an actor and actress, as well as a pair of rogues; and in both their rôles they were simply inimitable (112).

This complimentary assimilation echoes Holmes's comparison to John Hare, reiterating the age-old practice of emulation whilst highlighting the ability of the 'actors' to change their appearance in line with their environment. Modernity assists all the characters in their disguises by providing more convincing prosthetics, an increased range of goods and easier access to disposable dress though it is utilised notably more by the criminal characters than the detective. Though Holmes possesses numerous disguises including false beards and a vast array of clothing he does not embrace the possibilities of the fin de siècle marketplace as do Carne and Clay. Carne manufactures a papier-mâché hump that he straps to his body under his waistcoat to produce a marked deformity as Carne (which is missing from Klimo and thus reducing any visual association between the two) along with a pair of crépu-hair whiskers. Clay assumes an even more extreme use of materials using wax to change the shape of his nose and even injecting paraffin into his face. The French Comissary makes the extent of Clay's artistic talents clear:

He is called Colonel Clay, because he appears to possess an india-rubber face and he can mould it like clay in the hands of a potter. [...] Employs his knowledge to mould his own nose and cheeks, with wax additions, to the character he desires to impersonate (11).

Perhaps even more disturbingly, Clay can change his eyes, “a drop of belladonna expands – and produces the Seer; five grains of opium contract – and give a dead-alive, stupidly-innocent appearance” (11). Clay thus renders Holmes’s traditional methods of recognition, such as the Bertillon method that relies on ‘fixed’ points of physical appearance like facial features, entirely useless. Indeed, as Pittard makes clear, Clay “presents a significant challenge to criminal anthropology in his changeability” (122) which contrasts with Lombroso’s ideas of the visually recognisable criminal considered in Chapter One. The use of modern scientific methods of detection such as fingerprinting and photographic methods renders detection a more expert skill than ever before and signifies an upscaling of the ‘game’ between criminal and detective in which visual recognition alone is no longer enough. Allen’s use of scientific theories and his portrayal of the polymorphic criminal Clay undoubtedly challenges the assumption that criminals were of a biological or physical type.

These physically invasive or extreme measures are only used by the male characters, though the females change superficial aspects of their appearance such as dress or wear wigs they are given additional ‘powers’ of disguise in the form of feminine wiles which can be used to manipulate and charm their way into their victim’s domain. Charles Vandrift for example is reluctant to believe Mrs Clay guilty of her crimes, partly because of her gender since he “will not lightly swear away any woman's character” (167) and partly because he is beguiled by the beauty of “that clever and amusing and charming little creature” (168) regardless of her persona, echoing the high regard shown for the beautiful criminals Madames Sara and Koluchy in chapter one. Vandrift is an exponent of an earlier view which Veblen aligns with barbarian cultures in which women are seen as a commodity owned by men and as Clay/Finglemore’s wife Vandrift suspects that “she may have acted implicitly under his orders” (168). The Married Women’s Property Act of 1882 further renders Vandrift’s view as outmoded while the mutual complicity

of Picardet and Clay to imitate and emulate suggests a shared vision of modernity in which they act as equals to critique “Sir Charles Vandrift’s obvious dishonesty” (179).¹²²



Figure 26: Well-dressed White Heather/Madame Picardet removing the cufflinks from her Curate husband's cuffs in "The Episode of the Diamond Links." *The Strand Magazine* Jul-Dec 1896 Xii, 115. Via Internet Archive Online, web. Sourced 1 Sept 2016.

Whatever her disguise, she always appears impeccably and fashionably dressed [Figure 26], appearing as Madame Picardet in “a neat tailor-made travelling dress” (9) and gloves and “charmingly got up in the neatest and

completest of American travelling-dresses” (135) as Mrs Quackenboss. She uses her outfits to illustrate her status as a stranger (by their explicit description as travelling outfits) and her intention to move on, and her removal from manual labour or the domestic sphere. Unlike Carne, Clay or even Holmes, Picardet does not need to emulate a particular class, profession or subculture so long as she appears respectable, exploiting Charles’s expectations of femininity and her charm to beguile Charles Vandrift so that he “was always that disguise’s devoted slave from the first moment he met it” (168). The donning of middle-class identities allows her to move freely within circles that possess sufficient wealth to make the frauds worthwhile without raising undue suspicion that she may court should she pose as an aristocratic or upper-class woman.

¹²² See Gary Hoppenstand’s introduction for further discussion of the series as a critique of capitalism.

Accomplished Accomplices: Keeping Up Appearances

Picardet's mastery over Vandrift and her equality with Clay challenges the conventional notion of women's subservience to men as she plays an equal part in the scams, appearing not as the manly New Woman figure that epitomised the fin de siècle but as a quietly subversive modern version of the angel of the house, beautiful, feminine and charming in every way, particularly in her faultless appearance. Her subtly respectable sartorial code gives credit to her husband by illustrating her status within the leisure class (her clothes not being designed for manual labour) without displaying conspicuous consumption to a vulgar or tacky degree, suggesting that in all her guises Picardet is willingly passive in terms of high fashion in order to avoid drawing excessive attention to herself. Simmel's inference that "sensitive and peculiar persons" use fashions as "a sort of mask" (142) is ironically accurate as Picardet uses "the levelling cloak of fashion" (142), by appearing sufficiently stylish without being outlandish, to hide her true intentions. This function of fashion Simmel scathingly attributes specifically to women, who use dress to "deceive one about the individual depth of their soul" (142), though the stories discussed here illustrate that this gender divide is not nearly as clear cut as Simmel supposes. Clay's frauds are reliant on the accompaniment of Picardet to legitimise his presence as an honest traveller/vicar/academic or whichever disguise he happens to be using because they normalise his behaviour within a society which values marriage as a measure of social and personal success. Their acceptance in society depends upon the coherence of their aesthetic and sartorial standards - they must look as if they are a couple and dress to suit the social subgroup which they intend to infiltrate and act according to their assumed class and status, a co-dependence which renders them as equals.

Clay's reliance on Picardet to affirm his social respectability is diametrically opposed by Trincomalee Liz,¹²³ Simon Carne's female accomplice in *A Prince of Swindlers* who neither looks nor acts according to conventional codes of respectability and with whom Carne never appears in public. She is presented to the reader pointedly in the introduction as "the famous Trincomalee Liz, whose doings had made her notorious from the Saghalian coast to the shores of the Persian Gulf" (21). Like Picardet, she is of non-British heritage, well-travelled, and demonstrates a modern independence and equality with Carne, effected by her financial independence and her liminal social position outside of the established London society. The source of her wealth is unclear and remains questionable though she appears even more affluent than Carne, lending him fifty thousand pounds so that he can steal the Duchess of Wiltshire's jewels to make a profit. Their relationship is evidently close, although the narrator concedes, "to tell in what manner Liz and Carne had become acquainted would be too long a story to be included here. But that there *was* some bond between the pair is a fact that may be stated without fear of contradiction" (22), hinting at a physical relationship between the pair outside of the respectable boundaries of marriage. This is reinforced by the assertion that "those tiny hands had ruined more men than any other half-dozen pairs in the whole of India, or the East" (21), the emphasis on gender implying not only a monetary connotation through men's financial ruin but implying a sexual sense, heightened by her exotic and unorthodox appearance and her unexplained wealth. Her tendency towards conspicuous consumption is clear from the first description as Carne hears her approach

¹²³ Trincomalee is an ancient city in Sri Lanka famous for its port, which boasts a strong international trading history. Liz's birthplace is listed as Tonquin, Vietnam so her name is evidently unrelated to her racial origin, suggesting that this is an affectionate name given by Carne but also emphasising her own role as a commodity and the illicit trade conducted between the pair. Doyle's "A Scandal in Bohemia" mentions a case on which Holmes has been working as "the singular tragedy of the Atkinson brothers at Trincomalee." which perhaps provided Boothby with the inspiration for the name of Carne's co-conspirator. There are several nods to Conan Doyle's detective in both *A Prince of Swindlers* and *An African Millionaire*; indeed, he is mentioned in the opening paragraph of "The Duchess of Wiltshire's Diamonds" as "the late lamented Sherlock Holmes" (27).

by the “sound of chinking bracelets” and sees “a hand glistening with rings” (21) from the sumptuous surroundings of her apartment, expensively furnished in “half European, half native” (21) style. The emphasis placed on the soft furnishings and the comfortable divans scattered about “as if inviting repose” (21) coupled with Liz’s preparation of a hookah for Carne, “its tube curled up beside it in a fashion somewhat suggestive of a snake” (21) completes the depiction of a dangerously exotic siren in her den of debauchery.¹²⁴ Her tendency towards ostentatious possessions appears to stem from her father, “a handsome but disreputable Frenchman, who had called himself a count, and over his absinthe was wont to talk of his possessions in Normandy” (22).¹²⁵ This discredits Veblen’s notion of the “elaborate system of rank and grades” (54) which structure the leisure classes and which is traditionally “furthered by the inheritance of wealth and the consequent inheritance of gentility” (54). Rather than gentility, Liz has seemingly inherited a predilection towards excessive and distasteful wealth that, by Simmel’s analysis, renders her fashionably desirable to Carne since “whatever is exceptional, bizarre, or conspicuous, or whatever departs from the customary norm, exercises a peculiar charm upon the man of culture” (136). Carne’s attachment to her may paradoxically be precisely because she has the wealth to invest in conspicuous commodities; though he pats her “affectionately upon the hand” (24) and refers to her as his “little friend” (26) his visit is evidently for the primary purpose of borrowing money.

Liz’s penchant for possessions appears to be an exaggeration of Veblen’s more traditional notions of acquisition through inheritance or marriage and her power over men is evinced by Carne’s assertion that her “respectable merchant friends will do it

¹²⁴ The scene brings to mind the temple at the heart of the Cult of Isis in Richard Marsh’s *The Beetle* published in September 1897 in which the central character, Paul Lessingham is lured into an Egyptian den and held captive as a sex slave by his female captors.

¹²⁵ The scene echoes Clay’s imposition as a count in “The Episode of the Tyrolean Castle.”

[lend money] for you if you but hold up your little finger” (24). Yet for all her financial power, she is still beguiled by the beauty of goods. Indeed her eyes light up at the mention of the Duchess’s jewels and her voice trembles with excitement, not solely at the thought of its fiscal value but at the prospect that the sale of the stolen jewels will allow her to buy “such jewels, for interest, as no woman ever wore yet” (23) – a clear indication of her intention to wear as well as possess the stones. Her concerns for Carne’s safety and her objection that “it is always the money of which you think” (26) implies that Liz’s involvement in this scheme and others is not solely motivated by money. Evidently, she is driven by an emotional attachment to Carne, reiterated by her jealousy that Carne may “learn to love one of the white mem-sahibs” (25) in place of her. Liz’s relationship to Carne is not commodity driven, she is not attached to him simply because he can make money or acquire possessions but because he has “done wonderful things” (24) by way of criminal schemes. This idolization is also reflected in *An African Millionaire* through Madame Picardet and Césarine’s loyalty to Finglemore/Clay even after he is convicted of his crimes. The attachment of all three women to these criminals undermines traditional notions of marriage and male-female relationships but also suggests a deep-rooted attachment that extends beyond the changing physicality of external appearance and beyond the boundaries of conventional social judgements. This is demonstrated by the final scene in “The Episode of the Old Bailey” in which Césarine and Madame Picardet/White Heather appear dressed all in black “for Paul [...] for our king, whom *you* [Vandrift] have imprisoned! As long as he remains there, we have both of us decided to wear mourning forever” (*Millionaire* 182). Their unorthodox refashioning of mourning garments for a man still living but whose physical presence in their lives is temporarily suspended marks the final revocation of social expectations as they signify their removal from society and from the marriage market by shunning fashion altogether. This touching tribute mourns the loss of Finglemore’s aliases but also

visually illustrates the depth of the relationship between the three, inspiring the usually cynical Vandrift to ask, “if I had gone to prison, would Amelia and Isabel [his sister] have done so much for me?” (182).

Holmes accomplice, Dr. John Watson “assists him in his chief undertakings, and generally plays the part of confidant and chronicler to the absorbed and lonely detective of Baker Street” (*London Quarterly Review* 184). He may be viewed as a more traditional accomplice by the standards of the adventure fiction genre which the stories partly encompass (evinced by the titles of each story) in that the two men work together as comrades using their respective skills and knowledge to solve the cases. Conversely, some scholars¹²⁶ have suggested that Watson constitutes a feminine figure with an overly intense attachment to Holmes that contrasts with the cool rationality of the detective. Gender assumptions aside, it is clear that Watson is intended to be intellectually inferior to Holmes as Knox clearly illustrates in point nine of his decalogue which mark the ten rules of golden age fiction: “the stupid friend of the detective, the Watson, must not conceal any thoughts which pass through his mind; his intelligence must be slightly, but very slightly, below that of the average reader” (195).

In the first of the series, “A Scandal in Bohemia,” Holmes immediately notes Watson’s appearance and infers his domestic status from the appearance of his clothes: six parallel cuts in the leather of his shoes which indicates that the mud has been carelessly removed from them and a bulge on his top hat which indicates the hiding place of his stethoscope. Holmes’s interpretation that “a most clumsy and careless servant girl” (430) has damaged Watson’s shoes and his possession of medical equipment illustrates his social position as a member of the leisure classes, the archetypal well-educated Victorian

¹²⁶ Numerous modern interpretations have depicted Watson as a woman. Malcah Effron claims, “the first recorded interpretation of Watson as a woman appears in detective novelist Rex Stout’s 1941 speech to the New York-based Sherlock Holmes fan group, The Baker Street Irregulars.”

gentleman rich enough to employ a servant yet ordinary enough in appearance to blend in to the background. This is key to his role as the ‘everyman’ character who represents the commonplace standards of behaviour and ‘normal’ levels of observation against Holmes’s almost superhuman analyses. Watson is thus the everyman figure, with whom the average fin de siècle reader could identify and as Clarke notes, “the *Strand*’s contents were strategically designed to appeal to the middle-class, yet aspirational, professional male and his family” (74).

Holmes rarely assimilates with a subculture for an extended period due to the range of cases he covers and the speed with which he solves them (“The Man with the Twisted Lip” is a notable exception to this rule). He is never required to disguise himself amongst the upper classes so does not require an accomplice to validate his social position in the same way as Carne and Clay. However, in the same way as Picardet to Clay, Watson lends an air of respectability to Holmes by upholding sartorial and social standards that help to mitigate Holmes’s eccentricities, though the novelty of Holmes’s profession and his indeterminate class status reduce the social expectations that might be placed upon him in a more established employment. Holmes’s skills of detection mitigate his unfashionable appearance and his usual practice of consulting clients within the boundaries of his own home further permits his casual approach to sartorial matters. Moreover, Holmes does not need or desire to interact with others and he does not rely on his appearance to make money but renders a market price on his services based on his success rate. In this sense Holmes is an exponent of an older generation that values word of mouth and reputation to advertise his skills rather than using modern methods such as the gaudy advertising boards used by Klimo. Holmes’s deliberate shunning of fashionable society and disinterest in commercial enterprises reflects his submersion in his own thought processes which are beyond those of the conventional social body, even though many of his deductions rely on the observations of minutiae and his pre-determined

interpretation of the behaviour of others. Holmes's own dress is rarely mentioned in the stories in any detail and he appears to have a cool disregard for fashionable attire, remaining largely conservative in his dress. Yet his indifference to fashionable clothing is at odds with his knowledge of other consumer goods. He is able to state categorically that "a nice little brougham and a pair of beauties [horses]" (432) would cost "a hundred and fifty guineas apiece" (432), that the cost of repairs to a pipe would far exceed its original purchase price of "seven and sixpence" (679) and that the reward offered for the return of the blue carbuncle is "certainly not within a twentieth of the market price" (545). His knowledge indicates an awareness of commodity culture and compliance within a cultural value index which allows him to understand, if not sympathise, with the needs and motivations of his clients.

