

CHERCHEZ LES FEMMES:
*The Lives and Literary Contribution of the First Women to Write
Crime Fiction*

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SUMMARY

“Cherchez la Femme” is a phrase emblematic of crime fiction. In this study it is applied to detective/mystery writing from the late 1700s through the mid-nineteenth century to the 1870s: the object being to investigate the women writers whose work helped shape and define the literary genre. Like a mystery, the intent is to “chercher les femmes”, to discover “whodunnit”.

The extent of the female presence and influence in crime writing during the crucial years of its formation and codification has never been fully examined before. The established genre histories focus almost exclusively on work by male writers, a paternity of crime writing. Where women appear in studies of the early crime tradition, it is as fictional detectives, rather than the female authors.

This study demonstrates that women writers were an active and innovative presence in crime writing even before its formal generic beginnings. They preceded such significant crime “mileposts” as Poe’s “The Murders in the Rue Morgue”, with the female influence on crime traceable back to the Gothic and its “mysteries”.

“Cherchez Les Femmes” is concerned with origins, founding mothers of genre. The writers studied are innovators, or the “firsts” of their respective national crime literatures, or who wrote more than one significant work of crime. The focus is mainly on Anglophone writers, from the UK, America, and the British colonies. Thus from Britain, the discussion includes Ann Radcliffe, Frances Trollope, Catherine Crowe, Elizabeth Gaskell, Caroline Clive, Mary Braddon and Ellen (Mrs Henry) Wood. American writers examined are Harriet Prescott Spofford, Louisa May Alcott and Metta Victor. Several chapters are devoted to the Australian authors Ellen Davitt and Mary Fortune.

The study evaluates their work in the context of the emerging crime genre, with also a discussion of their lives, given that with all to some degree a personal transgression against Victorian notions of correct female behaviour was involved.

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Bibliography

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INTRODUCTION

LOOK FOR THE WOMEN

“Cherchons la femme.” (Let us look for the woman)
Alexandre Dumas (père), *Les Mohicans de Paris*, vol. 2, chapter 2.

“Cherchez la femme” is an oft-repeated phrase that has become emblematic of mystery and detection, and also its fictionalization. It first appeared in Dumas’ 1854–7 novel *Les Mohicans de Paris* as “Cherchons la femme”, and its subsequent listings could fill a book. The phrase typically performs a narrative function: it signals the entry of a female character into a text that has, up to this point, been predominantly masculinist in content and orientation. The detective—almost inevitably a male—has been unsuccessful because he operated only within the male sphere. The answer to the mystery (the *raison d’être* of the detective narrative) lies with a woman. “Cherchez la femme”, the search for a woman, re-genders the text.

The text under consideration in this thesis, to which the phrase “cherchez la femme” will be applied, is the corpus of crime and detective fiction, specifically the period of its origins and early development. However, the search will be not for a single woman, but a plurality. The object of the thesis is to resolve a question: the extent and influence of the female presence in crime writing during the crucial years of its formation and codification. Like a mystery, the intent is primarily to discover “whodunnit”, to “chercher les femmes”, the women writers whose work helped shape and define the genre.

There is no need to search for women in today’s crime fiction, nor any mystery concerning its female authors. Should crime fiction readers be asked about women writers in the genre, their answers would be immediate, and lengthy: “P. D. James, Sara Paretsky, Patricia Cornwell, Gabrielle Lord etc. etc.” For the early twentieth century, the so-called

Golden Age, respondents would note Agatha Christie and Dorothy Sayers. Yet asking general readers, crime fans and even scholars about women's crime fiction in the nineteenth century, or even earlier, will usually draw a blank. "Cherchez les femmes'? What femmes? Were there any women writers of crime, so far back?"

Going to the Internet, and using the likes of Google and other common search tools, however, leads to websites such as Mike Grost's *A Guide to Classic Mystery and Detection*. In his pages on *Gender Integration and the Mystery* Grost writes: "Women integrated the detective story in the 1860s". He cites seven names from this decade alone, including Louisa May Alcott and Mary Braddon.

What this thesis will endeavour to do is show that, rather than the crime genre initially emerging as largely an "all male preserve" (Grost), then being "integrated" or infiltrated by women, their presence can be identified even earlier, before the officially-recognised "beginnings" of the genre. Women writers can be located in the precursive literature to detective writing proper, that is, fiction of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth century which contained elements later to combine into generic crime: crime content, the mystery structure, detectives, even female detectives.

As these themes coalesced during the first half of the nineteenth century, women began to write fiction dominated by crime and/or detectives—even before the fledgling genre had been formally named. They helped influence the early form and content of the genre far more than has been previously realised. The tradition of women writing crime can be traced back to the eighteenth century.

Such early origins for crime fiction are proclaimed in the title of Allen J. Hubin's definitive English-language bibliography *Crime Fiction 1749–1980*. Later editions of Hubin include work from as early as 1722. However, pre-1800 examples of crime fiction tend to be

inchoate, lacking the shape of what is now regarded as the form or formula of crime writing. They were also isolated, hardly constituting a continuous stream of publications.

Moreover they were not defined as belonging to a distinctive, crime-themed genre. One example is William Godwin's 1794 *Caleb Williams*. It was at the time of publication and for decades afterwards variously categorised as a political or Gothic novel. Only retrospectively has it been hailed as containing "the first important detective in the English novel" (Ousby 20). This recognition occurred during the nineteenth century, at the same time that crime fiction became identifiable as a publishing category, spreading rapidly and becoming hugely popular. By 1900 it had evolved into the detective genre, with its own set of conventions and codes.

The thesis will be concerned with origins, founding mothers of genre. It will focus on the extra-generic influences and early years of crime writing. However the notion of what crime fiction is properly regarded as "early" has undergone some changes in the course of researching and writing the thesis. Originally a cut-off date of 1900 was planned, but it soon became clear that the fin-de-siècle (little over ten years after Conan Doyle's first success with Sherlock Holmes in 1887) would be inclusive of more writers and work than could possibly and properly be covered in a conventional thesis length. Therefore the concept of "early crime fiction" was revised, to specifically refer to work produced prior to 1870. However, in the case of several writers who continued to publish crime regularly after that date, such as Mary Braddon, Mary Fortune and Ellen (Mrs Henry) Wood, their post-1870 work will be discussed. Otherwise the examination of their careers in crime writing would be arbitrarily cut short.

The significance of 1870 is that it is inclusive of several well-known early milestones of crime, such as Poe's Chevalier Dupin stories of the 1840s, Wilkie Collins' *The Woman in*

White (1860) and *The Moonstone* (1868), and Emile Gaboriau (1832–1873), the most important French detective writer of the nineteenth century, with his *romans policiers* (police novels), also from the 1860s. Crime fiction featuring a detective and the mystery plot was, by 1870, well-established both in short story and in novel form. It still lacked the label of “detective fiction”, though, and was yet to reach its first peak of popularity and critical approval with the work of Conan Doyle.

The choice of the date 1870, however, excludes discussion in the thesis of a writer whose first novel was published only eight years subsequently. American Anna Katharine Green’s best-selling 1878 novel *The Leavenworth Case* has traditionally been regarded as the point of entry of women into the crime genre. As late as 1980, histories of detective fiction “still” gave Green this primacy (Maio, “A Strange and Fierce Delight” 95). Indeed the title of Green’s 1989 biography by Patricia D. Maida is *Mother of Detective Fiction: the Life and Works of Anna Katharine Green*. Yet by the time Maida’s work was published, Hubin had listed various women writers prior to Green, as did Dilys Winn’s semi-scholarly *Murderess Ink: the Better Half of the Mystery* (1979). Green was not *the* founding mother of detective fiction; she was *a* founding femme, amongst various nineteenth-century (m)others.

Green is arguably thus an example of what Joanna Russ termed “the myth of the isolated achievement” and “anomalousness” (62, 76), as applied to the canon and women’s writing. Nonetheless, in deference to Green’s status and influence, it was originally intended that a discussion of her life and work form the final chapter of the thesis. However, in the course of research so many precursors to Green emerged that they quite crowded her out. Had she been included, the thesis would have been well over 100,000 words. Instead the thesis ends with Metta Victor and her novel *The Figure Eight* (1869). Victor’s 1866 *The Dead*

Letter is the first American detective novel—irrespective of auctorial gender. Yet it only preceded Green by twelve years.

In thus concentrating on a search for the founding femmes of crime writing, the thesis will depart from the established genre histories, which focus almost exclusively on work by male writers, a paternity of crime writing. As Sally Munt notes: “This critical tradition invokes a progressive model of fathers and sons” (3). It can be described as a genealogy, whose male line in the nineteenth century can be traced through some prominent forefathers. The first is Edgar Allan Poe, popularly regarded as the first detective writer, in the 1840s. The second is Wilkie Collins in the 1860s, whose *The Moonstone* is sometimes called the first detective novel, famously by T. S. Eliot: “the first and greatest of English Detective novels” (464). Finally appears “the great master of detective fiction, Arthur Conan Doyle” (Peterson 10), with his Sherlock Holmes tales, published from the late 1880s. This model of crime fiction’s early development is the most popular and most likely to be cited.

Specialist literary histories of crime also present a progressive or genealogical model of origin, inclusive of other, less famous names: Godwin’s *Caleb Williams*; the police short stories series written by writers such as “Waters”, the pseudonym of William Russell, from 1849 onwards, and by “Andrew Forrester Jr.” in the 1860s; Gaboriau; and the international bestseller *The Mystery of a Hansom Cab* (1886) by the antipodean Fergus Hume. The focus is similarly masculinist. Women authors are mentioned, but not as a major focus of interest, as if they are incidental to this *history*.

A third, and also genealogical approach to detective fiction, particularly applied to Wilkie Collins’ *The Moonstone*, is to regard “feminine genres”, such as the Gothic, as “the *matrix* for the male-dominated detective novel” of the 1860s, which Collins then “*fathers*” (my italics, Heller, “Blank Spaces” 245). This approach at least allows for an extra-genre

“motherhood” of crime, which is slightly more equitable, but completely omits Collins’ formidable female contemporaries and rivals in crime writing, Mary Braddon and Ellen Wood, not to mention their successors, such as Anna Katharine Green. These women enjoyed popularity and sales comparable to if not exceeding those of Collins. Their presence indicates that the early detective novel field cannot be entirely regarded as the sole domain of, or dominated by, male writers.

The prevailing bias towards a male-dominated story of crime fiction’s origins is reflected in the titles of critical studies, such as Audrey Peterson’s *Victorian Masters of Mystery: from Wilkie Collins to Conan Doyle* (1984). Peterson does discuss two women crime writers, Mary Braddon and Anna Katharine Green, although clearly not regarding them as “masters”. The pair occupy one third of a chapter each between the longer examinations of Sheridan Le Fanu (arguably, given his use of the supernatural, more a writer of the Gothic ghostly than a crime novelist) and Doyle, and they are dismissed under the heading of “Some Minor Voices”.

Attempts at redressing the prevailing male narrative of crime fiction’s genesis, with its corresponding neglect of the female contribution to the genre, do exist. Some early women writers of crime are included in feminist surveys such as Winn’s *Murderess Ink*, Kathleen Gregory Klein’s *Great Women Mystery Writers* (1994) and Jessica Mann’s *Deadlier than the Male* (1981). These studies, however, list only the well-known figures, such as Green, and even then the discussion is brief. It is the early women fictional detectives, rather than the writers, who have received more attention, with works such as Patricia Craig and Mary Cadogan’s *The Lady Investigates: Women Detectives and Spies in Fiction* (1986), and Klein’s *The Woman Detective: Gender & Genre* (1995).

As regards the individual authors discussed in the thesis, the existing scholarship (where relevant to their crime writing) will be discussed in their respective chapters. They are increasingly the focus of critical study. In the last few decades biographies have been produced on Green, Maida's *Mother of Detective Fiction*, as mentioned above and Catherine Crowe (the unpublished "The Ghost-Fancier" by Geoffrey Larken). Frances Trollope and Mary Braddon have attracted much interest. Two biographies of the former have appeared, Teresa Ransom's *Fanny Trollope: A Remarkable Life* (1995) and Pamela Neville Sington's *Fanny Trollope: The Life and Adventures of a Clever Woman* (1997) as well as Edmund White's novel *Fanny* (2003), based on Trollope and Frances Wright. Mary Braddon also has two biographies, Robert Lee Wolff's *Sensational Victorian* (1979) and Jennifer Carnell's *The Literary Lives of Mary Elizabeth Braddon* (2000). Trollope and Braddon are additionally the subjects of recent critical collections, *Frances Trollope and the Novel of Social Change*, ed. Brenda Ayres (2002) and *Beyond Sensation*, ed. Marlene Tromp, Pamela K. Gilbert and Aeron Haynie (2000) both including essays which situate them as early crime authors. Braddon in particular has moved from the "subliterary" margins to the near-canonical. Indeed, the Sensational novel of the 1860s, where Braddon first made her name, has been extensively re-evaluated and examined in studies such as Thomas Boyle's *Black Swine in the Sewers of Hampstead* (1989). Somewhat less attention has been paid to Braddon's fellow Sensation novelist Ellen Wood, although a modern biography is also in progress, by Marie Riley. More significantly, nearly all of the authors discussed here have been reprinted during the last decade, with crime works such as Frances Trollope's *Hargrave* and Catherine Crowe's *Susan Hopley* now available for the first time in over a century.

While these authors have been slowly emerging from obscurity, they have not been previously situated within the early tradition of crime fiction, a crucial gap in the scholarship.

Thus the female line of crime writing has never been traced back to its origins. An extensive examination of the mothers of crime, their lives, writing, and contribution to the emergent genre is well overdue, given the surge in feminist literary retrieval of the 1970–80s, which has unearthed early women dramatists, early women utopianists and writers of science fiction, for example. Without such a study, as presented in this thesis, our understanding of early crime writing is incomplete.

An extensive and book-length study of early female crime writing has never been completed, something puzzling given crime's popularity and substantial female fan base. One reason has been, as Humpherys has noted, that within Victorian detective fiction studies there has been an "exclusion of the majority of such fiction (a good deal written by women) from critical attention in favor of an obsessive return of critical analysis to a handful of canonized texts". She surveys some 170 relevant publications published between 1980–92, noting that the great majority (80) were on Sherlock Holmes. This bias she found consistent with "most general histories and book-length analyses of detective fiction" which discuss Holmes, and to a much lesser extent, Dickens and Collins. She gives as one reason for this neglect of the non-canonical the difficulty of obtaining the original texts (259, 260).

A greater difficulty is that the corpus of early crime fiction is large, and its exact limits unclear. The full extent of the works published in crime fiction's infancy and vigorous youth remains unknown. Wilbur Jordan Smith estimated in 1973 that a complete listing of nineteenth-century mystery fiction published in the English language alone could comprise as many as 6,000 titles (qtd. in Maio, "A Strange and Fierce Delight" 94). The 2003 edition of Hubin's *Crime Fiction* (Shelburne, Ontario: Battered Silicon), concurs with this estimate, listing 5973 titles published between 1800–1900 (Contento 2002).

Smith and Hubin both refer only to Anglophone publications, although even in its early years crime writing was multi-national. French writers were particularly active—and were read by their English counterparts, such as Braddon. Moreover, Smith’s estimate appears to apply to monographs only. Similarly, Hubin’s bibliography specifically excludes works published in magazines. This limitation is understandable, given the space constraints of even reference works. However, it represents a major gap in our understanding of the field. The nineteenth century was a golden era for fiction journals: Onslow refers to the “centrality of periodicals within the literary market” (3). Crime writing featured strongly in magazines, either in short story form or in serials, with serialization described as “the dominant publishing form during the nineteenth century” (Wynne 11). Periodicals as geographically diverse as *Chambers’s Edinburgh Journal*, the American *Harper’s Monthly* and the *Australian Journal* published detective series or serials. In the case of *Chambers’s*, crime writing can be found from the 1840s, with *Harper’s* and the *Australian Journal* from the 1860s.

The three most famous and canonical nineteenth-century crime authors, Poe, Collins and Doyle, all published crime fiction in magazines. Their periodical writings were reprinted in book form, but those by numerous other crime writers were not. Should a bibliographer create a complete listing of crime fiction books published from 1800–1900, it would represent the tip of an iceberg, for the vast bulk of magazine crime never appeared in book form. Consider the subject of Chapters Eight and Nine: Mary Fortune. She published one crime book, but had over 500 detective stories published in Australian magazines. These included “The Detective’s Album”, the longest-running early detective series, begun in 1868 and continued by Fortune until 1908.

Without a bibliography extending its coverage to both non-Anglophone crime and periodical publications, it is difficult to estimate the extent of the total amount of crime fiction published in the nineteenth century, let alone establish what percentage was written by women. Nonetheless it is possible to argue with Munt's contention that: "many (if not most) of the early detective fictions by women are now irretrievably lost" (5). This thesis' sortie into the vast area of nineteenth-century crime fiction has retrieved a substantial amount of work by women.

The thesis does not claim to be comprehensive. Early crime fiction has been identified in four countries, or language groups: England (including its colonies), the US, France and the German/Austrian states. This study will focus on the Anglophone writers, including examples from the Antipodes, a region often neglected in surveys of nineteenth-century crime. Several women writing in French will be discussed, mostly as an indication of what may be discovered given further research. Early German-language crime fiction has received recent scholarly attention, notably by Tannert and Kratz. However the full story of French crime writing and its influence on the English and American traditions remains to be told. More research is needed, particularly on crime fiction appearing in *feuilleton* form, in French newspapers, and the extent to which these texts were translated/pirated/plagiarized for the British and American markets. Until this work is done the extent of women writing early crime fiction in French is a very large unknown.

It must be said, though, that in the process of researching this study more women crime authors were retrieved than could be discussed within the length of a conventional thesis, even with narrowed date limits. The 1860s were in particular notable for women writing crime narratives, as part of the popular Sensational novel boom. Therefore, the study is obliged to focus on writers who were significant innovators, the "firsts" of their respective

national crime literatures, or who wrote more than one significant work of crime. Thus, for the USA, Victor was included, as the first detective novelist, as well as Harriet Prescott Spofford, the first woman to write detective short stories. A similar process was followed for Australia, with the similarly pioneering Ellen Davitt and Mary Fortune. These innovators are discussed here; their followers deserve further research.

The thesis is not theory-dominated, but where theory can be usefully applied, it is included, notably theory of genres and their formation. Nor does it consider, to echo the title of Priestman's well-known study, the question of detective fiction *and* literature, but detective fiction as a genre, whose products range from popular pulp to works whose status places them within, or approaching, the literary canon. The thesis also follows Susan Rowland and other critics of women's crime fiction in presenting "a more nuanced consideration of author's lives in the context of their work," in which the retrieval process considers the "effects of biographical knowledge upon our understanding of their neglected art" (1). Indeed, with most of the writers discussed here, their knowledge of crime arose from personal experience. Some had lawyers for husbands or fathers; in some cases a close male relation skirting or on the wrong side of the law. Only one writer was, as far as is known, ever wanted by the police; yet in all cases their subject matter of criminal transgression echoed to some degree a personal transgression against Victorian notions of correct female behaviour.

There are critical pitfalls in studying the early history of a genre. Notable is the problem of definition—when is a crime story generic crime fiction?—which will be addressed in the first chapter. Second is the problem of retrospective evaluation, of assessing early crime texts when informed by the more sophisticated or more politically palatable (to our tastes) works produced subsequently in the genre. "Coincidence, sentiment, and obviousness" are termed by Michele Slung "the three bugbears of nineteenth-century

mysteries” (introduction vii). It is worth noting that the first two were not at the time regarded as faults; and the obviousness (or not) of a whodunnit resolution is dependent upon how much prior knowledge the reader has of generic conventions. We may find an early crime text “obvious”, as did such acute early critics of crime as Poe and De Quincey (see Chapter One for a fuller discussion of their reactions); but the contemporary general reader may have well been beguiled by the mystery. Richard Beaton, in an e-posting to the Mary Braddon List, sums up the difficulty of modern critical assessment: “Perhaps our reading of the modern, ingenious detective novel spoils our appreciation of the earlier form simply by raising unrealistic expectations?”

This thesis will therefore attempt to read the texts discussed primarily in terms of their literary, social and political context. Even if a work seems rudimentary (to our perspectives), should it make an innovation or have some perceptible influence, then it is significant. Thus where possible the thesis will try to avoid twenty-first century value judgements, though it will note where a text transcends its time, is more than of purely scholarly interest, and even perhaps offers pleasure for the modern reader.

The plan of the thesis is as follows. Chapter One, “Origins are Multifarious and Unclean” will consider the definition of and beginnings of crime fiction, positing a polygenetic origin for crime, in accordance with the theories of Russian formalism, that generic “systems” or genres interact to produce new systems. Chapter Two, “Mrs Radcliffe as Conan Doyle?”, will consider women’s initial involvement in the genre, both as writers, and as heroine-detectives in fiction. Chapter Three, “A Most Preposterous Organ of Wonder”, will consider the crime novels of Catherine Crowe, arguably the first major woman writer in the genre. Chapter Four, “Transitions”, will discuss the 1850s–1860s, when the male (often police) detective began to dominate the genre. Chapters Five and Six will discuss Mary

Braddon, and Seven, Ellen Wood. The remaining chapters will follow the greater diaspora of crime fiction, considering developments in the Antipodes and America. Chapters Eight, Nine and Ten will examine the Australian writers Ellen Davitt and Mary Fortune. The final chapter, Eleven, will be devoted to Metta Victor. The extra chapters on Braddon and Fortune are necessitated by their significance; and the fact that they persistently returned to crime fiction throughout their long and prolific careers.

One final note, before the discussion proper. Throughout this thesis, an image will recur, of a virtual art gallery. In using it, homage is made to the feminist art historians of the 1970s–80s, who in works such as *Old Mistresses: Women, Art and Ideology* by Rozsika Parker and Griselda Pollock (1981) and *Women Artists: Recognition and Reappraisal from the Early Middle Ages to the Twentieth Century*, by Karen Petersen and J. J. Wilson (1976), situated women prominently on the walls of art galleries, retrieving their work from misattribution, dusty attics and cellars. This thesis will attempt to do something similar for the women of early crime fiction.