His observations see through the facades of advertising, fashion and materialism to observe the "thorough predictability of human behaviour" (Jann 689) on which he relies to solve his cases and outwit Lestrade, a predictability based on group generalisations and statistical essentialism across generations. Watson is aware of his friend's anti-social eccentricities but sees the value of Holmes's talents to the modern consumer marketplace. He observes that some cases "have already gained publicity through the papers [but] have not offered a field for those peculiar qualities which my friend possessed in so high a degree, and which is the subject of these papers to illustrate" ("Orange Pips" 505). His role as biographer provides a useful narrative frame but also indicates the fashionable differences between the two characters as Watson offers a textual self-awareness in which he obliges the fin de siècle consumer clamour for sensational stories "bald enough and vulgar enough" ("Identity" 469) to capture the imagination of the general public.

Dressing for One's Profession: Clothing as Indicative of Pecuniary Class

The duality of Carne and Clay as rogue-heroes, simultaneously socially respectable and reprehensible, apparently conformist and yet teleological follows chronologically in the wake of Holmes, perhaps the most single-minded and Bohemian of all late nineteenth century serialised characters. Holmes's ability not merely to observe but to imbue objects with meaning offered a positive sense of order to the anxious late nineteenth century reader, utilising "reason in a manner magical and adventurous, rather than the purely instrumental fashion that many contemporaries feared was the stultifying characteristic of the age" (Saler 604). Holmes' deductions, like Simmel and Veblen's theories, made sense of the conflicting social signs of contemporary life to create order grounded in the observable and material world. Rather than focussing on reading the social signs of the upper-classes in order to infiltrate them as Carne and Clay do, Holmes's scrutinising eye frequently falls upon the middle and working classes so that he can single out an offender from a seemingly innocuous crowd. Holmes is not looking for the fashionably inclined consumer as a victim or as a sartorial trendsetter himself, although arguably his role within the detective fiction canon did just that, but rather he analyses clothing to deduce culprit and motive, infiltrating the community for a deception of a different kind. From the most insignificant details Holmes can infer employment, location, personal and social habits, identifying the British workman who has lately worked on the gas supply at Watson's abode by "two nail-marks from his boot upon [Watson's] linoleum" (756), the recently excessive writing habits of a client by a shiny right cuff, "the left one with a smooth patch near the elbow where you rest it on the desk" (451) and the "worn, wrinkled and stained" (467) knees of a suspect's trousers which indicate he has been kneeling in order to dig a tunnel into a bank vault.

Holmes's acute observations are not simply a result of visual inference but an extended accumulation of sartorial and social knowledge. His familiarity with the expected dress

of a particular employment, class or occupation highlights the repeated associations between work and wear, which as Clarke suggests, illustrates “a typically Victorian belief in the importance of professionalism and a conviction that to know someone’s profession is to better understand their social and moral status” (96). Holmes identifies the “baggy grey shepherd’s-check trousers, a not over-clean black frock-coat [...] [and] a frayed top-hat and a faded brown overcoat” (450) as the usual attire of the “commonplace British tradesman” (450). The “very shiny hat and oppressively respectable frock-coat” (462) denote Mr Merryweather’s austere profession as bank director and Watson’s habit of keeping his handkerchief in his sleeve is evidence that he has been “accustomed to wear a uniform” (756). As Rosemary Jann points out “Holmes’s sweeping claim that a man’s calling is ‘plainly revealed’ by his fingernails, callouses, and the state of his clothing is clearly much truer of the working than of the middle and upper classes” (691). This renders visual observation, including the interpretation of dress, the product of a society in which class distinctions are clearly defined, distinctions that became increasingly blurred as the century drew to a close.

Indeed, though Holmes’s analyses are commensurate with Veblen’s association between leisure and dress, the class delineation is much less precise than Veblen suggests in his definition of the leisure class, with many straddling the shifting divide between the working and middle classes. Veblen’s categorisations of employments into pecuniary (which involve ownership or acquisition) and industrial strands (which involve workmanship and production) clearly separate the leisure classes from the lower classes with which particular mind-sets and behaviours are associated. Veblen writes that “freedom from scruple, from sympathy, honesty and regard from life, may [...] be said to further the success of the individual in the pecuniary culture” (147), an attitude plainly evident in Allen’s depiction of Charles Vandrift. The final story of the series, “The Episode of the Old Bailey” leaves the reader in no doubt as to Charles’s character. The

judge in Clay's trial sums up for the jury, asking them to disregard "Sir Charles Vandrift's obvious dishonesty," his status as "a particularly shady" millionaire since "even the richest and vilest of men must be protected" (179). His profession as a successful businessman and trader is forgotten in the wake of

the proved facts that Sir Charles Vandrift, with all his millions, had meanly tried to cheat the prisoner, or some other poor person, out of valuable diamonds--had basely tried to juggle Lord Craig-Ellachie's mines into his own hands--had vilely tried to bribe a son to betray his father--had directly tried, by underhand means, to save his own money, at the risk of destroying the wealth of others who trusted to his probity (179).

Though Clay profits financially from his crimes against Vandrift, the reader is encouraged to assume Veblen's point of view by portraying Vandrift as a deserving victim who "prey[s] upon society" and "drain[s] the world dry of its blood and money" (75). Pecuniary employments are vilified as predatory by both Allen and Veblen and seen as "a free resort to force and fraud" (148) blurring the distinction between legal and criminal. Clay's own description of himself as "a Robin Hood of my age" (75) leaves no doubt that the distinction between moral and immoral rests only on the social interpretation of the individual in so much as he constitutes a hero figure for the poor but is perceived as a criminal by the rich. His aesthetic appearance denotes "*prima facie* evidence of pecuniary success, and consequently *prima facie* evidence of social worth" (Veblen 112) but it does not count for moral integrity. Indeed, the same can be said of Holmes as Clarke affirms, arguing "from fairly early in the Holmes canon, Doyle implies that Holmes could just as easily have been a criminal as a detective" (98). The stories all depict a meritocracy that

questions which individuals deserve to have wealth and the nature of such wealth, both pecuniary, emotional and social, critiquing existing value systems in fin de siècle society.

Clay's employment class is both pecuniary and industrial and it is this simultaneous effort, both manual labour and intellectual design, which moderates his dishonest actions to allow the stories to entertain without the threatening aspects of his crimes unsettling the reader. Formerly a "maker of wax figures to the Musee Grevin"¹²⁷ he evidently manipulates his skills and workmanship to make his disguises, artificially elevating him from the industrial class to the leisure class, reinforced by his pecuniary gains such as the five thousand a year he declares in "The Episode of the Drawn Game" to be "clear profit of my profession" (74). His flagrant admission of the success of his swindles echoes that of Klimo who ostentatiously shows that he "made his profession pay him well" (27) by his conspicuous consumption of expensive property and liberal expenditure on advertising. However, like Clay his motives are not entirely mercenary as evinced from "the glow of virtue as he remembered that he was undertaking the business in order to promote another's happiness" (96) in 'A Service to the State' in which, as Klimo, he uncovers a Fenian plot to bomb London. Resolving to "play policeman and public benefactor" (90) he obtains "a police inspector's, a sergeant's, and two constable's uniforms with belts and helmets complete" (90-91) in which he and his accomplices can disrupt the conspiracy. Not wishing to bring scandal upon the female client whose father is implicated in the plot, Klimo does not wish to involve the real police, fortuitously allowing him to "reimburse [him]self to the extent of fifty thousand pounds" (90) as a reward for his services through the appropriation of funds belonging to the Fenian Brotherhood. In order to monitor the 'real' criminals Carne poses as an "ascetic looking curate" (91) in a costume so convincing that it "would have been a clever man who would

¹²⁷ Musée Grévin is the French equivalent of *Madame Tussauds*, which opened in Paris in 1882.

have recognised in this unsophisticated individual either deformed Simon Carne, of Park Lane, or the famous detective of Belverton Street” (91). The term ‘unsophisticated’ highlights both the supposed naivety of priests and the comparative ingenuity of Carne/Klimo’s plots and disguises. He subsequently dons the uniform of the police inspector in order to ‘arrest’ the conspirators, effectively deporting them back to America in a supposed plea-bargain which sees the men sign a pledge that they will not return to England, a document which is later revealed to be a cheque for forty-five thousand pounds. The ease with which Carne transforms into Klimo, a priest, and a police inspector before returning home to get “dressed for the Garden Party at Marlborough House” (102) and successfully keeps up the charade of living in multiple dwellings is crucial to his chosen ‘profession’ and to the construction of the fictional plots. It is significant that all of his disguises are of the leisured and upper classes, who “are marked from the inside out, not by what they have done but what they ‘are’. The essence of their moral and intellectual identities is inscribed in their faces, heads, and the bearing of their bodies” (Jann 691). This form of emulation was thought to be infinitely more difficult to achieve than the assumption of lower-class disguises because such signs of class refinement were believed to be inherited rather than taught. Through Klimo/Carne, Boothby offers a critique of the willingness of contemporary society to accept an individual literally at face value providing their class and wealth is concordant with their appearance and challenges ideas of innate class structures. Not only is the definition between criminal and non-criminal fluid and changing, but the difference between upper and lower classes too; social equals are defined by Carne, Clay and Holmes as intellectual equals regardless of their pecuniary status or birth right.

The Fashion for Teleological Drive: Dressing with Intent

Simmel's reference to teleological drive holds the fundamental cornerstone that links all three central characters in the stories discussed in this chapter and for this reason, the term and its application deserve further exploration. In its purest sense, teleology refers to "the doctrine or study of ends or final causes, esp. as related to the evidences of design or purpose in nature" (OED). Simmel's interpretation of the term 'teleological drive' in 'Fashion' suggests a final end or cause which is subject not only to overarching 'natural' influences, common factors which fulfil a customary social pattern which he terms "the socializing impulse" (137) but also the will of the individual, "the differentiating impulse," (137) both of which "are essential to the establishment of fashion" (137). This balance between "socialistic adaptation to society and individual departure from its demands"(131)¹²⁸ is the central antagonistic force which motivates change on a spiritual, economic and material level, including of course in the development of fashionable dress and aesthetic standards.

Final causes are also the principle concern of crime fiction and particularly within the concise narrative frame of the short story, with the individual's drive, their human agency, exerting a threefold influence upon the genre. Firstly, the agency of the criminal, his or her motive to depart from collective ethics of justice and commit the crime that drives the chain of events that unfold in the narrative. Secondly, the agency of the investigator or detective, the motivation to uncover or identify the perpetrator relies on the ability to identify the individual from wider society and, in order to provide a fully satisfying resolution, to begin to understand why such social deviance was enacted. Thirdly, the agency of the reader who is motivated to read to the end of the story to discover the final

¹²⁸ Simmel's 1908 study *On Individuality and Social Forms* and *The Philosophy of Money* (1900) further build on this idea to examine social structures as "the teleological chain of means to given ends" (Frisby 190). See David Frisby's *Georg Simmel: Critical Assessments* for a more detailed explanation of these ideas.

cause in order that the mystery or puzzle is resolved and see that social order is restored. This final cause, the imposition of justice and the arousing of a curiosity “which is gratified at the end” (Knox 194) is central to the tenets of crime fiction according to a number of critics including John Scaggs, Ian Ousby, Umberto Eco and Ronald Knox. Knox’s breakdown of the criteria that comprise true detective fiction attempted to garner the principal source of satisfaction that the reader may derive, setting down a host of humorous rules that he deems necessary in order to allow fair play in the game between author and reader, which he suggests defines the genre from a twentieth-century viewpoint. Knox’s idea of an intellectual battle between author and reader reflects the internal battles of the stories themselves such as Clay’s ongoing mastery over Vandrift, Carne’s successful deceptions over numerous members of the aristocratic society and Holmes’s triumphs over the inept police force and the less successful battles with Irene Adler and Professor Moriarty. But the teleological drives of the short stories of the fin de siècle are not as straightforward as Knox implies and “the old familiar tests by which, in the Victorian days, [the reader] used to know the good characters from the bad” (Knox 195) are already redundant, as evinced by the complex ambiguity of sartorial signs and aesthetic judgements shown elsewhere in this study.

Holmes’s teleological drive, as representative of the detective within this chapter, firmly illustrates the capabilities of the individual to distance themselves from the crowd should they choose to, by suggesting that merely changing one’s perception of others can unlock hidden meanings. Holmes’s decoding of common signs relies on stable identities, types and “positive norms of behaviour” (Jann 686) yet all the while he himself breaks these definitions by assuming disguises and false identities, telling falsehoods, omitting information and even breaking the law. Yet his designation as a quasi-superhero raises him above these troubling aspects and the reader is encouraged to perceive his actions as fully justified even where the same dynamics are criticised by Veblen. Social relativity is

thus key to interpreting fashion, which instigates a troubled relationship because perceptions of reputability are closely linked with the visible aesthetic of that moment.

In the crime short stories discussed here, the teleological drives of the central characters indicate a shared belief in the spiritual or intellectual over the material. All three characters are personally driven by the need to establish themselves as professional geniuses rather than being solely motivated by the capitalist concerns which are critiqued to some extent in each of the fictional texts (and also in Veblen's analysis). Sherlock Holmes, Colonel Clay and Simon Carne are all part of a wider society which advocates particular codes of behaviour but they exalt themselves to a position which raises them above trivial aesthetic concerns almost to a god-like status in which they are worshipped by the 'average' individual for their superior knowledge and skills, attributes which cannot be bought and sold on the commodity market. Their desire to achieve greatness is juxtaposed against their desire to bring down others in order to teach a moral lesson and in this sense, their actions exactly match Simmel's description of fashion as a sphere of activity by which we seek to combine "the tendency towards social equalization with the desire for individual differentiation and change" (133). Social equalisation here is based on shared intellectual and moral principles, not on aesthetic or pecuniary standards, reducing fashion to a superficial covering that stands as a metonym for this flux between independence and conformity. It is the internal moral compass of these characters, their personal judgements on what is right and what is wrong which makes them likeable even when they transgress traditional social boundaries including criminal law. The reader's desire to complete the story is necessarily an individual determination, even though it may be influenced (however unwittingly) by the reading fashions, marketing and reception the story receives in exactly the same manner that they might choose dress. Serialised periodicals proffered off-the-peg fiction and clothing within the same glossy leaves and the public outcry for Holmes's revival after Conan Doyle's attempt to kill him

off suggest that conspicuous consumption extended not only to dress but also to fiction at the fin de siècle.

Conclusion

The short crime fiction discussed in this chapter exemplifies and exaggerates many of the aspects that Simmel and Veblen identify as troubling characteristics of fashion, with particular focus on conspicuous consumption, imitation and emulation. By extension, this suggests that crime is potentially just a step away from being socially acceptable, the readers of such fashionable fiction being also the purchasers of fashionable dress and thus partaking in aesthetic practices designed to manipulate, mislead or deceive, from imitation Velveteen to false diamonds. The aspiration to appear to be successful as well as reputable was inextricably entangled with pecuniary concerns, hyperbolically exaggerated through the fashionable London figure of Simon Carne who appears to be charming, successful and well-bred but in fact holds his fellow 'equals' in contempt, successfully deceiving them through his fashionable superpowers as Klimo, Boothby's own ironic emulation of Holmes. The crimes themselves are not perceived as the biggest concern in any of the stories here because the cause and reason for the crime is always revealed. It is social and moral injustice that function as the central tenets of the stories, disguised by the superficialities of modern consumer culture and the ambiguity of shifting social codes, particularly concerning aesthetic appearance. As Jann neatly summarises, "in the assertion that class superiority had a biological basis, that social identity was transparent to the trained viewer, that the higher classes could be counted on to police themselves, we can sense many of the insecurities of the late Victorian period" (705). The exceedingly modern deceptions of Clay and Carne and the timeless disguises of Holmes

prove that the reading of sartorial and fashionable codes could be readily manipulated and distorted by those with the teleological drive to do so.