And now “Nous cherchons les femmes!”

CHAPTER ONE

“ORIGINS ARE MULTIFARIOUS AND UNCLEAN!”: THE BEGINNINGS OF CRIME FICTION

And this idea of a single origin is of course related to the father/creator notion of procreation endemic to Western culture. Hah! Down with the monogenetic (holy, pure, separate) view of things! Origins are multifarious and unclean!

Janet Lafler.

The origin of crime/mystery/detective fiction is regarded in the popular imagination as monogenetic, the achievement of a single writer. As if depicted in a neoclassical portrait, the genre emerges in 1841, fully formed like the goddess Athena, from out of the febrile imagination of Edgar Allan Poe. It was Poe “whodunnit”, who created the detective fiction genre with his short story “The Murders in the Rue Morgue”. As if Poe were truly like Zeus, a polyamorous literary progenitor, other forms of literature are attributed to him: some commentators have claimed him as the father of science fiction (see Disch 32–56), and influential upon horror as well.

Monogenesis is generally not associated in nature with complex biological systems; and neither should it be associated with so complex an entity as the literary genre of crime fiction, with its multitude of creators and consumers. Alastair Fowler states in his *Kinds of Literature* that monogenesis continues to “dominate much of our thinking about origins. However, when remote antiquity does not obscure the period of a kind’s beginnings, they can always be shown to have preceded the inventor” (154). Popularly, Poe may be regarded as the father of the genre, but crime historians know he has precursors. Consider Ian Ousby and his 1976 *Bloodhounds of Heaven: the Detective in English Fiction from Godwin to Doyle*, which names in its title the significant precursor William Godwin, author of *Caleb Williams* (1794), a novel dominated by a murder and an “amateur detective”. And as this study intends

to establish, there were numerous other precursors, contemporaries and followers, many of them women.

The thesis will thus take a polygenetic approach to the story of crime fiction's origins and its development in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth century. In downplaying the single innovation theory of crime it will loosely concur with the Russian formalists and their successors' case for literary genres as systems, whose interaction forms new systems, new genres. A various set of multifarious origins will be posited for the detective genre, a stew in which elements from primarily late eighteenth and early nineteenth century literary genres promiscuously intermingled. These elements can be isolated, as well as the conditions—whether due to historical circumstances, the *zeitgeist* and other factors—which caused them to coalesce.

If, to return to the image of the painting, the depiction of Poe as monogenetic father of crime is spurious, painted after the fact, it is necessary to search for the canvases which give the real, more complex story. They can then be located in an imaginary gallery of fictional crime, mystery and detection. However, the provenance of the works concerned is wide, and in some cases dubious. They are not the work of a clique, their arrival hardly announced by loud manifestos and theorising from the Detective Writers' Brotherhood (and Sisterhood). Rather the process of development involves numerous and often non-canonical writers working largely in isolation from each other, the process involving much trial and error—mostly the latter—over a period of decades. They can be geographically widespread too, in continental Europe, Britain, America and even the Antipodes; but despite the distances a surprisingly effective dialogue of mutual influence existed. Works were quickly reprinted/translated/pirated in various literary markets, and in some cases it would even seem that synchronicity was at work.

The first images in the gallery of crime fiction do not comprise a man in a deerstalker hat, with pipe and magnifying glass—nothing so recognizable appears. The genre of crime is initially amorphous, lacking definition and even a name. Furthermore, precisely when the form begins to appear is hard to pinpoint. “Detection is a genre of dubious origin”, notes Gill Plain, with a “gospel [...] paradoxically both definitive and nebulous” and “a murky past” (5).

Locating early examples of a genre can be a process of hair-splitting definitions, in which the final product is compared to its possibly dubious antecedents in search of resemblances. Thus, Agatha Christie and Sara Paretsky can be categorically described as women detective writers, but can this also be said as easily of Ellen Wood or Caroline Clive?

Who was the earliest woman to write detective fiction is a question considered at length in this book. Other questions, which have engaged various historians of the genre, include: when is a mystery not a mystery? Is a detective story without a detective a detective story? And where or when did it all begin?

But first, a definition: Crime writing, as it shall be (loosely) defined in this study, is a literary genre marked by the subject matter of crime and its solution; structured around the gradual revelation of criminous information (the mystery) of which detective fiction is a refinement, focussed on the detective as chief investigator and ratiocinator of the narrative. Thriller writing, where crime content appears in a narrative marked by use of suspense, but without the mystery, will also be discussed in the thesis, but the main focus will be on crime/detective mysteries.

The first element or system of crime fiction to be considered is content, one of its most distinctive features. However, this subject matter is problematic, in that it is ancient, present in oral and written storytelling from the beginnings of narrative: Genesis contains the

murder of Abel by Cain, and Greek legends and Norse sagas are full of gore. Here it is fruitful to make a cross-genre comparison with the history of science fiction, which shares some polygenetic origins with crime. Brian Aldiss notes the tendency of “fans with colonialist ambitions” to claim “illustrious ancestors” for their favourite reading matter. As understandable, he remarks, “in critics as in impoverished families. But they tend to error, the first being the error of spurious continuity—of perceiving a connection where none exists.” He uses the term “ur-science fiction” to describe works with similarities to the science fiction genre, yet written before the genre actually originated (27–8). Thus a Middle Eastern folktale of a flight to the moon on a djinn’s back is not the same as Jules Verne’s *Autour de la Lune* (1870) or H. G. Wells *The First Men in the Moon* (1901).

There is crime aplenty in the ancient ur-crime narratives from Europe and the Middle East, yet other distinctive features of the genre are missing. Crime or detective fiction is a genre marked by peculiarities *both* in subject and form. As Tzvetan Todorov has noted, it is “constituted by the problematic relation of two stories: the story of the crime, which is missing, and the story of the investigation, which is present, and whose only justification is to acquaint us with the other story” (*Genres* 33). The investigatory narrative supplies the missing pieces of the crime narrative, and the two merge in a conclusion, becoming one. Moreover, the text is structured as a puzzle, with information withheld or concealed from the reader in a fictional game of suspenseful mystery.

When the ur-crime narratives are compared to indubitable examples of modern generic crime, they prove examples of content rather than form. Plots are episodic, rambling, the story of an adventure rather than an investigation. The ur-crime text may contain features found in modern crime fiction, such as the felony, the discovery of a culprit, his punishment. What is lacking is the structure. There is no mystery as such, the story having an immemorial

folk tradition so familiar the audience knows automatically “whodunnit”. Fact and fiction are mingled, with gods and (non-human) monsters appearing. And there is nothing resembling a detective.

It is only when the modern nation-state begins to develop, with crime and its punishment a significant part of the apparatus of power (and terror), that what we would now term narratives of true crime, about specific, recent misdemeanours, appear. Crime, via the spectacle of judicial execution, long had primitive, visceral, entertainment value. With the development of the printing press and increased literacy, it could become highly topical; and also commodified. The form the true crime narrative took in the early centuries of printing was the form of pamphlets and broadsheets, commemorating in ballad and prose the more notorious cases. Some were last words from the gallows, being (purportedly) confessions to prison chaplains, or the latter’s sermons. Their relationship to their subjects was so close that they were often sold at public executions, like ghoulish program notes. A seventeenth-century crime consumer such as Samuel Pepys might attend an execution and buy a broadsheet ballad as a souvenir.

Interestingly co-existent with and even predating this true crime discourse was a fictional analogue: the picaresque, featuring unreformed but likeable rogues. This literary form originated in sixteenth-century Spain, the word “pizaro” itself being Spanish for knave. Some famous examples were Le Sage’s *Gil Blas* (1715–35), Defoe’s *Moll Flanders* (1722) and Henry Fielding’s *The Life of Mr. Jonathan Wild, the Great* (1743). However, while the content of the picaresque was certainly criminal, its structure was biographical and episodic. The mystery narrative was absent, and the focus was on the villain. In subject matter the picaresque is crime, but other generic similarities are lacking. It is essentially ur-crime, though perhaps ancestral to the thriller.

The printed commodification of crime was initially disorganized and haphazard. A development of the 1700s was that the private collecting of crime texts (such as Pepys' collection of broadside murder ballads) became public, the work of a printer/publisher. Accounts of famous criminal trials were compiled and issued in book form, such as François Gayot de Pitaval's multi-volume *Causes Célèbres et Intéressants* (1735–9), which included the story of Martin Guerre. A parallel development in English was *The Newgate Calendar* (1728), a collection of narratives taking its title from London's Newgate prison and its Calendar, that is, a list of prisoners awaiting trial. Pitaval and *The Newgate Calendar* were singular publishing successes, being reprinted or revised throughout the next two centuries, often with new and updated villains.

To examine how this true crime material was presented to the reader, a narrative from *The Newgate Calendar* of 1773 shall be examined, that of Eugene Aram. The first thing apparent is that the format follows the new model of biography—indeed, the criminal lives depicted in the *Calendar* are a rare contemporary source for the lowly and the marginal. These rogues progress from birth to death, usually on the gallows. Aram was born in Yorkshire in 1704, of an ancient but reduced family. He was a child prodigy, self-taught in philology but lacking the means for advancement. Instead he worked as a schoolteacher. Then in 1745 he and Richard Houseman killed a Knaresborough neighbour, Daniel Clarke, the motive being money.

The body was concealed and Clarke's disappearance barely investigated, despite some suspicious circumstances. Aram left Yorkshire, and also his wife. The murder was only discovered fourteen years later, when some skeletal remains were found near Knaresborough, "still joined to each other by the ligatures of the joints" (613). The disappearance of Clarke was recalled—and also some hints dropped by Aram's deserted wife. In fact Clarke had been

buried elsewhere, something inadvertently revealed by Houseman. He turned King's evidence and Aram was located and brought to trial. He was convicted, and after repentance and confession, finally hanged (615). Here the typical moral and narrative constraints of *The Newgate Calendar* slightly obscured the facts: the historical Aram was considerably less repentant than implied, and certainly never made public confession (Tyson 29–30).

The Aram story contains rich and strange material, such as the cultured villain and the proximity at Knaresborough of two skeletons, the result of unrelated crimes. Yet the *Calendar* does not fully exploit the inherent possibilities of the story. Its narrative is chronological, without the reordering of events, the withholding of crucial information for the sake of drama and suspense, which is typical of the detective form. A modern crime narrative would begin with the *corpus delicti*, the discovery of the bones, and move backwards in chronological time as it reconstructed events, and determined whodunnit. However it would take decades (and several retellings of the story) before a mystery narrative form would begin to be applied to Aram, as we shall see later in this chapter.

Another significant difference between the Aram story and modern crime narratives is that the presence of the (Christian) supernatural is a given—as it is in much of *The Newgate Calendar*. The murdered make ghostly reappearance, bent on vengeance, or are given a chance to testify via superstitious forensics: Houseman was forced to handle the bones, in the belief that a corpse would supposedly bleed if touched by its murderer. The practice had, in the late seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, an increasingly practical basis: as Deborah Williams notes, “confrontation with the corpse of the victim was probably the most likely method to terrify a confession out of a recalcitrant felon” (8). The “silent witness” had nothing to do with Houseman; but in the shock of the experience he implicated himself in the Clarke murder.

Thus the circumstances that led to Aram's trial were a series of accidents, by which divine intervention could be read. The *Calendar* stated smugly: "The discovery of the murder is a striking proof that from the eye of Providence nothing can be concealed" (608). God was the detective in such crime compilations as John Reynold's 1621 *The Triumph of God's Revenge, against the Crying, and Execrable Sinne of Murther*. William Godwin termed this book "tremendous", and recalled that "the beam of the eye of Omniscience was represented as perpetually pursuing the guilty, and laying open his most hidden retreats to the light of day" (340).

In the eighteenth century this belief began to change. There were stirrings toward the beginnings of forensics as a science, and other paths than Providence towards the solution of murder. A quarter century after the Aram trial, in Kirkudbrightshire, Scotland, the 1786 case of *R v. Richardson* was not resolved via the handling of a corpse, but by physical evidence. A young pregnant woman was murdered, with distinctive footprints being left in the soft soil of the crime scene. A plaster cast was made, and compared with the boots of the men attending the funeral: one set of hobnails matched perfectly (Marriner 21; Welsh 160).

What had happened in the intervening period? The most obvious influence was the Enlightenment, with its emphasis on rationalism and perceptions of human, rather than divine, morality. Criminal trials had always had a reconstructive function, to establish a narrative of what had occurred, but now wrongdoing could no longer be simply ascribed to the Devil. "Enlightenment ideas focused attention on *motive*" (Halttunen 43). Nor would punishment be a mundane analogue of the Last Judgement. Legal means of solving crime were becoming less brutal and more systematized, in apparent response to the diminution of crimes of violence during the eighteenth century, with offences against property being more frequent (see Foucault, *Discipline and Punish* 75). Notably, torture as part of the criminal

justice system (to extract confessions or pleas to indictments) was gradually abolished, for instance in Britain in 1772 and Germany in 1831. “[O]nce a suspect could no longer be forced to incriminate himself [...] other evidence of guilt had to be found, and it had to be someone’s task to find and evaluate that evidence”, note Tannert and Kratz, referring to the German states (2). In short, belief in the ultimate responsibility for detecting crime was moving from the sacred to the secular. The supernatural was being separated from the law, leaving space for rationality as the ultimate means of uncovering criminals, as wielded by human agents of justice, rather than the impersonal divine.

The modern crime narrative is thus philosophically a child of the Enlightenment, and is thus liable to have arisen anywhere the movement had influence. It is entirely possible that hidden in dusty European magazines of the early 1800s are crime narratives in Dutch, perhaps, or Scandinavian. Yet curiously, crime fiction pre-1850 has so far been located only in England, America, France and the German/Austrian states. Certainly rationalism (and the increasing importance of deduction and physical evidence to the conviction process) was influencing the legal system in all four national groupings. But there were some significant differences. With England and America trials became adversarial, dominated by a contest between prosecution and defence lawyers before a passive audience of judge and jury. In France and Germany, while lawyers participated in the courtroom, elements of the older, inquisitorial model were retained. Judges could play a more active role, having historically “worked from a dossier that encapsulated a thorough, official pretrial investigation into all aspects of the case” (Langbein 132).

A comparative study of eighteenth-century legal change and its possible effect on early crime fiction in Europe, England and America, has not been performed. Halttunen has argued for the prime influence of the adversarial system upon crime’s narrative structure,

leading lawyers to emphasize storytelling, for the benefit of *tabula rasa* jurors (101–2). She is, though, drawing upon American case histories only; while contemporaneously on the Continent different legal procedures were producing their own crime stories. The early fictions of crime investigation, of murders to be solved, seem to transcend their specific legal systems. Thus the detective could be an amateur, a lawyer or even (on the Continent) an examining or investigative magistrate. The latter figure is perhaps most familiar to modern crime readers from the work of a twentieth-century French author: Georges Simenon has Inspector Maigret but also the *juge d'instruction*.

The “cultural construction of murder-as-mystery” is what Halttunen terms the typical narrative form of the crime story. Its earliest appearance she finds in 1786, in an American collection of execution sermons entitled *God Admonishing His People of Their Duty* (92). The sermon devoted to Hannah Ocuish, a twelve-year-old murderer from Connecticut, is accompanied by a brief account of her crime, which departs from *The Newgate Calendar* model of birth, crime, death (91–2). It follows the narrative sequence typical of modern genre crime fiction, beginning with the corpse, followed by investigation, the discovery of the culprit and her motive. However, there are other sources or discourses than the American law court for this “strikingly new way to tell the tale of a murder” (Halttunen 92): newspaper reportage.

Eighteenth-century newspapers could vary between the staid and the sensational, some featuring advertisements, foreign wars and shipping news; others finding criminal reports far less censorable and contentious than contemporary politics. For those newspapers in which “blood and sex reigned supreme” (Cranfield 65), crime, trials and execution provided excellent copy. Readers intrigued by a murder could, if not physically present at the assizes or a hanging, still vicariously participate in a crime as it unfolded, a real-time process

beginning with the *corpus delicti*, followed by investigation, the discovery of the culprit, etc. etc. Thus the form of the Ocuish narrative may simply derive from a Connecticut newspaper.

Indeed, the crime narrative form can be shown emerging in Henry Fielding's short-lived newspaper of 1752, the *Covent-Garden Journal*. Fielding was both novelist and London magistrate, and he used his court to provide copy for the paper. He also made the journal a tool for publicising his magistracy and solving crime, for instance advertising for those robbed to bring information to his Bow Street premises (28 January, 2). In the cases he was involved in, such the brutal highway robbery and murder of George Carey, a higgler (itinerant dealer), Fielding ensured a continuing *Crimestoppers* coverage of events. In the Carey case, he reported his pre-trial (examinations of suspects) and trial activities, even publishing detailed descriptions of those wanted for the crime, with attendant rewards (see issues of 21, 28 January; 1, 8, 11, 15, 18 February). A serialised narrative of a crime and the judicial response was thus presented in installments, which the reader could follow as it happened.

A simpler case, also reported in the *Covent-Garden Journal*, was solved in less than a day. It is worth reporting as an instance of rationalist deduction solving a crime; and also because the story clearly appealed to Fielding, who gave it much space. Indeed, had the *Bill* existed in the 1700s, the narrative would have made a perfect half-hour program.

A trunk was stolen from a coach bound for Gravesend. It contained papers vital to the East India Company, and was due to be sent on a ship sailing the next day. Fielding was consulted, and advised, given the shortness of time, that the trunk be cried for. He also sent for Mr. Bath, "an old and experienced Thief-taker" (bounty hunter cum freelance detective). The trunk had been last seen at then semi-rural Peckham, to which Bath went:

and then conceiving, as he says, that as the Theft was committed at Noon-Day, the Rogues would not attempt immediately to carry off their Booty, as the Trunk was

very large, but would endeavour to conceal it in some place till the Evening, he bethought himself of searching all the Ditches in the adjacent Fields, in one of which the lost Goods were soon found in *statu quo*. (21 January, 2)

The irony was that the crime having been cried, when Bath and his companions carried the trunk to the nearest inn, they were immediately arrested and charged with the theft. They extricated themselves with some difficulty and the trunk sailed to the East Indies the next day, as originally scheduled. On 25 January the *Covent-Garden Journal* proudly reported the thief-taker's reward (2).

However, until the early nineteenth century the penetration of this crime narrative mode was limited. In 1783 there was "one newspaper for every 300 inhabitants of the British Isles" (Smith 95). The literate population was small, and production and postage costs put newspapers beyond the reach of the less than affluent. Yet it is indicative of the thirst for news that popular meeting places such as coffee-houses made papers freely available to their customers, thus increasing the potential readership.

The Industrial Revolution's innovations in the areas of printing and paper-making made newspapers much more profitable concerns; and published more frequently. Gradually the restrictions on the press were reduced, such as the British stamp tax, which had effectively acted as a means to suppress revolutionary-minded publications. The arrival of the railway and the telegraph in the 1830s–1840s improved distribution and made communications more rapid. The news became hotter, costs went down and the papers increasingly reached a lower, and newly literate socio-economic.

Crime would become a staple of the popular press, particularly in weekly papers such as the *British News of the World* (1843), and *Reynolds' Weekly Newspaper* (1850). These were mass-circulation papers, geared at a market that could only afford one newspaper a

week, and only had the leisure to read it, or have it read to them, on a Sunday. They had formidable competition, not only from pamphlets of trial proceedings, but also penny or halfpenny murder broadsheets. English publisher James Catnach and his followers specialized in such gory ephemera. They were sold by hawkers nicknamed Death Hunters and achieved extraordinary sales figures: the 1840 case of François Courvoisier sold over a million copies, and nine years later Maria and William Manning sold two million (Mayhew 1: 284).

How much the press was coming to depend upon crime reporting is shown by one of the more severe penalties French courts of the 1830s–40s could impose on a wayward newspaper: to prohibit reportage of trials, “which effectively deprived it of much of its potential copy” (Smith 112). However, further specialization had already occurred, as with the French *Gazette des Tribunaux*, a daily and topical Pitaval, founded in the 1820s (and of such influence as to be cited by Poe in “The Murders in the Rue Morgue”). An English example, John Cleave’s *Weekly Police Gazette* (1834) mingled radical politics and crime so successfully it had a circulation of over 20,000 copies a week.

In the nineteenth century newspapers would typically present a murder case as a puzzle. Since the first report would usually concern the discovery of a body, with attendant suspicious circumstances, the narrative temporal dislocation later characteristic of detective fiction would occur. The newspaper coverage essentially began *after* the fact, the object being to establish the story of the crime. The body, the inquest, the investigation, the capture and the trial thus formed a narrative of revelation, a whodunnit. It is therefore no surprise that some of the most influential of nineteenth-century crime texts, such as “The Murders in the Rue Morgue” and Fergus Hume’s 1886 bestselling *The Mystery of a Hansom Cab* introduced their crime plots by means of large chunks of fake reportage from real newspapers.

Moreover, the newspaper whodunnit was inclusive of the reader, who would be first

caught with the hookline of morbid curiosity, and then be increasingly involved in a true crime puzzle, as edition after edition of the paper was bought, and guesses were made as to the identity of the corpse in the ruined mill, or who the Bow Street Runners would arrest next. The comment cited below comes from the mid-nineteenth century; but is applicable to earlier decades:

Every little hint or clue is seized with astonishing avidity; countless suggestions are made and theories are started; millions of readers wait impatiently for more and more news; and the police and the newspaper offices are besieged by correspondents eager to propose new lines of enquiry. (Dallas 4)

As an example, the case of François Courvoisier will be discussed. This 1840 real-life murder mystery constituted a genuine early Victorian media frenzy, its representation appearing both contemporaneously in the newspapers and soon after in book form, in *Chronicles of Crime; or, the New Newgate Calendar* (1841), by the pseudonymous Camden Pelham. Both showed the murder mystery narrative model well established just prior to the publication of “The Murders in the Rue Morgue”. Indeed, the account in Pelham gives a detailed and at times suspenseful description of the police investigation, something unknown in the old *Calendar*.