The stories consistently undermine Veblen's association of wealth with reputability in a number of ways. All three characters are reputable, even renowned, for their actions rather than their wealth and their wealth does not dictate their class since they can simply reinvent themselves. However, they must retain a level of affluence that allows them to acquire new disguises easily and permits social interaction within the subculture that they choose to infiltrate. In this respect, they are all members of the leisure class who use conspicuous consumption where necessary, though undoubtedly Clay and Carne take pleasure in the indulgence of luxury goods. On account of their shifting identities, they can siphon off their wealth and shift it from one persona to the next if they choose which allows the transgression of fashion by disguise, though Holmes's disinterest in material goods and wealth suggests he chooses not to be fashionable in his real identity or in his disguises. However, when all three characters are revealed in their disguises, or come to the end of their purpose in a particular identity and thus are revealed as imitators, they simply reinvent their aesthetic meaning and their values (and fashions) are reassigned. It is this shifting aesthetic that renders the stories popular – they retain their mystery and appeal because the reader can never be sure what guise the character will appear in next. In this sense, the characters discussed here and in particular the criminal characters, represent the ultimate in fashionable modernity because they are constantly casting themselves as individuals away from an aesthetic that came before. Their teleological drives to outwit and outmanoeuvre rely upon their ability to interpret and fashion their own sartorial codes that allow them to both assimilate within society and create a reputability that allows them to be accepted within it. They too are dissociated from their means of production when in disguise; they have no real history and must present a visible account that is sufficiently persuasive to uphold their social reputability.

Chapter Five: Anxieties of Crime - Strands, Clues and Narrative Threads

“The webbe of our life, is of a mingled yarne, good and ill together”

(*All's Well That Ends Well*, iv. iii. 74 (1616)).

The first four chapters of this thesis have explored anxieties of reading and misreading dress in the context of a host of social concerns including sex, identity, modernity and gender. In all of these studies, clothing and appearance are interpreted as a system of readable signs that tell the viewer/reader something about the wearer, a system that since the late nineteenth-century has seen numerous attempts at definition by historians, cultural critics and theoreticians alike. Moving on from the works of Veblen and Simmel who explained fashion in terms of economics in the 1890s (as discussed in the previous chapter), JC Flügel explored emotional and cognitive drives behind dress in *The Psychology of Clothes* in 1930. Roland Barthes attempted to define sartorial semiotics from a structuralist perspective in numerous fashion-based essays in the 1960s whilst Alison Lurie's *The Language of Clothes* in 1980 offered a ground-breaking shift towards interpreting dress from a cultural studies perspective. In all of these critiques, dress and clothing are understood in some sense as signifiers, metaphorical representatives of cultural ideas that are read and interpreted by others. This chapter considers clothing as a signifier not simply of cultural ideas but of literary genre, considering how crime fiction is particularly reflective of or receptive to, dress and clothing as signifier.¹²⁹ Though clothing holds signification for the reader in a vast number of ways, some of which have already been explored in this thesis, this chapter looks at ways in which clothing can be encrypted with particular signification in crime fiction, as clue, as red herring and as

¹²⁹ In his “Defence of Detective Stories” (1902) G.K. Chesterton remarks that “popular art in all ages has been interested in contemporary manners and costume” (5) citing the use of modern dress in historical dramas as a poetical interpretation of the conventional tendency towards the romanticism of history. For Chesterton, the rise of detective fiction constitutes a shift towards modern thinking in which detectives are both timeless “agent[s] of social justice” (6) and modern defenders of freedom.

contextual symbol. By exploring the physical basis of clothing and examining semantic links between crime and cloth/clothing this chapter highlights how reading and misreading dress are particularly bound up within the crime fiction genre more closely than any other.

In order to do this, key focus is given to threads, both in their physical form as pieces of unwoven material that form the constituent component of clothing and also as the metaphorical basis for storytelling in the form of narrative threads. Within crime fiction, these two entities are uniquely combined by the use of the clue, a literary device that allows a crime to be discovered and revealed and, as Kate Summerscale points out in *The Suspicions of Mr Whicher* (2008), whose etymological origins reveal the material link. “The word ‘clue’ derives from ‘clew’, meaning a ball of thread or yarn” (Summerscale 68) with the figurative sense of “that which points the way, indicates a solution, or puts one on the track of a discovery; a key. Esp. a piece of evidence useful in the detection of a crime” (OED). The physical and metaphorical interpretations stem from age-old oral traditions passed through generations that rely on both physical properties and the role of threads as signifier (especially of direction) such as the use of threads in ancient mythology.¹³⁰ In the Greek myth of Theseus and Ariadne a ball of thread is used to guide the way through the labyrinth so that Theseus can find his way out again after slaying the Minotaur. Theseus unwinds the thread on the way in to the labyrinth and then follows it back out of the maze to reach freedom and metaphorically free the inhabitants from fear of the Minotaur. Thread also features prominently in the myth of the Three Fates,¹³¹ incarnations of destiny who control the threads of life of mortals. Traditionally the Fates

¹³⁰ In Homer’s *Odyssey*, Phoebe uses thread to delay the narrative as she promises to remarry only when she has finished weaving a shroud which she secretly unravels at night to buy more time. This device allows her to remain faithful and be reunited with her long-lost husband and thus guides her along a moral pathway.

¹³¹ The Fates are depicted in various forms in many ancient belief systems including Greek, Roman, Norse, Germanic and Slavic traditions. They are always depicted as creating, controlling and curtailing threads of life.

are three women who spin, determine and cut the threads of life, bringing together the physical forms of thread and the manufacturing processes with which they are associated with the idea of human life as a defined story, a predetermined narrative that is measured by some external force beyond mortal control. The juxtaposition between physical and metaphorical interpretations or properties in these myths and others underpins the ways in which threads are considered and used within crime fiction as both objects and signifiers and allows for a complex interweaving of interpretation whereby signs are implicit. Such ambiguity of meaning forms the crux of crime fiction – the red herring, the missed clue, the significance of the insignificant – moments whereby the physical object has metaphorical resonance or vice versa, and as such, reading threads both literally and figuratively becomes synonymous with the reading of crime and crime fiction.

Crime fiction has been subjected to numerous attempts to define how narrative threads work and multiple evaluations of what reading clues (as signifiers of genre) and crime fiction more generally should entail. The attempts to define and impose rules, to quantify and analyse the way in which a narrative progresses from mystery to solution is a particular quirk of the genre¹³² that suggests a desire to determine a particular method and to cut and measure the fate of the characters. The definition of successful crime fiction and the formulae for producing it has been the subject of much public debate and the supposed rules for the ideal detective story were ironically codified in 1929 by Ronald Knox in “A Detective Story Decalogue, with the input of many writers who formed the Detection Club.”¹³³ The detective story, he writes, “is a game between two players, the author on one part and the reader on the other part” in which “honourable victory can be

¹³² Though there have been attempts to define the structure of the novel, or more specific types such as the bildungsroman, these types of analyses are rarely prescriptive, more usually offering a reflective or subjective approach.

¹³³ The Detection Club was formed in 1928 by Anthony Berkeley and encompassed many crime writers including Baroness Orczy, G.K. Chesterton and Arthur Morrison who agreed to adhere to a code of ethics which ensured “fair-play” to allow the reader to be able to guess at the offending party. See “The Detection Club Oath” in Howard Haycraft’s collected essays *The Art of the Mystery Story*.

achieved only if the clues were ‘fair’” (195). Though Knox reviews the genre from a twentieth century perspective and with particular reference to the whodunit, his rules highlight the agency of the reader and how the writer’s use of plot and narrative may influence the reader’s perception, even if the Victorian pioneers of the genre were unaware of just how formulaic the genre was to become. The analysis in this chapter uses several critical approaches to crime fiction including Franco Moretti’s essay “The Slaughterhouse of Literature” (2000), that considers how clues are central to the reader’s enjoyment of crime fiction, as well as several of the attempts to produce defined rules of crime fiction such as SS Van Dine’s¹³⁴ “Twenty Rules for Writing Detective Stories” (1928) and Knox’s rules. These critiques are used to consider the role of narrative and clues in popular crime fiction and the way that this is reflected by threads functioning as metonyms. In terms of fiction, this chapter starts chronologically with Mrs Henry Wood’s “The Mystery at Number Seven” (1877), moving on to consider Mary Wilkins Freeman’s “The Long Arm” (1895), Emma Orczy’s “Old Man in the Corner Stories” (first published 1901) and finally her Edwardian tale “The Woman in the Big Hat” (1910), which featured as part of the ‘Lady Molly of Scotland Yard’ series. Though threads may be identified within all genres of fiction and conversely not all crime fiction explicitly references them, this chapter argues that the thread offers a means by which the reader can interpret the crime fiction genre in particular, within a genre that is preoccupied with the visual, signs and reading. Threads offer a device to read crime fiction and as physical clue, they can themselves be read to reveal crime.

¹³⁴ The pseudonym of Willard Huntington Wright (1888-1938).

Linguistic Links within Fiction: Reading Threads

The extent to which sartorial terms permeate our everyday language reflects the history of dress and its manufacture and also the significance of clothing for all social and economic classes. Fashion, for example, might indicate the type and style of dress in vogue but as a verb it also denotes the physical act of moulding or giving shape to something, with the emphasis on human endeavour. While the noun evokes affluence (as Veblen argues), the verb denotes a lower-class association with manual labour.



Figure 27: *Silken Threads: A Detective Story* by the author of “Mr. and Mrs. Morton.” Paisley; London: A. Gardner, 1890. Photographed at the British Library 17 March 2017.

Fabrication originally denoted a process of construction or manufacture but later came to mean the process of making up, inventing or even forging, again suggesting manual labour with more criminal connotations. There is thus considerable slippage of meaning of sartorial terms over time and according to context, and like the ancient myths already considered, literal actions may come to represent a metaphorical function. Threads appear relatively frequently in Victorian fiction in both the physical and metaphorical senses and often, as a mixture of both.¹³⁵ A cursory search for

threads in nineteenth century periodicals elucidates book reviews for Arthur Mursell’s *Bright Beads on a Dark Thread Or, Visits to the Haunts of Vice: Being a Narrative Founded on Personal Adventure Amongst the Criminal Class* (1874), Eliza Lynn Linton’s “With a Silken Thread” (1880), *Silken threads: A Detective Story* (1890) by the unknown

¹³⁵ Perhaps the most well-known of all references to threads in Victorian crime fiction is Conan Doyle’s first novel *A Study in Scarlet* (1887) originally entitled “A Tangled Skein.” Baroness Orczy’s second novel *In Mary’s Reign* (1901) was rereleased under the title *A Tangled Skein* in 1907 to considerably less acclaim than the success of her most famous novel *The Scarlet Pimpernel* in 1905.

author of “Mr and Mrs Morton” [Figure 27], MG Sturge’s “Unwoven Threads”¹³⁶ (1895), Clara Sherwood Rollins’s *Threads of Life* (1897) and Ellen Thorneycroft Fowler’s *A Double Thread* (1899). The titles show that threads are in use as a metonym for life as a story throughout the Victorian period with both the physical properties (“bright beads” and “silken”) and the abstract properties (“dark” and “double threads”) freely interwoven. The metaphorical associations of threads are evidently culturally prevalent but also denote contrasting and sometimes conflicting ideas, Thorneycroft Fowler’s title for example using both the singular “thread” and the multiple “double” rather than “a thread folded double” which is presumably the sense in which she uses the reference.

The crime fiction genre seems particularly suited to this abstruseness and the link between text and textile is illustrated by sartorial/material references that describe or can be fitted to the detection process. Indeed, the short stories considered within this study are replete with references to unravelling,¹³⁷ guiding threads, and strands coming together (including of course *The Strand Magazine*)¹³⁸ as well as more general references to storytelling such as spinning a yarn, cottoning on to an idea, winding up a discourse and following the thread of a story or conversation. The tangible and intangible properties of thread are frequently merged together to create a complex weaving of characteristics applicable to the story at hand and an extended figurative subtext. The material qualities of threads are ambiguous, even metamorphic, creating the ideal basis as a clue within crime fiction. For

¹³⁶ A scathing review of the work in “The Saturday Review” declares that the reviewer is “rather annoyed with the first few stories in “Unwoven Threads.” Stories, by the way, they are not: they are bits of stories or unfinished attempts at them, and that was the reason of our feeling somewhat irritated at their publication. The authoress is palming off as pictures what are for the most part only slight studies for pictures: she begins anywhere, leads us nowhere, and does not much entertain or amuse us in the journey.” (“Unwoven Threads” 196).

¹³⁷ The OED definition of unravelling “To free from intricacy or obscurity; to make plain or obvious; to reveal or disclose” (OED, 1660) affirms the link between threads and the visual, which lends itself to the crime fiction genre.

¹³⁸ The title refers to the bustling London street which provided the headquarters of the magazine, but which also functioned as fashionable centre of commerce and therefore also crime. *The Strand* contained many disparate articles and genres as its predecessor *Tit-Bits* had also done and thus the title perhaps also refers to the magazine’s attempts to draw these pieces together under one cover, a linear thread of format rather than theme.

instance, they can be both worthless and priceless, signifying a dishevelled garment of an unfortunate victim or the unseen mark left by an escaping villain, worth nothing to the average person but invaluable to the detective looking for a clue. A thread is ostensibly worthless until it is spun or woven into a composite piece but holds the paradoxical qualities of both strength and weakness in its unspun form, encompassed in the expression ‘hanging by a thread.’¹³⁹ It may stretch or tangle but requires significant force to break but on the other hand, it is so fine that it can be difficult to see, meaning it may be overlooked by a bungling detective or accidentally left behind by a careless criminal. However, threads rarely constitute a persuasive clue in themselves, being too insignificant and physically difficult to see or conclusively identify as belonging to a particular garment or person. In the short stories considered for this thesis there are no stories where threads are deliberately placed in the same way that we might see a complete item of clothing used as a red herring,¹⁴⁰ though they may function as a minor clue in addition to other evidence. The multiplicity of interpretations renders threads an easily readable sign and yet difficult to decode precisely when situated within a genre that seeks to deliberately obscure in order to propound the mystery element.

Metaphorically Speaking: Threads of Destiny in “The Mystery at Number Seven”

One of the more commonplace linguistic uses of threads is the notion of threads of destiny, well known even to the nineteenth century readers as the anonymous author of “Knots and Threads” affirms in 1897. “We [the Victorian readership] still talk of [...] the

¹³⁹ This reference originates in the legend of Damocles who was given every luxury of a king but above his throne was placed a huge sword hanging only by a single hair of a horse’s tail. The story is a warning against the dangers that accompany positions of power. The myth has been retold many times with a thread in place of the hair, including by Geoffrey Chaucer in *The Canterbury Tales*.

¹⁴⁰ Rosanna Spearman’s petticoat in *The Moonstone* or the dropped handkerchief in *The Leavenworth Case* are examples of clothing red herrings. There are also numerous stories in which parts of clothing are used as potential clue – the ragged trouser ends in Dostoyevsky’s *Crime and Punishment* and the torn piece of cravat in Wilkie Collins’ “The Diary of Anne Rodway.” In the latter, the detective figure perceives that the cravat functions as a clue “like the silken thread that led to Rosamund’s Bower” (148).

thread of destiny, although few of us stop to consider the meaning of the words we utter so glibly” (298). The phrase derives from mythology¹⁴¹ and interprets threads directly as a reflection on human experience:

the thread of destiny refers to a belief of the ancients that the Moirae of fates spun a thread at the birth of every child, and upon this thread the good or evil fate, long or short life, of each individual depended (298).

Here threads are invested with agency to propel and navigate beyond human choice, a perception of world order whereby events are controlled by a predetermined force guided by a non-human hand, with the dichotomy of good and evil reflecting a Biblical influence. This predetermination occurs as both a force of good, propelling the detective to uncover the culprit and as a force of evil, tempting the criminal away from a path of righteousness. In earlier Victorian crime fiction, some detective figures describe being pulled onward by a thread,¹⁴² a sense of impending fate that is inextricably connected with the unravelling of a crime or mystery. The reluctant detective Robert Audley in *Lady Audley's Secret* (1862) for instance tells the victim's sister that he will find him because he “believe[s] it is [his] destiny to do so” (Braddon 160). Mr Bucket the detective ironically carries a “book of fate” in *Bleak House* (1852) that contains evidence that may hang criminals. Maurice Leblanc's short story “Sherlock Holmes Arrives Too Late” (1906) even suggests that the world-famous detective of the title and the criminal turned detective Arsène Lupin met because they were “inevitably destined by their special aptitudes to come into collision” (108).

¹⁴¹ There are multiple recorded sources of this term across the world. Chinese and Japanese folklore refers to the red thread of destiny which proposes that we are connected to everyone we meet by imperceptible strings.

¹⁴² As opposed to a personal desire to investigate or a sense of social duty.

Threads of destiny dominate Mrs Henry Wood's short story "The Mystery at Number Seven" (1877) in which the narrator, Johnny Ludlow,¹⁴³ relates a murder that occurs while he and his family are on holiday in a British seaside resort. The body of a servant, Jane Cross, is found at the bottom of a flight of stairs inside a locked house a few doors along from the boarding house where Johnny and his family are staying. Jane serves as housemaid in the property alongside another maid, Matilda, for whom she is frequently mistaken "for the girls were about the same height and size, and were usually dressed alike, the same mourning having been supplied to both of them" (Wood 91). The women are embroiled in a dispute over the admiration of the local milkman and during a scuffle (and in a supposed fit of insanity) Matilda pushes Jane over the balustrades of the staircase, causing her death. Matilda concocts an alibi that makes it seem as if the accident has occurred while she is out of the house, their physical similarities causing sufficient confusion amongst any witnesses, whilst the rends on Jane's dress and the disordered contents of the house suggest murder. The mystery remains unsolved for over a year until Wood's enterprising quasi-detective Johnny, with help from the milkman Thomas Owen, inadvertently stumbles across the solution to the mystery, employing as he does so a series of thread analogies. "Have you ever noticed," he comments in his role as narrator,

in going through life, that events seem to carry a sequence in themselves almost as though they bore in their own hands the guiding thread that connects them from beginning to end? For a time this thread will seem to be lost; to lie dormant, as though it had snapped, and the course of affairs it was holding to have disappeared for good.

¹⁴³ Johnny Ludlow was a recurrent character who featured in more than 120 short stories from 1868 in Wood's own publication *The Argosy* (no accompanying illustrations were included). The stories are notable for their feminine focus on dress. See my forthcoming article "Emphatically un-literary and middle-class': Undressing Middle-Class Anxieties in Ellen Wood's *Johnny Ludlow* Stories."

But lo! Up peeps a little end when least expected, and we catch hold
of it, and soon it grows into a handful. [...]" (114-115).

The thread is the linear link that connects events, propelling an individual from one instance to the next with an independent agency, a form of predeterminacy that progresses chronologically through time. Threads connect each and every event in human life and dictate a particular order that things happen, an analogy for Johnny's role as narrator in the story wherein he is given the capacity to relay events in the sequence that Wood has decreed, not necessarily in the chronological order in which they occurred. Johnny's reference to the thread being lost, broken or dropped plays on the physical properties of threads as difficult to see, weak or difficult to hold, strangely juxtaposed against the preceding personification in which the end of the thread "peeps up" as if imbued with the ability to detect its own absence from a necessary situation. The progression of the thread into "a handful" marks a curious turn of phrase, an organic transition that fails to agree with either the physical or metaphorical functions of the thread that has been up to this point singular, but now appears to multiply. The fact that the thread becomes easier to handle as time progresses, metamorphosing from single thread easily dropped to a handful over which Johnny has some control and that has a certain agency to expose itself, is illustrative of the notion that the truth will out, a well-known analogy for justice. Johnny's metaphor assumes the unsolved murder to be a tangled skein of thread that fate or providence has placed in his fingers rather than a thread of logic that he follows. This detracts from his role as detective and the notion of the crime story as a game – the discovery of the murderer is an inevitability that requires no assistance from the reader. This reference to threads is one of many in "The Mystery at Number Seven." The analogy continues, using the thread as an indication that a narrative still exists even while it remains inactive:

“Not a single syllable, good or bad, had we heard of the calamity [...] during the fourteen months which had passed since. The thread of it lay dormant. [...] before that visit of mine came to an end, the thread had, strange to say, unwound itself (114-115).

Here the thread transitions from plot (the connection of events) towards narrative (the context in which those events occur). The thread is used to explain the gap in time in the story and Johnny’s subsequent re-involvement in the case, an event which seems to be a miraculous coincidence given the time that elapses between Johnny’s visits to the area. The reversion back to a single thread at the end of the metaphor marks a return to the linear plot, moving away from the banal narrative interlude describing the actions of the family rather than the crime that occurs prior to this metaphor. Moreover, there is an increased personification of the thread as it “unwound itself” that suggests that the crime is becoming more readable and that clues are about to be decoded and revealed. Johnny’s later assertion that “the thread was unwinding itself more and more” (119) confirms this, as if the circumstances of the mystery exist as a metaphorical ball of yarn that he alone is imbued with the power to unravel. This is interpreted by Johnny as “this same thread of destiny” (119) rather than the product of his own thoughts and actions. He is an accidental detective aided by circumstance and as such, belongs to an earlier style of crime fiction preceding the science of detection that marks the peak of Victorian crime fiction in the 1890s.

Wood’s narrative does make use of visible clues to some degree, though these are interpreted instantaneously by a number of different characters rather than miraculous later observations made by one detective figure. A physical piece of material contributes to the solving of the mystery, evincing Summerscale’s point that “then as now, many clues were literally made of cloth – criminals could be identified by pieces of fabric” (68). When Jane’s body is found, “a small portion of the gown-body, where it fastened in front,

[had] been torn away” (Wood 96), immediately pointing towards a violent rather than accidental or natural death. Unravelling the thread of events, Matilda states that following a period of sewing upstairs in the bedroom Jane “just got up and shook the threads from off her gown, and went on down[stairs]” (98), leaving her workbasket upstairs. Jane later returns upstairs to collect the basket at which point she overbalances and falls down the stairs. When the body is found on the ground floor “nearly close to Jane Cross lay a workbasket, overturned, a flat, open basket, a foot and a half square. Reels of cotton, scissors, tapes, small bundles of work tied up, and such-like things lay scattered around” (95). The sewing ephemera is present as a clue that supports Matilda’s story, visible clues revealed to the reader at the same time as the detective figures. It is only when the investigating officer Knapp starts to decode these clues that inconsistencies are revealed, as the missing door key and a torn gown reveal more sinister goings-on than Matilda’s story suggests. Knapp searches the murder scene carefully and retrieves from upstairs “the torn-out pieces [of fabric], to compare them with the gown” (97) worn by the body downstairs. Unsurprisingly, “the pieces fitted in exactly” (97). At this point clothing clearly acts as clue in that it reveals that Jane has fallen from the top of the stairs, fitting neatly not only in the dress but also in the thread of events that the reader begins to unravel. It also exposes Matilda’s fabricated story that Jane “must have gone upstairs again to fetch the basket, and must have fallen against the banisters with fright, and overbalanced herself” (98) since such an explanation would not explain the tears to the body of the dress. But though the cause of death is identified, the coroner, jury and investigating officers are unable to decode all of the clues to establish the events leading to Jane’s death. The loose threads on Jane’s dress are a visual analogy for the failed connections missed by the investigating police in the initial enquiry and the myriad of possible explanations for the death.

It is Thomas Owen the milkman who steps in to take over the role of detective following Johnny's return to London as he endeavours to "do what is in [his] power to unravel the mystery" (117) and to clear his own name from suspicion. His community shuns him because of his supposed involvement in the case and it is this sense of injustice rather than any notion of destiny that drives him to investigate further. The final entrapment of the culprit takes place, fittingly, in a draper's shop where the hapless Matilda has been sent to purchase extra material for a dress. The shop is particularly important because it is an establishment where women were permitted to enter unchaperoned and likely to spend some time, thus the perfect setting for gossiping and revealing clues to the crime, if an unlikely setting for a male detective. Johnny has accompanied the elderly Miss Deveen¹⁴⁴ to the drapers earlier in the story so that she can look at "silks and calico" (115) and thus becomes familiar with the shop wherein he later overhears vital clues. As Miss Deveen trivially contemplates the piecing together of material, Johnny pieces together the clues of the mystery. However, the resolution to the mystery is found in a chance meeting between Thomas Owen and Matilda's family that reveals not only a hereditary trait of insanity but provokes Matilda to the degree that her insanity is triggered, making her disclose the truth during a seemingly lucid moment. This serendipitous coincidence is attributed to the thread of destiny in another mixed metaphor:

The thread was unwinding itself more and more. Once it had begun to lengthen, I suppose it had to go on. Accident led to an encounter between Matilda and Thomas Owen. Accident? No, it was this same thread of destiny. There's no such thing as accident in the world (119).

Here Johnny as narrator proposes that once the ball of yarn begins to unravel, the length of thread becomes ever longer with an unstoppable momentum. Equating the yarn with

¹⁴⁴ Miss Deveen becomes Matilda's employer after the death at Number Seven following recommendation by Johnny's surrogate father, Squire Todhetley. Miss Deveen is evidently well-known to the family prior to this story and no contextualisation of her relationship with Johnny is given here.

clue, his analogy suggests that at some point the clues will always be decoded, the truth will out no matter how much time may elapse. But since the thread of destiny is revealed only to those that choose to unravel it –Thomas Owen and Johnny – and not to the reader, the latter must surely be dissatisfied with the use of the thread metaphor to explain unlikely circumstances. For the reader, this use of coincidence belongs to an earlier class of crime fiction, for as Lucy Sussex points out in her historical analysis of the genre, late Victorian crime fiction generally avoids the use of coincidences and the incredible previously favoured by gothic and sensation fiction, preferring more systematic approaches in keeping with the fair-play rules of crime fiction.

“The Mystery at Number Seven” makes repeated reference to threads of destiny that appear unrealistic against the threads of logic that demarcate the thinking of the *fin de siècle* detective and particularly the Golden Age of crime fiction in the 1920s and 30s. Reliance on non-rational inferences goes against the grain of the rules of crime fiction specified in the twentieth century because they do not allow the reader to have a fair attempt at deducing the answer to the mystery. Point five of SS Van Dine’s “Twenty Rules for Writing Detective Stories” states:

The culprit must be determined by logical deductions--not by accident or coincidence or unmotivated confession. To solve a criminal problem in this latter fashion is like sending the reader on a deliberate wild-goose chase, and then telling him, after he has failed, that you had the object of his search up your sleeve all the time. Such an author is no better than a practical joker (190).

In defence of Wood’s story, though the story features crime at its centre and has since been collected in several crime short story anthologies, it is more in the vein of an adventure story focusing on character rather than plot. Wood’s story, published fifty years before van Dine’s rules, does not endeavour to direct the reader to read clues but

rather to didactically instruct and entertain. Johnny Ludlow is a recurrent character who spins entertaining narrative threads in the pages of a family periodical - he is first and foremost a storyteller rather than a detective. The denouement to the story is reached by a series of accidents and coincidences whose only link appears to be the metaphorical thread to which Johnny refers and the reading of crime consists of following an inevitable thread of destiny. Threads within this story thus function largely as a metaphorical basis to knit together the crime narrative, signifying progression and affirming the resolution as correct – Johnny has unravelled the threads to solve the mystery effectively.

Threads of Evidence: Clues in “The Long Arm”

The importance of telling a story that can be followed by the reader is as much a part of crime fiction as any other genre, yet crime fiction is unique in that it actively encourages readers to follow a particular thread or path through the events that are presented. In the twenty rules given by Van Dine and the ten rules decreed by Knox, the reader’s role is focussed around the opportunity to follow clues: “The reader must have equal opportunity with the detective for solving the mystery. All clues must be plainly stated and described” (Van Dine, [rule 1] 189). The availability of this device became key to the success and popularity of the story as the genre developed, establishing the clue-puzzle, a term used by Stephen Knight, John Scaggs and other critics to discuss the form of detective fiction into the Golden Age. In “The Slaughterhouse of Literature” Franco Moretti concurs, explaining the rationale of using detective stories in his experimental analysis to be “because they possess a “specific device” of exceptional visibility and appeal: clues” (212). Moretti speaks of clues as a formal narrative device whose function “remains constant, although their concrete embodiment changes from story to story” (212). For Moretti, the clue is a measurable, definable entity, often embodied in an object or sensory

snapshot (he gives the examples of words, cigarette butts, footprints, smells and noises) all of which leave some tangible trace of their existence within the story. He goes on to physically count the number of clues in a selection of late nineteenth century short crime stories in order to establish why some texts are successful and still remembered to the present time and why others are relegated to the non-canonical recesses that he terms the slaughterhouse of literature.

Moretti's definition of clues is interesting on a number of levels. He invokes narrative function as their primary existence for which visibility is crucial but, in his allusion to appeal he points to the position of the reader, since appeal is an intrinsically human feeling. Clues must be read visually to have any existence at all within the crime narrative and though they may vary in shape or form, their function remains as a means of displaying information to the reader. Success in the genre, he argues, can be attributed to the clue remaining visible to the reader at all times, having a function within the plot and being "decodable by the reader" (214). Yet this proposal of a code implies one particular meaning can be inferred from a clue, that signifier suggests a specific signified, and a linear thread of meaning between object and subject can be applied to the exclusion of all other possibilities. Should a multiplicity of meanings exist, the reader would not be able to solve the mystery and the detective would be unable to prove their investigative prowess above the 'average' onlooker.¹⁴⁵

The next story considered within this chapter presents physically visible clues which are, arguably, not easily decodable by the reader, though undoubtedly there is increased focus on "close observation and orderly thought" (Scaggs 38), key tenets of readerly

¹⁴⁵ Moretti's observations build on those made by Dorothy L Sayers in "The Omnibus of Crime" (1928-29) in which she identifies three viewpoints for the reading of clues whereby the reader is given varying access to the detective's interpretation – the solution to the mystery. She argues persuasively that "the reader must be given every clue – but he must not be told, surely, all the detective's deductions, lest he should see the solution too far ahead" (97).

participation in crime fiction. Mary Wilkins Freeman's "The Long Arm" (1895),¹⁴⁶ is littered with references to dress, dressmaking and sewing that the reader is invited to interpret as physical clues and to set the scene of the crime itself, a brutal murder committed, unusually, by a female. Threads constitute the first clue discovered by the 'detective,' leading to the identification of the killer, a dressmaker who uses threads to earn her living. Sarah Fairbanks, daughter of the murder victim Martin, predominantly narrates the story as she sets out to discover the identity of her father's murderer. Under suspicion herself but released due to lack of evidence, like Thomas Owen in "The Mystery at Number Seven," Sarah is compelled to turn detective as a means of clearing her name and absolving blame. She embarks on an especially visual method of detection and resolves to "make an exhaustive examination of the house, such as no officer in the house has yet made, in the hope of finding a clue" (Wilkins Freeman 147). With assistance from a professional detective she has employed, Sarah discovers that her father was formerly betrothed to their neighbour, Maria, but was prevented from marrying her by the domineering dressmaker Phoebe Dole¹⁴⁷ with whom Maria lives and works. After a forty-year separation, Martin and Maria rekindle their romance in secret and plan to marry at last. Phoebe becomes enraged at the prospect of being abandoned by Maria, breaks into her neighbour's house in the dead of night and stabs Martin to death with her dressmaking shears. She covers up the crime but is forced to confess when Sarah and the detective follow a series of clues (as Sarah explicitly calls them), including discarded threads, lost buttons and a dropped ribbon, that unequivocally reveal Phoebe's guilt.