The progress and reception of the case will be reconstructed, from the perspective of an 1840s *Times* reader. It began on 7 May, with the *corpus delicti*: a report of the discovery of the elderly Lord William Russell, in bed, with his throat cut. It appeared there had been a burglary, for valuables were missing, yet the three servants in the house had heard nothing. “No clue is at present obtained of any person being implicated in the transaction”, noted the *Times*, before giving an account of the inquest, which occurred on the same day (5). In the report of the inquest, witnesses gave their depositions. The first real clue was given by a police inspector, who opined that a door to the house had been forced *from the inside*; another

policeman noted that a chisel he had found in a box belonging to the one male servant, a valet, matched marks on the door. The latter was questioned, but his testimony contained no surprises; also unsurprising was the inquest jury's verdict of willful murder against someone as yet unknown. So ended the first day of coverage.

The following day, 8 May, the *Times* had no fresh news, but nonetheless made mention of the case, keeping interest warm, if on the back boiler. On 9 May, a longer item appeared, noting crowds of spectators as Russell's house was being searched almost to the point of demolition. Here, more definitely, the finger was pointed:

It is said that Courvoisier, the valet, on being told of the search which was making, manifested the greatest anxiety with respect to a watercloset attached to the back parlour, and it was stated during the day that in this watercloset several articles of the missing property were found. [...] It appeared that the workman upon removing a piece of skirting board adjoining the sink in the butler's pantry found hidden there two bank notes for 10*l.*, and 5*l.* each, together with some of the missing rings. The valet, it appeared, performed the duty of butler, and as such no other person but himself had a right to use the pantry, so that the general supposition is that the notes and rings were placed there by him [...] (5)

Courvoisier was examined, the next report stating that the murder had "to a considerable extent", been successfully fixed "upon the party to whom suspicion pointed from the first" (11 May, 5). It was also noted that a locket, missed by Russell previously, had been found among Courvoisier's effects; though this information merely established that the valet was a thief, not a murderer. A more detailed report of the 9 May events, from the *Observer*, was then reprinted, to fill out the coverage. The 14–15 May issues of the *Times* continued the story, reporting on the funeral. The issue of 16 May declared that Courvoisier still protested

his innocence, though it added hopefully: “It is, however, very currently stated in the neighbourhood that some article of attire belonging to Courvoisier has been found, which is spotted with blood” (7).

Courvoisier was committed to trial, which took place in late June. The evidence against him was largely circumstantial, and though the *Times* and other newspapers were convinced of his guilt, the case against him was not of the strongest. Then, on the second day of the trial, new evidence emerged. As the *Times* noted, this discovery had occurred:

in rather a singular manner. It appeared that a paragraph respecting the plate [marked with Russell’s family crest and missing since the murder] was copied into one of the French papers from a London newspaper, with a suggestion from the editor of the French journal that probably, as Courvoisier was a foreigner, the plate was deposited by him at some of the foreign hotels in London. The paragraph was seen by Mr. Vincent, partner of the proprietor of the French hotel in Leicester-place [...], who communicated it to the mistress of the house, and she at once recollected that the prisoner, who had previously lived in the establishment as waiter, and was known by the name of John, had a short time previous to the murder left a brown paper parcel in her possession [...] (20 June 7)

When opened, the package did indeed contain the missing plate, something decisive for the case against Courvoisier. Newspapers had covered the murder investigation and trial: it was their participatory involvement of the reader that provided the crucial evidence. True crime reportage essentially solved the case.

Yet newspapers were not the only venue for crime, which either in actuality or its popular discourses, increasingly pervaded early modern Western society. Thus crime was

slowly gaining the necessary familiarity to slip from the factual to the fictional mode. As Richard Altick has noted in his *Victorian Studies in Scarlet*, it became an obsession in the nineteenth century. The Red Barn, site of the 1827 killing of Maria Marten by William Corder was nearly demolished by souvenir hunters, and such sensation was attached to the spot that it became the subject of a multi-media frenzy, surrounded by crowds and thematic representations that included a Methodist preacher, puppet shows and camera obscura displays (Altick 30–31). Small wonder, then that the respectable *Chambers's Edinburgh Journal* could devote an 1849 article to “Murder-Mania”, complaining that “the exciting and abhorrent details of slaughter offered by the public journals” made them “accessories before the fact to three-fourths of the more extravagant murders that occur in England” (L. R. 209)—while simultaneously running a detective fiction series. The obsession existed, would run at fever pitch, and eventually would create its own mode of expression.

The prevalence of true crime discourse in the late eighteenth and nineteenth centuries led to an extraordinary piece of writing by Thomas De Quincey. His sardonic and idiosyncratic theorization of criminality, “On Murder Considered as One of the Fine Arts” (1827–54) contains in its later sections some extraordinary recreations of actual crimes—albeit not always strictly factual. In his account of the 1812 Ratcliffe Highway murders, De Quincey describes Mary the servant girl returning to a household of dead, with Williams the killer still on the premises. She knocks on the door, but does not get an immediate reply:

Yes, now beyond a doubt there is coming an answer to her summons. What was it? On the stairs [...] was heard a creaking sound. Next was heard most distinctly a footfall: one, two, three, four, five, stairs were slowly and distinctly descended. Then the dreadful footsteps were heard advancing along the little narrow passage to the door. The steps—oh heavens! *whose* steps?—have paused at the door. The

very breathing can be heard of that dreadful being, who has silenced all breathing except his own in the house. There is but a door between him and Mary [...]

Now, suppose that he should suddenly open the door, and that incautiously in the dark Mary should rush in, and find herself in the arms of the murderer. Thus far the case is a possible one—that to a certainty, had this little trick been tried immediately upon Mary's return, it would have succeeded; had the door been opened suddenly upon her first tingle-tingle, headlong she would have tumbled in, and perished. But now Mary is on her guard. The unknown murderer and she have both their lips upon the door, listening, breathing hard; but luckily they are on different sides of the door; and upon the least indication of unlocking or unlatching, she would have recoiled into the asylum of general darkness.

(13: 113–4)

This acute visualisation and maintaining of suspense, the face-off between Williams and Mary only resolved when she hysterically pounds the door, ringing the bell with such abandon as to rouse the neighbors, shows the influence of more than true crime reportage. The almost filmic aesthetic—De Quincey envisaging the scene as if staged, the streetscape on one side of the door, on the other the house, bisected for the audience's view—derives from the theatre. A similar set was used in the enormously successful *Jonathan Bradford; or, The Murder at the Roadside Inn* (1833) by Edward Fitzball, famous for depicting the inn concerned as a dolls' house, cut-away with four rooms on two levels.

Jonathan Bradford is a not crime *per se*, but melodrama, a form distinguished by gruesome content, black and white moral absolutes, and furious action. It arose in the 1790s, its key developer being the French playwright René Charles Guilbert de Pixérécourt (1773–1844). Melodrama was hugely popular throughout the nineteenth century, permeating all

stratas of society, via the established theatres, penny gaffs (shopfronts temporarily converted into theatres) of the 1830s, fairground tent shows and even puppetry—often using the same scripts, such as *Jonathan Bradford*.

Numerous early nineteenth-century melodramas had the word murder in their titles—such as *The Mysterious Murder: or, What's the Clock* by “G. L.” (1817). “Look into the papers, incidents enough *invented* there!” was advice given to Fitzball (Disher 90). He did: *Jonathan Bradford* was based on a real case from the preceding century, the transposition of the crime narrative to the theatre indicative of the gradual process by which true crime was modulating into fiction. Crime and melodrama famously coincided in *Maria Marten; or, the Murder in the Red Barn*, which packed theatres throughout the nineteenth century—but then the murder had been solved dramatically by a ghostly visitation in a dream. The relationship was even closer in the Weare murder of 1824, which was famously staged twice before the accused, one John Thurtell, came to trial, much to the accused’s dismay (Egan). One version even featured—allegedly—Thurtell’s actual chaise and horse as props (Altick 90).

However melodrama partook of other forms than true crime, its key early inspiration being the contemporary publishing sensation of the Gothic novel. Indeed Pixérécourt adapted Ann Radcliffe’s 1794 *The Mysteries of Udolpho* for the stage. At first glance the Gothic would seem to be removed from the sordid details of eighteenth-century true crime, given that the form was defined by its historical/exotic settings, aristocratic and romantic leads, and fondness for the supernatural. Yet it was the Gothic that supplied the word mystery to the crime genre. The term itself had a history of wandering between literary genres, being in medieval times a Biblical play. By the later eighteenth and the early nineteenth century it connoted the Gothic, frequently appearing in titles such as the aforementioned *The Mysteries of Udolpho*, Augustus Crandolph’s *The Mysterious Hand: or Subterranean Horrors* (1811),

Eliza Parsons' *The Mysterious Warning* (1796), and Karl Grose's *Horrid Mysteries* (1796), a translation of his *Der Genius*. The last two titles were cited in Jane Austen's *Northanger Abbey*, as (un)suitable reading for her heroine, Catherine Morland. Even in the nineteenth century the meaning of the word varies, *Les Mystères de Paris* (1842–3) by Eugène Sue, the unfinished *The Mystery of Edwin Drood* (1870) by Dickens and *The Mystery of a Hansom Cab* being three novels with similar titles but major differences. Only the last example is indisputably what we would term a modern mystery novel, that is, structurally dominated by a crime and its solution. In the others, while there is mystery, it is not the entire focus of the narrative, something which applies to the Gothic as a whole.

The Gothic is a Pangeia of genre literatures, containing within it the future continents of horror, science fiction (as with Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein*) and crime writing. Behind the romantic historical geography, the Gothic novel in content is as bloodstained and sordid as any *Newgate Calendar* case—indeed, one early Gothic novelist, Charlotte Smith, translated selected tales from Pitaval with the telling title of *The Romance of Real Life* (1787). Yet perhaps more crucial is what mystery involved in the Gothic context: the depiction of a sensational motif or incident, with its explanation being delayed until much later in the narrative. This narrative form first appeared in Radcliffe's *A Sicilian Romance* (1792), to become hugely popular two years later with *Udolpho*.

The plot of *Udolpho* is, for the most part, a series of mysteries, only revealed at the end of volume four, these including an abbess with something to hide, and most notoriously, a picture frame covered with a black veil. Much that seems supernatural in the novel proves to have a rational explanation, in this aspect prefiguring the atheistic world of Sherlock Holmes. It is the suspense created by the long-drawn-out, seemingly interminable revelation of these mysteries, the violent action in between, and the intricate construction of plot, that is

truly precursive of the crime narrative form.

Several weeks after *Udolpho*'s publication in May 1794 (Norton 93, 170, 278), appeared *Caleb Williams* (1794) by William Godwin, radical philosopher, theorist of anarchy, husband of Mary Wollstonecraft, and father of Mary Shelley. Paradoxically there is less mystery in *Caleb Williams* than in *Udolpho*, despite the significance the former has retrospectively acquired as a "detective" novel. The eponymous Caleb is a servant who suspects his master of murder. Falkland, his employer, is as unlikely gallows-fare as Eugene Aram, being a very model of an Enlightenment gentleman, who just happens to have murdered—with considerable provocation—the odious landowner Tyrell. Caleb's initial idle curiosity about Falkland becomes obsessive, until it is clear to the master that his man is investigating him. Thereafter their positions neatly reverse; Caleb's pursuit of the truth causes a frightened Falkland to frame him for theft, then a hanging offence. Caleb flees, hotly pursued by Falkland and his hired thief-taker in the first notable chase sequence of the crime novel.

The source matter informing *Caleb Williams* was diverse: from *The Newgate Calendar* to contemporary political agitation. Not surprisingly the work is complex—it can be regarded as a protest novel, a psychological study, an updated *Revenger's Tragedy*, as well as proto-crime (not ur-, for here form and content do begin to coalesce). The series of revelations in the first volume, as Caleb wonders at Falkland's gloom, then gradually discovers the cause, show a plot structure that works backwards from the event. Such was to become typical of the detective genre, when expanded throughout an entire narrative length. Indeed Godwin, as he admitted in a later appendix to the novel, had plotted his third, then second volumes before ending sequentially with the first. Only when the framework of the novel was in place, did he begin writing chapter one, a technique anticipatory of later

practices in crime writing.

The impact of the novel can be gauged by its several adaptations for the stage, it first being used as the basis for the play *The Iron Chest; or, Murder Brought to Light* (1796) by George Colman, then translated for a Paris production as *Falkland* (1799). The set-piece of the reverse-chase, hunter becoming hunted, reappears, notably in *Frankenstein*. Yet De Quincey, that true crime enthusiast, dismissed the novel. His 1845 critique of the work, in “Notes on Gilfillan’s Literary Portraits”, is usually quoted only for his opinion of Caleb: “vile eavesdropping inquisitiveness” (11: 330). Rather more interesting is why De Quincey could see in the novel “no merit of any kind”, while perversely being able to write a detailed critique of it, from memory—despite the fact his reading of the book had occurred thirty-five years previously (11: 329). Clearly Caleb Williams left an impression on De Quincey, even if quite unfavourable.

De Quincey’s plot summary picks at the novel’s implausibilities: “no man could severely have blamed [Falkland], nor would our English law have severely punished him, if [...] he had seized a poker and laid his assailant dead on the spot” (11: 329). He is scathing about Falkland’s chest, where apparently an (unspecified) memento of the crime is kept—“Surely Mr. Falkland would not keep in brandy the gory head of Tyrrel”, he sarcastically notes (11: 330). Even the chase itself he finds incredible, despite it being “the most spirited part of the story” (11:330). He concludes his analysis with the words:

The interest from secret and vindictive murder, though coarse, is undoubtedly deep. What would make us thrill in real life, —the case, for instance, of a neighbour lying under the suspicion of such a murder, —would make us thrill in a novel. But then it must be managed with art, and covered with mystery. For a long time it must continue doubtful both as to the fact, and the circumstances, and

the motive. Whereas, in the case of Mr. Falkland, there is little mystery of any kind: not much, and only for a short time, to Caleb; and none at all to the reader, who could have relieved the curiosity of Mr. Caleb from the first, if he were placed in communication with him. (11: 333)

Caleb might have contained a murder, an investigation and a detective: but it did not sustain its mystery.

Even using the word “detective” with regard to Caleb is a little problematic. The term, in the specific sense of a criminal investigation, has its earliest example listed in the OED from 1843 (although the word appears in the Times’ coverage of the 1840 Courvoisier case). It has been claimed that it was not used with reference to literary genre writing until 1886 (Stewart 27). In fact the literature of crime precedes writing about detectives, as crime itself preceded the development of modern, efficient policing in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, a process by which the detective became a focus of interest, expressed initially in reportage and then fiction.

Caleb was precursive, unusually privileging the sleuth, or seeker of justice. In the society of eighteenth-century England, where the “basic unit of administration was the parish” (Ousby 5), justice was decentralized. Reading *The Newgate Calendar*’s narratives is to be struck by the lack of formal detection. The way in which Aram and the other malefactors were caught involved haphazard chance, guilt visibly expressed, and the fact of the crime occurring in a society so small and “tightly knit that escape will not be possible” (Knight, *Form and Ideology* 12).

Coroners, Justices of the Peace and parish Constables made anonymous appearances in *The Newgate Calendar*, yet the chronological and geographical diversity of the crimes featured meant that few would appear twice. Moreover, their image was hardly the stuff of

heroism—consider Constable Dogberry in Shakespeare’s *Much Ado About Nothing*, for example. He is merely a dunderhead; but even the limited power of the parish constabulary could be abused, through such practices as the use of paid informers, where thief- and bribe-taking became intertwined.

Historical crime fiction, such as the Cadfael novels by “Ellis Peters”, impose the model of modern detection upon eras where it did not, and could not exist, however careful the research. A rather more credible approach is taken by Bruce Alexander and Deryn Lake’s respective series (not to mention a John Creasey novel) featuring Sir John Fielding, the half-brother of Henry Fielding, and also a Bow Street magistrate. Both brothers were energetic in organising their local constabulary into an impartial and efficient force.

The Fieldings’ reforms included a small group of specialist investigative officers, who were to become known as the Bow Street Runners. In the Runners can be seen the beginnings of professional detection in England, though they were not wholly free of the potential for abuse, being paid a salary so small as to be only a retainer, the bulk of their earnings coming from bounty-hunting. They persisted until 1839 before being disbanded. It was not until 1842 that a small detective unit was inaugurated at Scotland Yard, as part of a process by the British police force was reorganized into a centralized system. Here it followed innovations in Napoleonic France, where Minister Joseph Fouché, described as the “supreme exponent of the police art” (Stead 46) had made the police an efficient model of professionalism.

Yet the Runners were daring and successful, attracting much attention. The first police detective to be a fictional protagonist appeared in *Richmond: Scenes in the Life of a Bow Street Runner, Drawn Up from His Private Memoranda* (1827). This work was anonymously published and has been variously attributed (see Bleiler, introduction, *Richmond* x; Knight,

Crime Fiction 22). *Richmond*, however, is not in structure a mystery; indeed the protagonist only becomes a Runner some 80 pages into the text. Thereafter, *Richmond* has a series of episodic adventures, with assorted villains. This section of the book might be described as the original police procedural; certainly in its claims to authenticity it prefigured the fake police memoir, the subject of a minor pulp publishing industry some decades later.

Richmond was not a success, in reviewing and sales terms, although Bleiler notes in his introduction it was quickly pirated in America (ix). Yet the following year, and on the continent, two significant works in the history of detection and its fictionalization appeared. One was fiction, “*Der Kaliber*”, an 1828 novella that is the first crime narrative in the German language. Its author, Adolph Müllner (1774–1829), was a successful playwright, and might have written more crime had he not died the following year. “*Der Kaliber*” has a sleuth-narrator, an investigating magistrate, who is assisted by a defence lawyer in proving the innocence of Albus, a murder suspect. As the title indicates, the case is solved by forensic evidence, a bullet’s calibre.

Müllner was a lawyer and “*Der Kaliber*” combined his professional interests, and his favourite theme of fratricide (a curious parallel between the novella and the writer’s life being that both he and Albus married their dead brother’s fiancée). The story is self-referential in other ways, with quotations at the beginning of chapters coming from Müllner’s plays, and his fratricide drama *Guilt* influencing the plot—Albus attends a performance, which provokes his confession. Indeed, the magistrate, in a fictional frame or justification for the novella, even “narrates” the story to Müllner, since, as the heroine notes, he wrote the tragedy “which could easily have cost my Albus his head” (52).

Also, in 1828, in France, a real-life police equivalent of *Richmond*, one Eugène François Vidocq, was approaching retirement, after a varied and colourful career. Vidocq had

begun as a petty criminal, escalating to prison escapee, before switching to the right side of the law. Vidocq was able to move from police informer to detective, becoming in 1812 chief of the Surêté, the detective division of the French police. It seems *Richmond* may have come to the attention of Vidocq (or, more likely, his publishers), for in 1828 appeared the first instalment of his *Memoires*, completed in 1829. They sold well, quickly being translated into German and English, as well as being pirated in America.

The *Memoires* offered crime with the authentic touch, a “ripping yarn” influenced by the various pre-existing fictional discourses of crime. They are not a simple autobiography or a compilation of case notes. At least two re- or ghostwriters worked on the *Memoires*, which take a self-consciously literary form, as if attempting to make the content conform to fictive conventions. Classical allusions appear, and some incidents seem twisted into the stock forms of melodrama, the thrilling escapes and captures being rather too theatrical to be simply true crime. Vidocq’s preface claimed he had the rewriter sacked at the end of volume two and wrote the rest himself. However, this comment was most probably the work of another writer, one Louis-François L’Héritier, who took the liberty of inserting his own work—episodes from a previously published short novel, *Adèle Descars*—into volume four (Knight, *Form and Ideology* 29). That this addition occurred suggests a laissez-faire mentality on the part of Vidocq, or certainly a level of involvement that did not extend beyond providing the raw matter. In addition, Vidocq’s account of his successful police captures were interconnected, in a series of narrative linkages—an “arrest in one chapter brings information that leads to another arrest in the next” (Knight, *Form and Ideology* 30). It was clearly not sufficient to simply present a series of crime episodes, even without the unifying figure of Vidocq: the narrative required further structural organization. The novelist’s art is here evident, articulating a crime narrative from the bare bones of a policeman’s procedures.

However this development had been prefigured in the mid-late eighteenth century, with the growing importance of intricately crafted plots to the novelist. Gladfelder states that “criminal discourses, by the end of the century, had become enmeshed with the novelistic tradition itself” (xii), but the process was apparent much earlier. It is not accidental that Henry Fielding, that magistrate-writer-journalist, should be the first English author to draw upon the nascent crime narrative structure in his novels. His novel *Tom Jones* (1749) used the linear, biographic mode juxtaposed with a competing narrative that it is necessary for the reader to reconstruct. Says Konigsberg: “He describes events in straight, chronological fashion but leaves out crucial episodes and explanations, important actions and motivations, so we must try to figure things out as we go along and finally reconstruct the plot” (151). Konigsberg does not link Fielding with the contemporary crime discourse, although he does note that he presents a perfect example of the Russian formalists’ *sujet* and *fabula* (or story and plot): “the events and even parts of the novel in the order they are presented, and our reconstruction of what actually happened in the correct sequence” (151). Such is the typical practice of crime fiction.

Fielding’s plot structures prefigure generic crime, but Jane Austen’s as well? P. D. James famously addressed the Jane Austen Society in 1998 on “Emma Considered as a Detective Story”, in which she made an excellent case for the domestic/romance content of the novel being presented in the mystery form (250–266). Austen, unlike Fielding, was not professionally engaged with crime, but she could hardly have been shielded from the ubiquity of its popular discourses, given that melodramas and newspapers equally served as transmitters of the crime narrative mode.

Indeed, Henry Chorley Fothergill, the reviewer of an early crime novel, Catherine Crowe’s *Men and Women: or, Manorial Rights* (1843), cited both authors for their use of a

technique now firmly identified with crime fiction: seeding the text with clues.