Unlike Johnny Ludlow, Sarah has a personal interest in the case that motivates her to expose the truth; she is not driven by destiny but by an individual motivation to seek

¹⁴⁶ "The Long Arm" first appeared in the August 1895 issue of *Chapman's Magazine of Fiction* and marks Wilkins Freeman's first foray into detective fiction.

¹⁴⁷ The name itself has some significance - dole can mean both "to pare and thin (leather or skins) in glove manufacture" (OED, 1884) but also refers to the state of being divided, grief, sorrow, distress, guile, deceit and fraud.

justice for her father and herself. Sarah's eagerness to clear her own name instigates her exhaustive search of the crime scene, dividing the floor space into geometric squares in order to provide a systematic method for discovering clues that may lead to the identity of the killer. Her method is indicative of the algorithmic logic device of Ariadne's thread, the solving of a problem with multiple apparent means of proceeding - such as a physical maze, a logic puzzle, or an ethical dilemma - through an exhaustive application of logic to all available routes. Sarah does not assume that there is a clue or clues with the ability to directly reveal the culprit but considers the entirety of the area where the killer must have been to ensure that all possibilities are considered. This process marks the use of the thread as a metaphorical tool to guide Sarah through the process of discovery; a process that the reader can deduce is as likely to move backwards as forwards, following along the linear trajectory of the thread of discovery in either direction. Her method invites the reader to systematically search the scene and invites focus on the things she sees as having the potential to solve the mystery where the previous police searches have failed, setting up any potential finds as both crucial clue and red herring, depending on their subsequent interpretation.

Sarah's first search produced "nothing on the carpet but dust, lint, two common white pins, and three inches of blue sewing silk" (148) and nothing further in the rest of the room except "five inches of brown woollen thread" (148). The listing of the threads within the household detritus suggests their perceived lack of value but crucially Sarah recognises their potential, asserting that "the blue silk and the brown thread are the only possible clues which I found to-day, and they are hardly possible" (148). Though she concedes that the presence of the threads can probably be attributed to having been dropped by a visiting female guest, Sarah's eagerness to continue the search even after such disappointing initial finds indicates the value of the threads to provide momentum to the investigation and her ability to see beyond the threads as domestic ephemera to

consider them as signposts of presence. Sarah applies her domestic skills to try to solve the case, using a brush to sweep the floor not as part of her usual duties but with a more typically masculine intent to solve the mystery. There is a sense that restoring order to the household reveals the disorder, as if cleaning up the dirt reveals the unwritten sign of the killer that in turn restores some sense of order to her chaotic circumstances. Domestic tasks are transformed from daily chores into tools for detection, empowering Sarah beyond the potentially limiting walls of the home and allowing Sarah to enact a practical activism towards uncovering her father's murderer.

Yet though Sarah visually identifies the threads, she is unable to determine that they are relevant to her investigation or to read "the encrypted reference to the criminal" (212) that Moretti identifies as the narrative function of the clue. It is the male detective Mr Dix, called in once Sarah has completed the visual search, who establishes their significance thanks to his serendipitous stay in the home of the murderer. Just as Sarah laments the progress of the case, Mr Dix "produced an envelope from his pocket, and took out a little card with blue and brown threads neatly wound upon it" (158) that he had found in Phoebe Dole's piece-bag.¹⁴⁸ "He had a number of pieces of blue sewing-silk and brown woollen ravellings, [that] matched [those that Sarah had found] exactly" (158) a circumstance that when considered alongside other circumstantial evidence places Phoebe at the murder scene. This discovery, which falls in the last paragraph before the section entitled "The Revelation," signifies the anagnorisis of the plot, the moments the threads of the story come together and where Phoebe's deception and her life-story start to unravel. The fact that the matching threads are visible as clues only to Mr Dix and not to Sarah or the reader restricts the interpretation of the physical threads. Dix has determined that they match and presents them as evidence accordingly, neatly winding them on a piece of card to

¹⁴⁸ *U.S.* a bag for holding pieces of cloth (OED, 1863).

represent the orderly precision with which he can present the clues to Sarah as the definitive conclusion to the case. For Mr Dix, the threads can signify only one signifier: that Phoebe is the murderer. Threads here constitute the third stage of Moretti's analysis whereby "clues are present, they have a function, but are not visible: the detective mentions them in his explanation, but we have never really "seen" them in the course of the story" (214). Though we have seen the threads on the floor, Phoebe's piece bag containing the matching threads is not visible, removing the possibility of Sarah or the reader from interpreting the threads as a physical clue. This is not wholly satisfying for the reader since fair play rules determine that "the detective must not light on any clues which are not instantly produced for the inspection of the reader" (Knox, [Rule 8] 196) and in Moretti's analysis, this constitutes part of the reason that stories exhibiting this trait are confined to relative obscurity.

Indeed, in this sense the story does not employ the fair-play rules of crime fiction since Mr Dix's opportune hostelry is not the only lucky coincidence in the narrative. As the only dressmaker in the area it seems fortuitous that there are so few types of thread in Phoebe's piece-bag as to be able to provide a match with ease and that she should have had these threads about her person when carrying out a murder that is clearly pre-meditated. In fact, alongside the five other key pieces of evidence laid out by Mr Dix, the threads provide the weakest basis of guilt, suggesting that their role within the story is beyond their physicality and points towards a metaphorical function, illustrative of the importance of seeing not simply as a sensory function but as an assessment of value. This is reinforced by Mr Dix's successful interpretation where Sarah was unable to make a deduction – Mr Dix is able physically to piece together the threads because he has the freedom to explore his surrounding area and is not constrained by the limitations of domesticity or gender. Moreover, his experience with detection has taught him that "crime has no sex" (Wilkins Freeman 160) and thus he regards everyone as a possible

suspect, whilst Sarah is unavoidably affected by her circumstances and the inexperience that blinds her from viewing the helpful dressmaker as a possible suspect.

Mr Dix's reading of the threads as crucial clues puts him firmly in charge of the investigation even though it is Sarah who amasses all of the physical objects and collates all of the information that he needs. Dix, like many of the new breed of Superdetectives in the 1890s, "needs unintelligible clues to prove his superiority [since] decodable clues create a potential parity between him and the reader" (Moretti 216). That Dix does not physically retrieve the items from the floor further illustrates his superiority over Sarah; it is Sarah who finds the threads, literally and figuratively, but Dix who turns them from useless objects into useful clues. The threads are metonymic of the discovery process in that they are useless until decoded but also represent the transition of thought that must take place in order to invest them with purpose.

The obvious differences in the ways that Sarah and Mr Dix interpret the threads brings into question the notion of gender. Threads are traditionally associated with women's work: "spinning and yarning [...] are, of course, the traditional functions of women"¹⁴⁹ (Cunningham 356) reinforced by the women featured in the Greek myths discussed at the beginning of this chapter. Storytelling and detection however, are arguably more closely associated with men; "spinning a yarn" is nautical slang that describes male sailors telling "their famously tall stories of far-fetched adventures" (Cunningham 356) while the first detectives in both fiction and reality were men.¹⁵⁰

The four authors discussed in this chapter are unintentionally all women (the stories were selected because of their focus on threads), perhaps indicating an unwitting penchant for

¹⁴⁹ See Valentine Cunningham's definition of yarn for a comprehensive analysis of the "tricksy ways of language and text" (365) in relation to the term and early derivations of connected terms.

¹⁵⁰ There is some critical debate as to the first detective figure in fiction, with Inspector Bucket in *Bleak House* (1853), Edgar Allan Poe's *Dupin* (1841) and even Wilkie Collins's Seargent Cuff from *The Moonstone* (1868) all proffered as candidates. Eugène François Vidocq is also claimed as an early detective and straddles the line between real and fictional, his real-life exploits as criminal and investigator apparently providing the source for numerous fictional characters.

threads and thread-based analogies in female writing, though such trajectory is beyond the scope of this chapter. It is notable that men derive the critical rules for detective fiction, even though female writers including Agatha Christie, Dorothy Sayers and Margery Allingham, heavily influenced crime writing during the Golden Age (when these rules were written). Though women are culturally associated with the fripperies with dress and with many of the manufacturing processes that produced them (usually involving threads), the ability to read, interpret and decode these items becomes primarily a male domain as soon as they take on the role of clue within crime fiction.

Narrative Threads: Unravelling Mysteries in the “Old Man in the Corner” Stories

In terms of gender, the fair-play rules of Knox and Van Dine do not differentiate between readers - men and women are equally accepted as consumers of crime fiction by the late 1920s and thus may be considered equally as capable of reading clues. Either this seems to suggest that disparity in interpretation of clues that exists between Sarah and Mr Dix is solely a fictional divide or that the gap has lessened as the genre progressed in time. However, the gender imbalance is partially upheld by Baroness Emma Orczy’s innovative armchair detective, the unnamed “Old Man in the Corner” in his relationship with his ‘Watson’ figure, an unnamed female journalist who appears either unwilling or incapable of interpreting clues in the same way as the detective. The stories do not feature threads but pieces of string which function as a masculine version of the thread, giving direction and creating a wider ‘fabrication’ but also offer a means to visualise the crime narrative. The stories first appeared in 1901 in *The Royal Magazine* and ran in serialisation in various periodicals including the *London Magazine* and *Hutchinson’s Magazine* until 1925.¹⁵¹ They feature an amateur detective figure who solves a variety of high-profile

¹⁵¹ There is considerable narrative shift between the original periodical publications of these stories and the later collected versions in that the female journalist (unnamed in the originals but later called Polly in the collected stories) is deprived of her narrative voice in the collected editions in favour of an omniscient

crimes from the comfort of an ABC teashop armchair in Norfolk Street, London. The female journalist narrates each tale in the original magazine and every story follows a similar pattern with the detective's prop, a piece of string, functioning as a signifier of multiple clues and of the broader narrative. The Old Man reads the details of the latest unsolved crime in the newspapers and acquires additional evidence by obtaining photographs and attending trials or inquests. Through these media, he gleans enough information to derive a plausible solution via his own logical deductions, fiddling incessantly with his habitual piece of string as he does so. The stories culminate in the Old Man listing a series of points to illustrate his deductions to the journalist and tying a

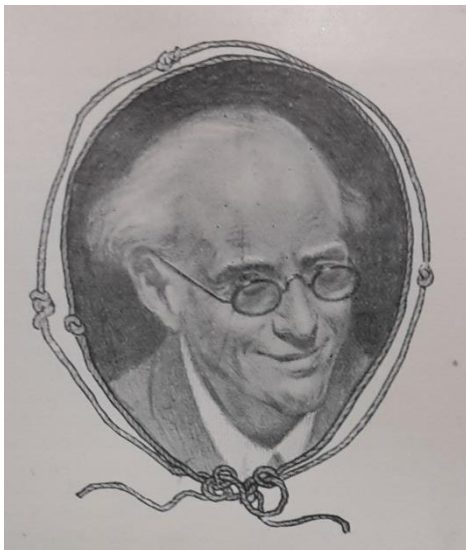


Figure 28: *The Old Man in the Corner*. Illustration by P.B. Hickling from "The Glasgow Mystery" *The Royal Magazine*, Apr 1902, 505. Photographed at The British Library 17 March 2017.

knot in the string at each decisive conclusion with which she can follow his line of reasoning. The Old Man posits his theories as the only possible solution to the mysteries and takes great pleasure in his intellectual triumphs. Though it is not explicit that the journalist publishes his theories, there is a sense that she is reliant on him to decipher the clues, though the gender imbalance is partly redressed by the continual ineffectiveness of the [male] police force whom the Old Man

considers ignorant and bungling.

Whilst piecing together the clues and discussing his ideas with the journalist, the Old Man fidgets incessantly with a piece of string, "his long, lean, and trembling fingers tying and untying it into knots of wonderful and complicated proportions" ("The Fenchurch Street

narrator. There are a number of editorial shifts that potentially weaken the journalist's position. See Rachel Smillie "True Cock-and-Bull Stories: Negotiating Narrative Authority in Emmuska Orczy's "Old Man in the Corner" Tales."

Mystery” 528). As Sally Dugan notes, “the string becomes the Old Man in the Corner’s most distinctive prop – his equivalent of Holmes’s violin – as he ties and unties it in an effort to solve mysteries” (introduction 16). The string is central to his character, even featuring as the frame around his image at the opening of each of his city adventures [Figure 28]. His appearance is eccentric, as Orczy explains in her autobiography *Links in the Chain of Life*:

“The ‘Old Man in the Corner’, as I conceived him, was in no way reminiscent of any other character in detective fiction. I thought of him even before I embarked on that popular series of stories, of him and his big checked ulster, of his horn-rimmed spectacles, his cracked voice and dribbling nose, but above all of his lean, bony fingers, fidgeting, always fidgeting with a bit of string.” (Book V Chapter XI, n.p).

His habit of playing with a piece of string brings together the feminine sense of spinning with the more masculine associations of crime storytelling¹⁵² to produce a unique detective figure for whom the thread/string metaphor signifies a host of thematic and formal concerns in relation to interpreting threads as a signifier of genre. The narrative structures of these stories are central to the notion of the string as both a semantic and physical link as the various narrative threads offer different versions of events, questioning the reliability of the information the reader learns about the crime – metaphorically stringing the reader along through the Old Man’s storytelling. Indeed, as Michael Dirda has argued, the stories are noticeable for the distance between the protagonist and the reader; they are “pure puzzles, The Old Man in the Corner mysteries

¹⁵² The Old Man’s methods are certainly more passive than that of the traditional male detective and in his tendency to exaggerate or draw out stories unnecessarily, his narrative style lacks the definitive masculinity that can be observed in other detective figures of the time such as Martin Hewitt (Arthur Morrison’s detective who first appeared in 1894) and Max Carrados (Ernest Bramah’s blind detective who first appeared in 1914).

are all the more enjoyable for eschewing any emotional involvement by the reader” (33).

The string illustrates how the reader is kept at arm’s length from the solution to the mystery because the clues it signifies can only be fully interpreted by the Old Man.

As an armchair detective, the Old Man’s role is more complex than that of the straightforward Victorian detective characterised by a discerning eye, an ability to decode clues and a network of hidden resources. He does not discover new clues but merely rereads those already in existence and then rewrites the resulting narrative, using newspapers, the police, overheard conversations and visually reading the faces of victims/defendants in court as his base accounts. These various narrative threads offer different versions of events that are interpreted by the Old Man and then relayed to Polly, making it exceedingly difficult to establish the reliability of the information the reader learns about the crime since it has been subjected to multiple distortions along the way. The ambiguous storytelling is further complicated by the recurrent use of first-person narrative so that the crime story is related by the characters involved as if the reader is directly witnessing events. Each source lays claim to narrative truth, with the police actively feeding the newspapers with information about the crimes making them a credible source, the witnesses on trial or at inquest having formally declared to utter the truth on oath and newspapers imbued with a nascent reliability as a factual-based source that is however offset by their reputation for sensation. At the heart of all these stories sits the grand storyteller, the Old Man, who claims that he “can of course, give a far clearer account than the newspapers have done” (“Lisson Grove” 93) even though much of his information derives from that same source, laying claim to a superior sense of reliability and trustworthiness in his version of events. However, reliability is not always the most desirable attribute for the reader. Polly prefers to hear the Old Man’s version of events, confessing in “The Lisson Grove Mystery” for instance that she “did not study [the crime]

in the papers because [she] preferred to hear [the Old Man] tell [her] all about it” (93) thus she actively chooses the narrative thread that she wishes to hear.

The reader must unpick the threads of narrative within the story to establish if the resolution to the case is reliable and to gather who exactly is telling the truth. All the while, the Old Man fiddles with his piece of string, an object physically made up from entwined threads. The string represents the multiple narrative layers in the stories and the progression through these narratives whereby the reader attempts to identify the one defining thread that conclusively unravels the mystery. These multiple versions convey a palimpsest of the same story that is written and subsequently read in different ways and with completely different agendas in view: the newspapers wish to sell stories, the Old Man wants to flex his intellectual muscles, and the journalist wishes to be able to see the truth for herself. In terms of the crime fiction genre at the turn of the century, this approach is unusual given that the reader does not follow material clues in the traditional sense, nor indeed does the detective figure. Instead, the Old Man tends to reveal immaterial clues such as character traits and behaviour patterns to assess the ideological motivation behind each crime and thus collate circumstantial evidence that though compelling, is far from conclusive. The clues are only as visible as the knots on his string. He admits that he tries “to reason out a case for the love of the thing” (“Fenchurch” 533) rather than for the good of society and confesses to having a respectful admiration for many of the more cunning villains. The Old Man’s illuminative solutions lend an ekphrastic dimension to the cases as the crimes are given a sense of skilled accomplishment that blurs the boundaries between the facts of the case and the Old Man’s own interpretations and embellishments. The lack of moral or judicial resolution at the close of each case leaves both Polly and by extension the reader “wondering, not knowing what to believe” (“Underground” 237) as



Figure 29: *Impossible he retorted, making an elaborate knot in his bit of string.* Illustration by P.B.Hickling from *The Case of Miss Elliott and Other Tales*. London, T Fisher Unwin, 1905. 24. Photographed at The British Library 17 March 2017.

the Old Man's theories consistently remain unproven though he is unwavering in his own beliefs [Figure 29].

The Old Man's methods are as unorthodox as his piece of string, yet they strive to produce a linear chronological sequence of events that, with a few knots along the way, can explain the baffling scenes at the beginning of the story. The notion of threads as a metaphysical means to navigate through the plot and reach the final denouement is an established trope in detective fiction, utilising earlier associations of threads of destiny such as

the myth of Theseus and Ariadne, alongside Victorian ideals of scientific deduction and visual truth. As Sherlock Holmes says in Arthur Conan Doyle's *The Hound of the Baskervilles*:

We hold several threads in our hands, and the odds are that one or other of them guides us to the truth. We may waste time in following the wrong one, but sooner or later we must come to the right (93).

His reference indicates the existence of metaphorical threads that the detective must physically follow or read to reach a conclusion, assuming that there is only one correct thread and thus one correct reading, extending the idea of the signification of a single clue to a series of clues. This affirms the role of the detective as super-reader; an individual invested with special abilities to read and decode where others have failed - a talent which directly contrasts with the threads of destiny seen earlier in this chapter.

While the string functions as a metonym for the narrative layers that make up each crime story, it also offers a visible illustration of the Old Man's own storytelling, appearing to some degree in almost every story and always subject to some form of manipulation by the Old Man. This manipulation shows the twisting, bending and distortion of a thread that overtly illustrates the Old Man's self-conscious role as storyteller. For the Old Man evidently is fully aware of his role, confessing that he is "waxing melodramatic" ("Underground" 222). Moreover, in response to Polly's suggestion that he has "some cock and bull story" to explain the events of "The Edinburgh Mystery" he complains that Polly is always "fully prepared to pooh-pooh [his] arguments, and to disbelieve [his] version of the mystery. Such is the lady journalist's mind" ("Edinburgh" 283). Yet she continues to seek out his ideas and thus the string symbolises his control over the narratives, over Polly and over the reader. He uses the string to enhance the stories, deliberately keeping Polly in suspense and using it to imply that there is more narrative to come. In "The Fenchurch Street Mystery," for example "he made a long pause, keeping the girl on tenterhooks. He had fidgeted with his bit of string till there was not an inch of it free from the most complicated and elaborate knots" (538) – knots that reflect the complexity of the case to the puzzled outsider. He is thus aware of his power over the entranced listener Polly who is captivated by his stories. Their relationship is undoubtedly an unusual one, with a persistent tension between their own ways of reading events and reading each other pervading every story, a tension that is to some extent visible in and mediated by the piece of string. Polly gives the Old Man a piece of string in at least two stories as "an adjunct of thought" in an effort to compel him to continue his narrative and in doing so takes a degree of control over the unravelling of the mystery. As Rachel Smillie points out, without the piece of string "the Man is rendered mute" (53) and thus Polly's manipulation of the string device "reposition[s] her as instigator of, if not collaborator in, the Man's narratives" (54). In "The Theft at the English Provident Bank"

this form of narrative manipulation by Polly takes on an almost amatory tone, indeed “she positively thought that he blushed” when she “drew from her pocket a beautiful piece of string and handed it to him.” The Old Man’s reaction indicates a certain private shame at his peculiar habit:

He looked at the invaluable toy which the young girl had tantalisingly placed close to his hand: then he forced himself to look all round the coffee-room: at Polly, at the waitresses, at the piles of pallid buns upon the counter. But, involuntarily, his mild blue eyes wandered back lovingly to the long piece of string, on which his playful imagination no doubt already saw a series of knots which would be equally tantalising to tie and to untie.

His absurd desire for the string not only accentuates his eccentricity but also infers social awkwardness reflected in his guilty look around the tearoom as if he is aware that his behaviour is in some sense inappropriate, reinforced by his preference for frequenting a tearoom traditionally known as a safe meeting place for unchaperoned women. There is something almost fetishist about his urge, a pseudo-masturbatory act as he fiddles incessantly with the string while exerting control over the narratives and over the woman who sits in front of him. The string is not just an outlet for his intellectual capabilities but provides stimulus, a motivational drive to continue his analyses that significantly relies on “playful imagination,” focussing on what is not seen, as opposed to the keen eye of the traditional fin de siècle super-detective.

Unlike Mr Dix, the Old Man is not engaged in paid employment and does not solve the mysteries for public gain. His efforts are in a sense worthless because they are never used for greater good but merely to inflate his sense of superiority over the police, the journalist and the general public including the readers themselves, since many of the clues he decodes are said to be found within the pages of freely available newspapers. By changing

the physical form of Ariadne's thread, a marker of a woman's productive industry in the original myth, to an unremarkable and useless piece of string, Orczy turns the myth on its head. The Old Man has the string in his pocket as a symbol of his eccentricity, a nod towards the balls of string held in the pockets of naughty schoolboys and a sign of his unwillingness to contribute towards a greater social good since the string is not long enough to be of any use. Whereas string typically serves a functional purpose to tie something up, secure or restrain, the Old Man's string functions only as his plaything, it never reaches its full potential, echoing the resolutions to the mysteries that the Old Man reaches. Yet though he is not doing anything physically productive with the string he is simultaneously extraordinarily intellectually productive. Even though there is no formal justice, the perpetrators are not apprehended through his resolution of the case and the victims cannot be saved, there is a sense of satisfaction for the reader that the mystery can be solved. The Old Man's "inevitable bit of string" ("The Glasgow Mystery" 247) is not simply inevitable as a customary habit but because it is a crucial part of the problem-solving process. It also signifies the progression of the case, the Old Man's thinking process and the certainty that the case can be solved – the piece of string is finite and once the Old Man has knotted it to the end, the case must be complete. A simple thread has the potential to become a complex construct, a metaphorical representation of the real-life complications that might lead an individual to crime but also of the way that the reversal, solving the crime, requires skill and patience. As Summerscale states simply, "a plot was a knot, and a story ended in a 'denouement', an unknotting" (68). The string draws attention to the conventions of the crime fiction genre, to the thread of the plot that, with a few knots along the way, indicates a progression towards the denouement and final resolution. The string gives the Old Man, the journalist and the reader a linear pathway through a chaotic series of actions and events, each knot reinforcing the Old Man's progress and marking his own unique pathway towards resolution. This is juxtaposed

against the female journalist who cannot read the clues independently and the bungling police who are never able to find the coherent thread of the mystery.

In one particular Old Man in the Corner story, the string also functions as clue in a similar sense to the threads in “The Long Arm” but crucially, the female journalist, rather than the male detective, makes the interpretation. “The Mysterious Death in Percy Street” relates the unexplained death of Mrs Owen, caretaker of a block of artist studios who is found dead in her room with a wound to the back of her head. Her body is found lying on the floor in just a nightgown, half covered by the drifting snow blown in through the windows that are found to have been tied up by their sash cords. Her cause of death appears to be exposure rather than from the wound and there is some dispute in the newspapers as to whether the case is one of accident, suicide or murder. A young artist with whom she has recently been closely acquainted is considered a prime suspect for her murder, but a firm alibi sees him acquitted of the crime. At the inquest, the artist mentions Mrs Owen’s nephew, a wayward individual who sporadically reappears in his aunt’s life to ask for money, but no one is able to corroborate the existence of the nephew. With no firm evidence of motive or suspect and some confusion as to the time of death of the victim, the police are unable to solve the mystery and yet the Old Man is reluctant to offer his theory until Polly goads him into sharing it by insinuating that this case is too complex for him to solve. The Old Man is evidently impressed by the crime citing it as “one of the cleverest bits of work accomplished outside Russian diplomacy” (“Percy Street” 42) and seems to know all of the facts of the case as well as extensive personal information about the victim. He proposes that Mrs Owen has stumbled during an altercation with the mysterious nephew, banging her head on a gas bracket and that the nephew must then have opened the windows to speed up the demise of his incapacitated aunt. The explanation appears credible, providing both motive and suspect and yet the conclusion to the story differs from all of the others – Polly has a compelling sense that she knows

more about the crime than the Old Man though she struggles to recollect the clue that she has discovered. At this point, the tables are turned. The Old Man fiddles with the string throughout the story, as per his usual custom, but in this story, he does not tie knots in the string to show the definitive points in the case. Far from being an aid to assist the Old Man in charting the events of a case so that he can demonstrate his prowess to the journalist who is unable to see, the string suddenly assists Polly to see for herself and unravel the events.

[Polly] remembered that in the illustrated papers photographs appeared of this wonderfully knotted piece of string, so contrived that the weight of the frame could but tighten the knots, and thus keep the window open. [She] remembered that people deduced many things from that improvised sash-line, chief among these deductions being that the murderer was a sailor—so wonderful, so complicated, so numerous were the knots which secured that window-frame (“Percy Street” 58).

The string transforms from a tool for reading crime to vital clue; the Old Man’s stories of crime have become his own story and the threads of narrative converge into a single piece of string. While he is spinning a story to relate the ‘facts’ of the case she is interpreting the facts for herself at the same time and reaching an entirely different truth. The insinuation of murder is overt:

In her mind's eye she saw those fingers, rendered doubly nervous by the fearful cerebral excitement, grasping at first mechanically, even thoughtlessly, a bit of twine with which to secure the window; then the ruling habit strongest through all, the girl could see it; the lean and ingenious fingers fidgeting, fidgeting with that piece of string, tying

knot after knot, more wonderful, more complicated, than any she had yet witnessed (58).

Plot and character become inextricably tangled and all of the threads of narrative become knotted together as Polly and the reader suspect the Old Man of involvement within the murder. Yet even here, the evidence is circumstantial, nothing can be proved, and the story is left inconclusive, with no police involvement, no public exposure and no moral resolution. Instead, the story ends with a warning from Polly: “If I were you,”[...], she says, “I would break myself of the habit of perpetually making knots in a piece of string”(58). The string that Polly has previously failed to read now narrates a story through its physical presence in the case rather than through the metonymic resonance it holds within the stories divulged by the Old Man. The truth of the case is revealed to Polly in the same way that the Old Man has seen all of the other denouements – she is able to follow the right thread and unravel the mystery.

As Rachel Smillie convincingly argues, “Percy Street” is particularly significant in the way that the Old Man’s relationship with the journalist is terminated in different versions of the text. In earlier editions of the story, the journalist breaks her connection with the Old Man explicitly because of his suspected criminal behaviour. Though the same is true in later editions, Polly is married off at the end, generating the possibility “that Frobisher [Polly’s husband], who has already demonstrated his jealousy of Polly’s relationship with the Man, has established his authority over his wife” (59). In this scenario, Smillie argues, Polly loses the narrative authority which is so closely guarded by the journalist in the earlier versions and creates a more decisive ending with a clear return to order as Polly takes on a more traditionally feminine role and gives up her detective tendencies for marriage.

Although the female journalist in earlier texts is much more active than the later incarnation as Polly, Orczy turns the entire crime fiction game on its head, empowering

the traditionally weaker sex and destabilising the convention of the all-knowing detective. In the process, she breaks the convention that will later be invoked by both Knox (rule 7) and Van Dine (rule 4): “The detective himself, or one of the official investigators, should never turn out to be the culprit. This is bald trickery, on a par with offering some one [sic] a bright penny for a five-dollar gold piece. It's false pretenses” (Van Dine 190).¹⁵³ Orczy intended the story to be the last of the Old Man in the Corner tales and the narrative undoubtedly implies a definitive end to the detective’s career, though Orczy got around this problem in her later stories by setting them chronologically earlier than the events in Percy Street. Notwithstanding the weaknesses brought to the stories by Orczy’s substantial rewrites for the collected editions, “the original Man in the corner tales invite new readings of gender and genre roles, as well as of the reader’s position in the detective narrative” (Smillie 60). Moreover, they take the detective’s clue-reading process and turn it in to a clue for a new, alternative detective to read, suggesting that the single determinate reading advocated in crime fiction is as subjective as the reader is, dependent on the thread of events that one finds most compelling.

Threads of Feminine Intuition: “The Woman in the Big Hat”

The journalist’s suspicion of the Old Man in “The Mysterious Death in Percy Street” stems partly from his behaviour: though she “sees” the fingers tying knots in the sash cord the vision is imagined, a combination of memories of his behaviour coupled with her own interpretation of events. She applies intuition to the visible clues she perceives and deduces a plausible though inconclusive solution. Crucially, clues are here interpreted by a female character functioning as detective, foreshadowing Orczy’s subsequent venture in detective fiction through the female detective *Lady Molly of Scotland Yard* who

¹⁵³ Grant Allen’s “The Ruby Robbery” featured in Chapter One also breaches this rule.

featured in a series of novels and short stories from 1910. One such story, “The Woman in the Big Hat,” offers a useful comparison to the narratives already considered in this chapter because of the emphasis on gender brought about by the female professional detective, bringing to light questions of gender about the way that threads and clothing are read. The story initially seems to follow the earlier style of Wood’s threads of destiny, opening with a direct reference to fate:

Lady Molly always had the idea that if the finger of Fate had pointed to Mathis’ in Regent Street rather than to Lyons as the most advisable place for us to have a cup of tea that afternoon, Mr Culedon would be alive at the present moment (268).