If we turn to Fielding, or to Miss Austen—that master and mistress of the art [of novel construction]—we find that their artifice was surpassed by their ease and nature in concealing it; that the incident which served as clue to the labyrinth, was rather remembered afterward, and turned back to, than watched or noted at the time. (*Athenaeum* 30 December 1843, 1160)

The sense is given here of a novel as a complex construction, as complex as the labyrinth of Greek mythology, to which the novelist's clues, like Ariadne's ball of string, function as guides—if the reader is sufficiently alert to spot them. The *OED*'s first reference to the use of clue specifically referring to the murder mystery is from the 1880s and Hume's *The Mystery of a Hansom Cab*; but forty years previously it was recognised as a means of reconstructing (what could be termed) the *fabula* of a novel, and not in generic crime either.

In the late eighteenth century and the early decades of the nineteenth century all the ingredients, or systems, were present for the creation of generic crime fiction. Writers recognised the popular avid interest in crime, and added it like a curry spice to some very diverse narratives. One such author was Sir Edward Bulwer Lytton, now largely famous for the eponymous bad prose contest. In the course of his long literary career he wrote prolifically in various genres, indeed combining many of them in the 1828 hybrid or multi-genre novel *Pelham*. It contained true crime (the Weare–Thurtell murder, clearly recognizable), the “silver fork” genre of high society novel, satire, and the picaresque London low life. However, its crime theme is essentially a revenge sub-plot largely buried for most of the extremely discursive narrative, surfacing only in the last quarter of the book to dominate the text. The eponymous hero is successively a politician, romantic hero and sleuth of a mysterious murder. However, his playing Caleb is not the whole focus of the novel, rather an activity of

its concluding sections. Knight thus sees Pelham as a transitional figure between Godwin and later genteel amateur sleuths, a “recognisable quasi-detective” (*Crime Fiction* 12), but not the genuine article.

Other attempts were made to focus the contemporary murder-mania and privilege crime as the main subject of the text. First the picaresque recurred, in form realist and contemporary, the focus on actual case histories. In Germany Schiller produced the 1786 *Verbrecher aus Verbner Ehre* (*Criminal from Lost Honour*), based on the true story of a poacher who became leader of a robber gang. In France Stendhal took several crime cases featured in the *Gazette des Tribunaux*, and fashioned from them *Le Rouge et Le Noir* (1831). Other authors focussed on villain-police in the Vidocq mould, notably Balzac, in several novels of his “La Comédie Humaine” series of the 1830s–40s—Mary Braddon acknowledged his influence by terming him “a born detective” in her 1899 *Rough Justice* (106).

English writers of this new picaresque were dubbed Newgate novelists, their genre proving highly popular, although the subject of pious anxiety. Their numbers included Dickens, with *Oliver Twist* (1838) and William Harrison Ainsworth, whose first novel, *Rookwood* (1834) was an admitted domestication of the Gothic, albeit without the mystery:

I resolved to attempt a story in the bygone style of Mrs Radcliffe (which had always inexpressible charms for me), substituting an old English squire, an old English manorial residence, and an old English highwayman, for the Italian marchese, the castle, and the brigand of the great mistress of romance. (xxxiii)

A closer precursor to modern crime was the novel *Eugene Aram* (1832), also by Bulwer Lytton. In its revisiting of *The Newgate Calendar* story, it perfectly demonstrates the developments in crime narrative between the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. After Bulwer discovered that his grandfather had employed Aram as a tutor, he fictionally re-

opened the case. His first attempt was a tragic drama, which ground to a halt (this fragment is preserved as an appendix to the novel proper). Bulwer started afresh in novel form, depicting Aram ten years after the murder, with his doom creeping towards him (see Prefaces, *Eugene Aram* viii–xviii).

The contemporary reader would have known the denouement, yet Bulwer developed the narrative significantly, making the enigma of Aram compelling. He added new plot elements, making Houseman a recurring blackmailer, giving Aram a genteel love interest, and introducing a young man, Clarke's son, who acts as detective—only to be forestalled by the accidental discovery of the bones. An anonymous reviewer in the *Examiner* of 22 January 1832, found fault with this element of the plot: “it seems improbable that the clues taken up by the son [...] should not have been pursued at the time of Clarke's disappearance” (52). Yet he commended the book, which was well received. Godwin admitted to Bulwer he had thought of novelising Aram too, though what his “dark and inquiring genius”, in Bulwer Lytton's words (Prefaces, *Eugene Aram* xi), might have made of the story must remain conjectural.

Bulwer wrote other Newgate novels, yet interestingly returned to Aram in the edition of 1849, which he revised slightly. Now he introduced, like a rabbit from a hat, a new auctorial verdict: that Aram had been innocent of the murder, being only Houseman's accomplice after the fact. He even revised his tragedy to suit. In the 1849 edition novel and play both include the line: “I did not strike the blow!” (*Eugene Aram* 417, 450) In the play it appears towards the close of Act I, and in the novel during Aram's confession in the penultimate chapter. Here Bulwer anticipated the revelatory shock endings of much later crime fiction, even if he did trumpet the change in his new preface (*Eugene Aram* xviii).

The Newgate novel was an attempt to depict true crime in novelistic form. However,

like the eponymous Calendars, its structure was primarily biographical, rather than mysterious. The solution of a crime was not the main focus of the text. In addition, its focus on the villain meant a narrative closure of either reformation or the gallows. There was no opportunity created here for a series detective, a character who would recur in different narratives, solving different crimes, despite the real-life precedent of Vidocq.

Another interesting attempt at novelising crime was the enormously popular group of novels known as mysteries, the first being Eugène Sue's *Les Mystères de Paris* (1842–3), followed by *The Mysteries of London* (1844–8) by the radical journalist G. W. M. Reynolds, later of *Reynolds' Weekly*. Sue's title was a deliberate nod to Radcliffe and in fact the mysteries might best be termed urban Gothic, though the melodramatic tropes and use of topical scandal show the influence of the theatre and the popular press respectively. Where it differed from the Newgate school, crucially, was in its sprawling nature and sheer volume: Reynolds' *Mysteries of London* comprised 800,000 words.

The publication process was responsible for the near interminable form: Sue and Reynolds' work were *feuilletons*, published serially in newspapers or penny numbers, which strung out the publication process for years. It also created, via the need to sustain the reader's interest over such a length, a multi-stranded narrative interweaving the adventures of various characters against the background of the metropolis. In Sue's novel disguised Prince Rodolphe wanders the streets of Paris, seeking his daughter; in Reynolds, two brothers are separated, one taking the path of virtue, one of vice. These protagonists encounter much low life, crime and bloodshed, yet in an unstructured fashion; mysteries may be revealed at novel's end, but the sheer weight of words beforehand threatens to overwhelm the narrative. Sue admitted to writing *Les Mystères* "by instinct, with no idea where he was going" (Harvey and Heseltine 632), and his lack of pre-plotting shows in the bloated, over-complex and

frequently chaotic nature of the mysteries. Moreover, though the characters in these texts may be involved in quests involving detection, they are not detectives by profession. Nor are the mysteries, as we now understand the term, mysteries. The form therefore represents another evolutionary dead end in the crime genre.

Curiously, just prior to the publication of Sue's novel had appeared a short story, more or less the antithesis of the mysteries, in its brevity and tight plot, hinging on the ratiocinative investigation of a crime. Edgar Allan Poe's "The Murders in the Rue Morgue" appeared in April 1841, followed by "The Facts in the Case of Marie Rogêt", based on a genuine New York case, in 1842–3; and finally by "The Purloined Letter" in 1844, all published in American magazines.

At the beginning of this chapter Poe's sole paternity of genre was debunked. In fact it would be more accurate to regard him as a synthesist: taking and refining elements from contemporary writing and combining them in a whole that would eventually become generic. Yet if Poe is to be considered father of any literary form, his claim is strongest as regards the classic detective short story, rather than the genre as a whole. Contemporary crime short stories such as those by William E. Burton, which appeared in his "Leaves from a Life in London" series in the *American Gentleman's Magazine* in 1837, were not so dominated by the crime solution plot, which Poe exemplified in short fiction form. Works like *Pelham* had buried their crime narrative under the weight of thousands of additional words dealing with romance and other novelistic fare. Poe extracted it, fashioning a plot-driven story which began with a mystery and finished with its explanation by the detective. The puzzle presented by the bodies in the Rue Morgue is solved by Dupin, a crime genius many steps ahead of the narrator and indeed the reader, for the ape did it.

An intriguing theorization of crime writing and its narrative methods was provided in

Poe's 1842 review of Dickens' *Barnaby Rudge* in *Graham's Magazine*. The review is as prescient as De Quincey's critique of Godwin, and indeed precedes it—although there is no evidence that De Quincey read Poe's review, the two were clearly of like mind. Interestingly, Dickens' response to the review was to refer Poe to Godwin's stated methodology of composition (his writing Caleb Williams "backwards") as later cited by Poe in his "The Philosophy of Composition" (6: 31).

Barnaby Rudge is a novel that begins with a mysterious murder, but is not a murder mystery, rather being a historical novel, which happens, like *Pelham*, to contain a crime subplot. Its murder mystery, though, is incompletely related to the major dramatic set-pieces and apparently forgotten for large sections of the work. Poe begins his critique, "Dickens's 'Barnaby Rudge'", with a plot summary. As he acknowledges, his synopsis follows a "simple or natural sequence", events "in the order of their occurrence" (7: 49), a *sujet* which does not happen in the book:

But this order would by no means have suited the purpose of the novelist, whose design it has been to maintain the secret of the murder and the consequent mystery which encircles Rudge [...] The *thesis* of the novel may thus be regarded as based upon curiosity. Every point is so arranged as to perplex the reader, and whet his desire for elucidation [...] The design of mystery, however, being once determined upon by an author, it becomes imperative, first, that no undue or inartistical means be employed to conceal the secret of the plot; and secondly, that the secret be well kept. (7: 49, 51)

The secret is, for both Poe and the modern reader, badly kept: Poe claimed he knew whodunnit from page seven onwards (7: 52). Indeed, Dickens' relation of the case, with Mr Haredale found murdered in his bed, a gardener and Rudge his steward both missing, until a

body was discovered underwater some months later, only identifiable as Rudge by the clothing, is redolent of red herring. Why hide one body but not another, unless the object is to produce an unrecognizable corpse? Such proves to be the case, Rudge being the murderer of both Haredale and the gardener, then making his escape after having changed clothes with the latter.