The reference to a “finger of Fate” suggests that events are externally determined, with the capital initial of Fate invoking the Greek myth rather than a generic sense of predetermination. The narrator goes on to describe how the detective “would have anticipated the murderer’s intentions, and thus prevented one of the most cruel and callous of crimes” (268) had she been in Mathis’s, as if the thread of destiny could have been intercepted by her ingenuity had she been in a position to read the clues. Yet the tone of the story is markedly different from that of Wood’s thirty years earlier, giving specific details of names and places that pertain to real-life¹⁵⁴ (the places mentioned would be familiar to many readers) and hints that the information may be useful as a clue later in the story. The reader is encouraged to participate in the story throughout, with the male narrator repeatedly using the phrase “as you know” in reference to details that the reader cannot possibly have known, such as the interior decoration of Mathis’¹⁵⁵ tearoom and the nationality of a fictional aristocrat. The direct address invites complicity and gives the

¹⁵⁴ “The Mystery at Number Seven” is set in the fictional Montpellier-By-Sea.

¹⁵⁵ Though the geographical area, Regent Street, is real, I have been unable to affirm the existence of Mathis’ Vienna Café in this location. Kelly’s Directory does however list Hotel Mathis in Arundel Street in 1884 (still listed in the directory in 1914).

impression that the characters and events featured in the story have been publicly available and well known prior to the crime, allowing the reader to feel as if they are at the same level of knowledge as the narrator. The story is narrated by an unnamed male who is part of the investigating team (he refers to “our men” being present at the scene) and who has some romantic attachment to Lady Molly. He describes her affectionately as “my dear lady” (269) and references her “graceful form” (269) thus reinforcing both her elevated social class and her appropriate display of femininity. The story details a murder that has taken place in the café where a man is found dead, presumably poisoned, having dined earlier in the afternoon with a female companion. The waitresses assume the man to be asleep and fail to realise his situation until after the mysterious woman has left the scene, leading to much speculation among the witnesses about his companion, who is generally described as wearing a large hat.

Lady Molly is explicitly required to investigate the case by the Chief Inspector because she is the same gender as the suspect, with the explanation that “there’s a woman in this



Figure 30: Illustration from "The Woman in the Big Hat" by Cyrus Cuneo from *Lady Molly of Scotland Yard*. London: Cassell, 1910. 289. Digitised via Hathi Trust, web. Sourced 3 April 2019.

case [as suspect], and we shall rely on you a good deal” (270). His statement assumes that Lady Molly can read the clues of her own sex more than could a man, perhaps owing to social codes of propriety that restrict interaction. Her uniformity with the female suspects is shown in the 1910 illustration by Cyrus Cuneo [Figure 30] in which Lady Molly assimilates perfectly with the women around her, even as she casually holds the dying body of the guilty party. Certainly, the process of detection is greatly

assisted by the familiar ease with which she can interview a number of female witnesses and suspects. As Mike Ashley points out in his introduction to Andrew Forrester’s *The Female Detective* “women can get into places that men cannot, as they are not seen as a threat, and [...] women will frequently talk openly to them when they would not speak to men” (Intro ix). Yet there is also a recognition that the male-dominated police force needs the skills of the female detective, particularly poignant given that there were no real-life female detectives at this point, despite the wealth of female detectives that appeared in

the pages of periodicals.¹⁵⁶ This ambiguity is typical of the story as a whole, whereby expectations of femininity and stereotypes of behaviour are used as essential aspects of the plot and yet provide the unique aspect to Orczy's female detective who, by her chosen occupation and public position, transgresses social gender expectations. However, it is Lady Molly's ability to interpret sartorial codes and understand the way that they are understood within the social community she investigates that prove to be integral to the story.

In their attempt to extract information from the waitresses, the male police are baffled by "a great deal of irrelevant and confused information" (269) given by the startled witnesses, suggesting that the women lack the ability to give a coherent account of events, providing a contrast against Lady Molly's later firm resolution to the case. Lady Molly seems to be able to entice a more intelligible response from a waitress who admits that she had not especially noticed the suspect but did note that "she had on one of those enormous mushroom hats; [so] no one could have seen her face – not more than her chin – unless they looked right under the hat" (271). Recognising the importance of the hat as clue, Lady Molly asks the waitress to describe the hat, who enthusiastically describes it as black velvet with plumes, accompanying her description "with a sigh of admiration and of longing for the monumental headgear" (272). Her reaction suggests the clichéd response of a woman of her class,¹⁵⁷ a viewpoint that occurs throughout the story, such as the narrator's assertion that servants will take part in an identity parade because the episode "gave promise of variety in their monotonous lives" (289). However, given that the male police have been unable to gain useful information from the waitress prior to

¹⁵⁶ As shown in Chapter Three, Female detectives making their appearance in this period included Loveday Brooke (created by Catherine Pirkis), Dorcas Dene (George Sims), Hilda Wade (Grant Allen), Florence Cusack (L.T. Meade) and Violet Strange (Anna Katherine Green). See Joseph Kestner's *Sherlock's Sisters: The British Female Detective, 1864-1913* and Lucy Sussex's *Women Writers and Detectives in Nineteenth-Century Crime Fiction* for further discussion.

¹⁵⁷ This echoes the supposition that the maid can be bribed for the price of a new frock in "A Silver Blaze" discussed in Chapter One.

this, it follows that they would not have been able to read the waitress's response in the same sense as Lady Molly and thus the following course of events could never have occurred. This is not a thread of destiny but the following of a specifically female knowledge that allows the detective to second guess the behaviour of other women. Lady Molly realises that the reaction of the waitress can be used to extract information from other women of her class, namely the servants of the household where the suspect resides, and sets up a supposed identity parade to discover the perpetrator. Having already formed a strong suspicion of the identity of the poisoner (the wife of the victim, Lady Irene), Lady Molly visits the family home in order to question the maids who have personal contact with the Lady Irene, and in particular, with her clothing. The maids are told that the waitress at Mathis' has "identified the woman in the big hat who [...] murdered [their] late master" (288) and that in order to confirm this "a certain number of ladies wearing abnormally large hats should parade before the waitress" (289). Molly's comment that she is "sure both these young ladies [the servants] possess fine big hats" (289) is the turning point in the narrative – there would be no reason for working class women to possess hats beyond those required to attend church on a Sunday, a fact that Molly has clearly anticipated will cause a reaction from their employer. Lady Irene is indeed infuriated with the notion, retorting that she "should not allow them to wear ridiculous headgear" (290), inferring that it would degrade their position, prompting the maids to confess that they have retrieved one of Lady Irene's hats from the dust hole. It thus emerges that Lady Irene had worn a large hat on the day her husband was murdered but told the maid "that she would not wear her big hat again – it was too heavy" (290), leading to the maid secretly acquiring the hat for herself.

Lady Molly follows the thread of evidence back from the hat, identifying the hat as a clue that must be read and using her experience as a woman as well as that of a detective to deduce the solution. Whereas the narrator assumes that "a woman [...] had worn a

gargantuan hat for the obvious purpose of remaining unidentifiable” (272), Lady Molly assumes the exact opposite. She realises that Lady Irene has ordered and worn a hat identical to that worn by a former fiancée of her dead husband who has recently had a dispute with him, thereby setting up the ex-fiancée as a suspect whilst also seeking revenge on the husband she despises. Lady Molly “had placed her dainty finger on the real motive and the real perpetrator” (292) from the outset, confirming her detective skills and the significance of clothing as clue. The description of a “dainty finger” serves both as a reminder of cultural expectations of femininity but also harks back to the “finger of Fate” analogy given at the opening of the story, instilling the thread of destiny with a distinctly human influence.

Though all the clues are visible to the reader throughout the story and the reader knows the murderer (the victim’s wife), the final denouement is reached by a blend of logical deduction and a distinctively female knowledge:

Had the mysterious woman at Mathis’ been tall, the waitress would not, one and all, have been struck by the abnormal size of the hat. The wearer must have been petite, hence the reason that under a wide brim only the chin would be visible. [Lady Molly] at once sought for a small woman. Our fellows did not think of that, because they are men (293).

The interpretation of clues requires a working knowledge of ladies’ dress and the ability to consider how others interpret dress. The resolution is dissatisfactory according to two of Knox’s rules: rule six that “no accident must ever help the detective, nor must he ever have an unaccountable intuition which proves to be right” (195) and rule eight that “the detective must not light on any clues that are not instantly produced for the inspection of the reader” (196). ‘The Detection Club Oath’ goes even further and specifically outlaws the use of “Feminine Intuition” (198), suggesting that it must have appeared in a number

of stories as a means to solve the case. The implication is that the reader could only have read the clues in the story and made the correct deductions if they too were female – meaning the guiding thread of the narrative was in fact women’s experience rather than destiny. Despite Lady Molly’s detective work and her ability to competently read the clues that her male colleagues cannot deduce, the denouement of the mystery partly reverts back to the older ideal of fate, as the narrator comments that it was “one of those magnetic moments when Fate seems to have dropped the spool on which she was spinning the threads of life, and [Lady Molly] is just stooping in order to pick it up” (290). This analogy discredits Molly’s talents and her ability to read clues and coupled with the suicide of the murderer prior to her arrest, leaves a dissatisfactory ending for the reader.

Conclusion

The detectives are all able to some degree to spin their own stories, to reveal and withhold information to their counterparts or foils who are usually privy to the same level of intelligence as the reader. Threads offer a linguistic and material connection between these processes by functioning as a clue, as a string of clues and as links between narratives or destinies. The Old Man and Lady Molly evidently enjoy this sense of superiority, withholding information until they are bribed or compelled to reveal it. When there is metaphorically no thread to follow there is no narrative for the reader. The detective figures are spinning a visible yarn, constructing a story that will be splashed across the newspapers in its final resolved state with little or no reference to the threads of logic and deduction that produced the final result. It is the reader that is fascinated, even titillated by the process of unravelling, motivated by the energy expended by the detectives.

The formulaic approach to successful detective fiction through visible clues that Moretti identifies is, he argues, likely to be the result of accidental trial and error on the part of

the author. The Victorian and Edwardian writers would not have identified the clues and the recognition system for clues that Moretti proposes and thus would not have been aware of the key elements to make a story successful because “*they were not looking for them*” [original italics] (215). Citing Conan Doyle as his example, Moretti suggests that clues functioned initially as “a support for Holmes’s omniscience” and were then accidentally refashioned into devices to create plot, with the latter use sustained erratically since they undermine Holmes’s superhuman ability to decipher if they appear too visible within the narrative. This raises a pertinent question: if the author does not deliberately create clues that are visible, decodable and have function because he/she cannot know that this is the desirable formula for successful fiction, what impact does this have on the character/reader of the clues? Does the reader therefore find the function of the clues dissatisfactory and are they merely supplementary details within a story rather than revelatory signs?

Taking the first of Moretti’s points, that clues were initially a function of character, the trace of the thread can again be seen in the form of visual props or associations that link the serialisations of a particular character. The Old Man’s string functions as a visual symbol that testifies to the continuity of the character over a series of stories, the thread that binds together seemingly disparate adventures, the humanising trait that grounds the superhuman personalities within the ordinary Victorian world. In the same sense that threads are part representative of a whole (i.e. they may be part of a piece of cloth) but also self-contained and existing independently, these clues gain metonymic symbolism and contextual significance. The torn cloth of Jane Cross’s dress reveals both her violent death but also the feminine nature of the struggle that is eventually ended in the very shop where one might go to mend a torn garment. The untied string awaits the Old Man’s thought processes, representative of the potential chain of clues that lie in the resolution of the mystery. The big hat does not reveal identity as first supposed but disguises it and

comes to represent the outward showiness of a quietly failing marriage. The interpretation of these clues shifts with the construction and/or deconstruction of the whole and their potential as clues fluctuates according to the context of the preceding story before the clue is introduced as well as the main character's use of the device. The clues as objects all require a degree of sensory perception and imagination on behalf of the reader, an optical consciousness that requires performative reading, to feel the tension in the Old Man's string or to see the potential of the discarded thread Sarah thinks may be a clue. The thread, though seemingly infinite in length when bound up in a ball, always gets to an end eventually if one only has the patience to follow it through, a metaphor for the notion that the truth will out.

The function of the clue in the short story as opposed to the novel is worthy of consideration. Knox posits, "the short story, [...] will ordinarily deal with a mystery of method" because it is "much more difficult to create, in such short compass, a genuine doubt as to the motive with which the crime was done, or the identity of the criminal" (Knox 194). The key component of the form lies in the narrative thread, the plot of the story and the intricacies in how the crime is achieved or discovered. His analysis argues that tangible threads must exist between the reader and the clue revealing process, that there must be a pathway that must be traceable and crucially, that "unaccountable intuition" a term that must surely encompass fate and destiny, must be disavowed. Though much later than the fictional texts considered in this thesis, Knox's analysis indicates the progression of the genre from the supernatural coincidences of Gothic fiction, through the forgotten skeletons in the closets of wealthy families in Sensation fiction through to the clue-heavy basis of detective fiction and beyond. Furthermore, though a parodic analysis, it suggests that the notion of the thread of destiny that we see so prominently in the earliest of the short-crime stories already considered in this chapter, "The Mystery at Number Seven," detracts from the satisfying resolution of the case, exacerbated by the

use of coincidence and non-visible clues. If this is so, it highlights the later uses of these problematic rules, since by this point, and in light of the developments towards ratiocination beloved by Conan Doyle, the notion of threads of destiny appear to be outmoded and dissatisfying. This renders Lady Molly's "finger of fate" redundant – though perhaps the novelty of the lady detective foregoes some of these criteria, since Knox and Van Dine refer only to male detectives.

This chapter has revealed and explored the frequency with which threads recur within crime short stories and considered how they are used on a literal and metaphorical level. One connection that has not yet been made is that between threads and clothing itself, a link that is never explicitly made within the fiction itself but that operates, linguistically speaking, on one metaphorical level through the notion of exposure. In every story that we have seen here, the detective figure seeks to unravel the threads of a mystery in order to expose the culprit, the modus operandi and/or the motive, to peel back the layers of intrigue and uncover the secrets that lie beneath. The mystery becomes in itself a sort of clothing, a disguise assimilated by the offender as soon as they commit the crime and move away from the law-abiding social norm, a layer that separates the ordinary from the extraordinary.

Threads function in the short crime stories on a literal level as evidence of the presence of a person such as the murderer Phoebe Dole or the victim Jane Cross. They are a reminder that an individual, enrobed in their own specific threads (of clothing and figuratively speaking) has been in a particular place or can be traced to a particular moment. This physical quality translates to the metaphorical function of providing a link between events, a driving force both forward and backwards that reminds the reader of the logical processes of deduction and provides continuity of plot. The significance of both representations lies in their commonality – threads constitute the base material in all types of clothing worn by the exceptionally rich to the destitute, from the golden silks of

the Orient, to the cotton-picking farms of America to the industrial mills of Northern England. Threads become a universal currency, a constant and consistent presence that offer the reader a means to negotiate a story, share thinking processes and follow a logical path grounded in the realist setting within which crime fiction is located in this period. Threads become a recurrent and familiar trope through which the reader may navigate through the fictional narrative to reach a resolution. Threads offer reassuring guidance to the middle-class readership through an increasingly complex world and though they may be broken, lost, dropped, multiplied or even missed entirely, they will eventually be regained within the story to restore social and/or moral order and deliver a satisfying ending to the reader. As a common household item, they suggest a plethora of social and cultural associations which, when coupled with the increasingly scientific approach to crime in the late nineteenth century, brought out the human side of crime to reveal that “criminal acts were not evil deeds but the result of defective social arrangements or heredity” (Cawelti 57). The criminal could be lurking in any household, wearing the same clothes, buying the same garments.

In the threads of destiny, threads of narrative and threads of evidence examined here, undoubtedly threads constitute a device to create plot, with varying degrees of success. The significance they hold over any other type of clue, such as a footprint, a written missive or a single article (e.g. a watch) is that they are always perceived as fragmentary even when entire, such as the threads Sarah finds that she dismisses as household detritus, but which are actually threads that have been or will be used for sewing. Their perceived insignificance, coupled with the fact that they can be physically difficult to see leaves them open to multiple interpretations, ideal as a clue to be read by the interested onlooker or the reader. The moment they come into their own is when the detective conclusively identifies their purpose, when the probability becomes a certainty and all of the generalisations made by less experienced onlookers are ruled out. As Knight points out,

the growing focus on the clue coincided with “an increasing desire to amaze the reader” (80) that occurred towards the turn of the century. Taking a banal, almost invisible object as a clue and examining its signification in the stories reveals the importance of reading and misreading within the genre and suggests how the multiplicity of associations provide intellectual stimulus that propound the mystery element. It is after all, “quite evident that we [the readers] are more interested in the form of the crime and the process of its solution than in the sinfulness of the criminal and his punishment” (Cawelti 55).

Conclusion

Research Questions and Answers

This thesis explores three central research questions. Firstly, it evaluates how writers depicted clothing in short crime fiction 1841-1911. Secondly, it considers how these portrayals might be interpreted by the reader and how the range of possible responses might affect the reading experience. Finally, it asks what the ambiguous interpretations of dress tell modern critics about the culture of the period and considers how this might prompt new readings of short crime fiction.

Starting with Poe's "Murders in the Rue Morgue" (1841) and working through to Leblanc's "The Red Silk Scarf" in 1911, this study selected a range of stories with prominent depictions of clothing for close textual analysis and explored depictions of dress within them. Set against a backdrop of critiques of crime fiction, fashion history and genre analysis, the study sought to interweave these diverse fields of study for the first time to consider how these popular modes complement each other, despite their relative critical neglect and the prevailing perception of unscholarliness. The research showed that in some respects, short crime fiction is identical to any other genre of Victorian fiction in the way that writers use clothing and the way that readers interpret it. Dress *does* function as a device to add to the realism of the narrative and to construct aspects of character and it can be interpreted literally to reveal information about the setting of the narrative. Yet the crime fiction genre and the short story format have some specific traits that allow writers to use clothing in unique or unusual ways. Clothing in crime fiction is both visible, since the reader is encouraged to pay attention to minor details, and invisible because it is so mundane as to be dismissed as peripheral imagery, particularly obvious in the use of threads. This allows hiding in plain sight and creates a tension between what is obvious and what is not, allowing the writer to play with the

reader's expectations. The reader's responses are thus part constructed by the writer and part instinctive based on their own experiences, meaning that there can be no definitive interpretation.

Chapter One unravelled the construction of the whodunnit as a specific crime fiction contrivance which entices the reader to look at how characters are dressed as a means to identify them as criminals or otherwise. There are, however, no radical transformations from saint to sinner that can readily be identified by dress, partly because the brevity of the narrative limits the ability for a single character to develop. Rather, dress and expectations of dress complicate the reader's understanding of what it means to be, and to look like, a criminal. Contrary to the suggestions of science and pseudoscience, Victorian readers could not recognise criminality and indeed, were even drawn towards attractive criminal characters because such characters appeared sartorially and therefore socially respectable. Crime writers further confused readers by revealing 'surprise' perpetrators whose criminality could not possibly have been identified from either looks or behaviour. This leaves the reader even more frustrated because their attempts to read criminality must be directed at innocent characters because the criminal is not visible in the plot until the mystery is solved. Dress frequently functions as a red herring to mislead the reader and to allow the detective superiority in their interpretation of clues.

Chapter Two revealed how dress codifies sex in a manner very particular to crime short stories and in stark contrast with crime novels. Clothing enables the characters to physically touch one another and encourages voyeurism in the reader because the reader is invited to look closely at every detail of the narrative, as criminality and bodies are simultaneously exposed. A network of desire can be constructed and enacted through dress, through the social and bodily control exerted by dressmakers, to the desire for jewels draped provocatively across a bare décolletage. Writers use dress and its infinite

variations to create salacious possibilities. The short story format increases the intensity of these sexual stimuli because they are interpreted fleetingly as part of a narrative which draws the reader in to investigate a particular set of circumstances, in which sex is necessarily a secondary consideration. The lack of critical reproach for short stories seems to allow a more risqué use of dress (by comparison to novels) assisted by the ephemeral nature of periodical fiction in that the next issue quickly replaces stories and with it, any potential scandal. Sexual responses are subtly engaged through sartorial details, leaving the reader uncertain as to the appropriateness of their reaction to the text at the same time that they are enjoying the thrill, both intellectually and sexually, of the unfolding events.

Chapter Three highlighted the creation of the female detective, who existed in fiction long before she became a real-life heroine. Writers used her dress to develop a character who could feasibly carry out her duties without hindrance whilst maintaining acceptable levels of femininity and middle-class respectability. The balance between the creation of believable but also exciting characters created conflicting interpretations that fluctuated with changing sartorial and reading fashions, reflective of wider issues about women's appearance and role in society. It is notable that there are no female detectives depicted with a plunging décolletage for example, presumably because the fashion is not conducive to being taken seriously as a professional. The contrasting depictions of female detectives are especially noticeable in illustrations and book covers that often bore little correlation with the written descriptions of characters, creating tension between text and paratext. The tendency to accentuate aspects of women's dress in images is evident through many of the pictures considered in this chapter and is indicative of the tendency to conflate women with the desire to be sartorially fashionable and as objects to be visually consumed or judged. The reader is caught between the excitement of a new and innovative character and the knowledge that their dress would not always physically allow the adventures related to take place, let alone in a respectable fashion.

Chapter Four exposed anxieties of 1890s modernity through the critical viewpoints of Veblen's *Theory of the Leisure Class* and Simmel's *Fashion*. Serial master criminals such as Allen's Colonel Clay and Boothby's Simon Carne exploited trends towards emulation and imitation to falsify their social positions and fraudulently claim identities. But so too did their polar opposite, Conan Doyle's detective Sherlock Holmes, making it impossible to routinely denounce such behaviour as immoral. Fashion is equally celebrated and denigrated according to a host of cultural and social rules, the context of the situation and the individual's intent, all learned behaviours which fluctuate from one group and time period to the next. Accordingly, Simmel, and to a lesser extent Veblen, argue that the contradictory desires to simultaneously fit in with a particular cultural milieu but also to stand independently as a trendsetter are the principal driving force behind fashion. This in turn creates facades of respectability that are perfect for developing elaborate criminal frauds. The reader is bombarded with false promises through the words and actions of the characters, through their appearances, through illustrations and even through the advertisements that accompanied the original texts. The attempt to decipher the 'real truth' is the struggle to come to terms with a modernity which demands honesty and integrity of behaviours at the same time that it permits and even encourages aesthetic and sartorial falsehoods.

Chapter Five revealed the metaphorical and semantic links between crime fiction and clothing through the trope of the thread. The research reveals the agency given to detectives as storytellers who manipulate the threads of narrative and the way in which readers are enticed to follow one series of clues over another. The reader's ability to decipher these clues is foregrounded in the significance they attribute to each minor device that, in the case of literal threads, is usually negligible. Intertwined with these visual stimuli is the metaphorical thread of destiny that suggests that the detective, and the reader, will uncover the truth because it is fated to be so. Though this seems an old-

fashioned idea in comparison to the complexities of fin de siècle detective fiction, the evidence from the analyses of these stories suggest that the trope was persistent throughout the period and that readers accepted this notion of destiny alongside more innovative forms of detection. Text and textile are intertwined, as garments reveal stories about individuals, while fragments of garments or threads hint at the constructedness of those identities both by the author and by political, social and economic discourses.

Contribution to Literatures

The interdisciplinary study opens up connections between critical fields that have not previously been considered alongside one another: crime fiction and cultural studies of clothing. The literature of nineteenth-century crime fiction is almost always approached chronologically by critics, as a genre that develops in a fairly linear manner from the *Newgate Calendar* to Poe's detective stories, via the serialised novels of Dickens towards the sensation novels of the 1860s and culminating in Conan Doyle's 1890s best-selling stories. Each new style is considered as innovative and distinct from the last, demarcated by subgenres that emphasise the differences in content and readerly experiences, such as police procedurals and thrillers. Form is largely incidental in these discussions, with Poe's stories often seen as an anomaly in the development from serialised novel to periodical fiction. Crime fiction examples can be reductive owing to the difficulties in establishing the definitions of the genre and though there has been more recent analysis of lesser-known texts, such as studies of crime written by female writers, the 'big players' of Victorian crime writing are recurrent in analyses of fiction.

Fashion and dress history, on the other hand, is critically presented as a cyclical form with emphasis on rediscovery of older forms, adaptation and range, for example in the use of colours, fabrics and embellishments. Trends are not depicted as entirely independent of

the style before, but rather new prominence is given to some change in an existing aspect of dress such as lower hemlines or puffed sleeves. This is not to say that dress history is not structured chronologically in critical works. Indeed, Willett Cunnington's studies of nineteenth-century dress have been crucial in charting the nuances that separated one year's height of fashion from another. As a relatively new area of academic study, there is no central corpus of seminal texts (though the works of Valerie Steele and Elizabeth Wilson are frequently cited as seminal) but rather an eclectic mix of approaches. These approaches tend to consider gender, clothing history, economics, and cultural history with a predominant focus on the Western world. Relatively few studies focus on representations of dress in fiction and there is still much work to be done to establish the significance of sartorial trends in fiction and the extent to which this representation reflects real-life fashions (both clothing fashions and social changes). There are no known studies of dress in Victorian crime fiction and thus this thesis offers an innovative contribution for scholars of Victorian fiction, crime fiction and dress.

This thesis charts a middle ground between the literatures of crime fiction and clothing history, assuming a thematic rather than chronological approach and exploring representations of dress in both well-known and lesser-known fictions. The way in which we read clothing enhances our interpretation of literature because of the networks of meanings and material culture associated with it. Significantly, clothing represents and symbolises wildly opposing characteristics such as conformity and independence, oppression and resistance, revulsion and desire. But its materiality is equally important and in the crime fiction genre, the ability to conceal and reveal is paramount, whilst the physical traces left by garments perform vital functions as clues and red herrings. The study of the intersection between text and textile highlights similarities and differences between crime fiction and draws attention to the ways in which writers use contemporary objects and everyday things to imply, to signify and even to mislead. The condensed,

quick pace of the short story can make these objects seem insignificant; however, clothing serves a vital function in the signs that it imparts to the reader precisely because these signs are so subtle. Moreover, there is a sense that clothing conveys truth as realist object and as a visual indicator of class, gender and wealth and this pretention to truth is exploited by crime writers to masquerade criminal devices. This study therefore elucidates links not just between text and textile but also between genres of texts, building upon existing studies of dress in fiction, which, in nineteenth-century studies, have tended to focus exclusively on realist novels.

New Knowledge

Although critics often assume that the interpretation of dress was perceived to be uniform and consistent, this thesis suggests that within short crime fiction it was actually beset with anxieties and contradictions. Crime writers used assumptions about dress to convey feelings, relationships, plot developments and personal characteristics to the reader. This may be true of all types of literature but in the Victorian short crime story these assumptions function in a specific way because the reader has certain expectations of form and style. For example, following the revelation of a murder, the reader expects to detect the murderer and therefore disordered dress may signify involvement in the crime. Or in a story about a “Lady Detective,” the reader expects the lead character to be dressed as a lady, i.e. respectably, particularly since they could have no preconceptions of what a female detective might look like since she did not yet exist in real life. Nevertheless, the belief that dress and appearance can be accurately read as a reliable measure of character persists within the stories and more generally within our reading of crime stories. Worse still is the repeated assumption that clothing offers compelling circumstantial evidence of identity, either in the guilt of a perpetrator seen in a particular place at a crucial time, or

in the identification of a body. Reading clothing offers an approach with which to examine disparate texts from a common cultural perspective, a discourse that is constantly updated to keep track with fashions, in keeping with the immediacy required in the crime fiction short story genre.

The findings of this project are of interest to scholars of crime, Victorian fiction and cultural historians because they suggest a wealth of new interdisciplinary approaches to literature which illuminate new interpretations to texts and reinstate the significance of studies which have traditionally been marginalised in contemporary critical discourses. The emphasis on lesser-known texts aims to highlight the importance of periodical fiction and to refocus the crime fiction canon to include neglected texts and writers since they can tell us much about the context in which they were written as well as offering an entertaining read.

Future Research

Further research might well be conducted in a number of areas that were beyond the scope of this project. In the course of examining the original publication sources of the short stories, many illustrations were identified. Though undoubtedly influential in developing a visual image of a character and what they wear, the illustrations frequently undermined the descriptions given in the text, even though the captions typically quote verbatim a line of the text. More often than not, illustrators used artistic licence in their depictions, drawing images according to the style of the periodical, in their own particular artistic style and with the fashion of the day to increase the saleability of the stories. As Stuart Sillars points out, “in a drawn illustration, every apparently denotative element is also connotative, since it is the product of the style of an individual and the culture which produces it” (*Visualisation* 19). Similarly, hand-tinted fashion plates perpetuate

discussions of Victorian fashion, though my research suggests that many fashion magazines actually published without pictures and used text only to describe new styles. A comprehensive analysis of the relationship between descriptions and images of dress within a periodical, a defined period (perhaps a year) or even by a single writer/illustrator would make explicit the extent of the disconnect between text and image. The inclusion of images in advertisements within the same periodicals would further assess the impact of commodity culture and draw out the relationship between fictional texts and real-life products.

A comparative study between short crime fictions within defined periodicals in their original format would reduce the number of variables encountered during this project and offer an innovative approach. This could be extended to include serialised crime fiction within the same periodicals to compare the ways in which dress functions in an entire short story as opposed to an extract of a longer story. The chief limitations of these approaches lie in the identification of complete print runs for periodicals, especially the retention of ephemeral pages such as advertisements and supplements. The definition of crime fiction also remains as pertinent as it has in this study. For this reason, the study could extend beyond crime fiction to consider the relationship between dress in text and image in short stories of any genre. In terms of form and genre, this study could be expanded to analyse dress and clothing in any other specified genre, within a given time period, by particular authors or even publishers.

There is also more to be done in exploring the material culture of clothing in relation to the cultural context in terms of fashion styles, the history and origin of textiles. Short crime stories tend not to be overly specific about precise details of fabrics, embellishments, cut and such like because of the brevity of the form however, some writers, such as Mrs Henry Wood, are more inclined to furnish the reader with specifics

of dress. These specifics may bring a sharper focus to the writer's choices and have greater resonance in the way that fiction is interpreted and understood. Above all, the act of dressing is always performative and deliberate, a skilled art which demands as much from the reader as the writer. This thesis demonstrates that sartorial discourses create a paratext which enables crime writers to influence, but not fully control, readerly responses because of the myriad of cultural associations and anxieties which underpin perceptions of dress. To return to Baker Street: ““This is of enormous importance,” said Holmes, making a note upon his shirt-cuff” (“Naval Treaty” 807).

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