Poe concludes:

That this fiction, or indeed any fiction written by Mr. Dickens, should be based in the excitement and maintenance of curiosity, we look upon as a misconception, on the part of the writer, of his own very great yet very peculiar powers. He has done this thing well [...] but he has not done it so thoroughly well as his high and just reputation would demand. We think that the whole book has been an effort to him, solely through the nature of his design. He has been smitten with an untimely desire for a novel path. The idiosyncrasy of his intellect would lead him, naturally, into the most fluent and simple style of narration. In tales of ordinary sequence he may and will long remain triumphant. He has a *talent* for all things, but no positive *genius* for *adaptation*, and still less for that metaphysical art in which the souls of all *mysteries* lie. "Caleb Williams" is a far less noble work than "The Old Curiosity Shop;" but Mr Dickens could no more have constructed the one than Mr. Godwin could have dreamed of the other. (7: 64)

Clearly Poe felt he *had* a genius for the metaphysical art of mystery, which he had already proved with "The Murders in the Rue Morgue". Yet it was not recognised in his lifetime, and indeed the influence of his three stories took decades to be felt. Poe would die in never-quite-explained circumstances in 1849, but his work would continually circulate and gain in esteem in the following decades.

And, at this point, with “The Murders in the Rue Morgue” published, the template for so much that would follow, the alternative story of crime fiction’s origins, crime as the creation of generic systems, will cease. A virtual gallery of crime fiction’s precursors has been created: the picaresque and *The Newgate Calendar*, Godwin, the Gothic, theatre and journalism, De Quincey, Vidocq’s self-portrait (much retouched), the side galleries devoted to the Newgate and Mysteries schools, and finally to Poe’s three miniatures. The preliminary hangings have been completed, but there is still space on the walls.

And given that this space has been created, the question must be asked: are there further pictures relevant to early nineteenth-century crime writing that should have been in the exhibition but remain, forgotten and unremarked, in the gallery storerooms? By women writers, perhaps?

CHAPTER TWO

MRS RADCLIFFE AS CONAN DOYLE?

Mrs Radcliffe was our Conan Doyle.
Eliza Lynn Linton, *My Literary Life* 87.

In chapter one was given an account of the origins of early crime fiction and its many influences. That history will form the basic framework for this chapter, the gallery wall on which the literary foremothers of crime can be situated. The focus will be on the period of the late eighteenth century and the early decades of the nineteenth century, concentrating on works largely of pre- or proto generic crime, either by women or with a significant female presence acting in an investigatory or detective capacity. The texts will be fictional, with one exception from true crime, dating from the seventeenth century.

In choosing the title “Mrs Radcliffe as Conan Doyle?” the intent is to be provocative. To a modern crime reader, the comparison between the pair seems at first unlikely. When Linton made the comment, it was far from a feminist statement. She was best-known as a polemicist against women’s rights, as in her famous essay “The Girl of the Period”. In the context of her memoir *My Literary Life* (1899) Linton primarily states that both authors were popular, and avidly-read. It is unclear if she is making a comparison between the crime content of Radcliffe’s Gothic and Sherlock Holmes. But that she ranks the two authors as equivalent (the Sherlock Holmes series was just over a decade old, still in progress, and yet to become canonical), provides an intriguing line of speculation for this chapter and the thesis as a whole. Can a case be made for women, and Radcliffe, having major significance in crime fiction, even perhaps comparable to Doyle?

Up to this point in the thesis, relatively few women have appeared in the story of

crime fiction: this chapter will add them. “Cherchons la femme”, wrote Dumas in *Les Mohicans de Paris*. His characters searched through the mean streets of Paris; but to seek the women of early crime fiction means venturing from the canon into some very dusty storerooms. While later crime writing, such as the Golden Age, at least has its women writers identified if not read in their prolific entirety, it is unclear just how many feminine predecessors they had in the early years of crime. By a process of diligent searching and serendipity, a number of significant early crime works by women authors have been identified. However it must be stated that this search does not claim to have identified all the female suspects. There is no doubt that many more remain unknown and unidentified, their works merely entries in antiquarian bookselling catalogues, or gathering dust on library shelves.

Some of the writers and works discussed in this chapter are now utterly obscure, although once famous and widely read. Others are better known, but in critical repute are more commonly associated with other genres, or with the history of their respective national literatures. Most have not been previously associated with crime writing, yet can be shown to have contributed appreciably to the early formation of the genre.

The question initially arises: why should women be intrigued by crime in an era when they were formally excluded from the legal system and the emergent police forces? Moreover, crime writing was codified during High Victoriana, where the ideology of the separate sphere—public for men, private for women—reigned. One relevant factor was that more women committed crimes: to cite one statistic, in England “[d]uring the second half of the nineteenth century, over a fifth of those convicted of crime were women—today they make up only an eighth” (Zedner 1). And when they figured, they drew considerable attention, for blatantly contravening the Angel in the House ideal. A typical example was described in

Henry Mayhew's *London Labour and the London Poor*. He quotes a Death Hunter on the case of Maria Manning, hanged with her husband Frederick for the 1849 killing of her lover:

I patters hard on the women such times, as I points them out on my board in murders or any crimes. I says: "When there's a mischief a woman's always the first. Look at Mrs. Manning there on that werry board—the work of one of the first artists in London—it's a faithful likeness, taken from life at one of her examinations, look at *her*. She fires the pistol, as you can see, and her husband was her tool." [...] The men likes it and the women doesn't object, for they'll say:

"Well, when a woman is bad, she *is* bad, and is a disgrace to her sex." (1: 328)

Another seller of murder broadsides interviewed by Mayhew declared: "Mostly all our customers is females. They are the chief dependence we have" (1: 222–3).

Gory murder trials famously attracted crowds of "nice" women. The novelist Mrs Eliza Stephenson wrote in *Janita's Cross* (1864), that supposedly refined ladies who "would faint at the sight of a cut finger and go into hysterics if the drowning of a litter of kittens were mentioned [...] such women can sit for hours listening to the details of a cold-blooded murder" (qtd. in Altick 42). Another novelist, Catherine Crowe, stated "many ladies were present" at a sensational 1848 French case of a grave-robber, although she avoided mentioning his necrophilia (Crowe, "Lycanthropy" 124; Sigmond 584). Moreover, women, if not present at trials, could participate in crime via the papers. De Quincey was noted for his eerie ability to analyse newspaper crime reports and correctly predict the murderer; but so was Ellen Wood, better known as the formidably respectable novelist Mrs Henry Wood (Japp 329; C. Wood, "Mrs. Henry Wood" 438). "Murder-Mania", to use *Chambers's* term, affected both men and women: both genders expressed their interest in fiction.

An obvious place to look for women writing crime was in the Gothic, a genre that was

equitable, even overtly feminine in its authors. It has already been noted in chapter one that the Gothic had crime content, and even form, in the shape of the mystery-dominated plot. Hubin lists Ann Radcliffe in his bibliography, and also Clara Reeve. Moreover, some famous ingredients of modern crime fiction arguably have origins in the Gothic, such as the locked room mystery, which has been previously claimed to be an invention of Edgar Allan Poe (Madoff 49)—although in the Gothic the locked room usually proves to have a secret passage. Kathi Maio has also noted that the “Had I But Known” mode, associated with female crime writers such as Mary Roberts Rinehart, involving a woman as investigator, often intuitively and most dangerously, also can be traced to the Gothic (“A Strange and Fierce Delight” 83).

Spotting generic crime elements in the Gothic is something particularly successful with the “Queen” of Gothic, Ann Radcliffe (1764–1823). She was one of the most inventive and influential female authors of all time, yet little is known about her: Radcliffe completely avoided the literary circles of her time. As a result she remains a woman of (Gothic) mystery, as secluded as her abducted heroines, luckless wives, and repentant nuns. With her female characters, it was male tyranny which shut them away from the world; but Radcliffe’s privacy was apparently a matter of choice. The only detailed account of Radcliffe’s person and character appears in a “memoir” written posthumously by T. N. (Thomas Noon) Talfourd, who relied on information supplied by her widower, William. She was, Talfourd states:

a female of diffidence, approaching to shyness [...] a scrupulous self-respect, almost too nice to be appreciated in these days, induced her sedulously to avoid the appearance of reception, on account of her literary fame [She was] low of stature. Her complexion was beautiful, as was her whole countenance, especially her eyes, eyebrows and mouth [...] she wanted that confidence which is necessary

to mixed society, and which she could scarcely acquire, without losing something of the delicacy of feeling, which marked her character. (7, 13, 105)

Ann Radcliffe began writing while William, a journalist, worked late—from the sheer size of her novels, it would seem he kept vampire hours. Perhaps protesting too much, Talfourd notes that “perhaps few distinguished authors have passed a life so blameless and so happy” (105). He does not elaborate on less happy facts: that Radcliffe was childless (then a significant failure for a woman), was a chronic asthmatic, and despite her success effectively ceased to write in her early thirties.

Even before her death, wishful rumour had Radcliffe incarcerated in a madhouse, a victim of her own Gothic imagination. Certainly a certain mental fragility can be inferred. Talfourd writes that “A few days before her death, an account, which she had accidentally read, of a shocking murder recently perpetrated, pressed upon her memory, and joined with the natural operation of the disease [bronchitis] to produce a temporary delirium” (102). Radcliffe’s biographer Rictor Norton suggests this crime was a grisly infanticide, widely reported, even in the *Times* (244–5). From this account it would seem that she was no fan of true crime; although earlier in her career she invoked Pitaval in the opening paragraphs of *The Romance of the Forest* (1791), as a source for the tale—something quite spurious, as noted by Norton (83). Yet Radcliffe was to be highly influential upon what was to become crime writing, in three areas: plot structure, the female protagonist, and general philosophical bent.

Radcliffe was the most successful exponent of what is generally termed Female Gothic (a style of writing not gender-prescriptive, for men could write in this mode too). At its centre was the female consciousness, frequently under trial, and in fact Female Gothic can be loosely described as “the perils of Pauline”. The young heroine often finds herself imprisoned in a sinister castle, usually by a wicked male tyrant, but emerges at the end

triumphant to marry her hero. The various elements of Female Gothic—such as its rational explanations of the supernatural, mysterious murders and hidden heroines—can be traced to earlier Gothic writers like Clara Reeve, Sophia Lee and Charlotte Smith, translator of Pitaval. However, it was Radcliffe who codified and exemplified the form, which appears first in her *A Sicilian Romance* (1792). Four years later *The Mysteries of Udolpho* made her the most popular and best-paid English writer of the eighteenth century.

Male Gothic, as typically expressed in *The Monk* (1796), written by Matthew Lewis in reaction to Radcliffe, has a different focus: the central figure is not the endangered feminine but the dangerous male. The tyrant or rake is the protagonist, and this Gothic mode can be arguably regarded as the link between the picaresque and the Newgate novel. It also represents the beginning of the modern psychotriller, with the excesses of Hannibal Lecter being (almost) equalled by those of Ambrosio the Monk, whose tastes run to black magic, rape, incest, and murder. Yet, while bad boy Gothic has its fair share of crime, mystery and suspense, it is no place for the detective, for the villain is privileged. The bringing to justice of the Monk involves fate, the devil, various characters with axes to grind, some of whom are ghosts—but there is no central investigative figure to act as the villain's Nemesis.

In addition, Male Gothic partakes of the supernatural, something that was generally anathema to the emerging detective genre. In a world-view which accommodates ghosts and devils, there are more things in heaven and earth than in any philosophy, including criminology. Mysteries abound in this universe, which is beyond human understanding. And, unlike simple murder cases, these mysteries can never be fully resolved. Much is irrational and also inexplicable. Thus, the logical search for a criminal, involving ratiocination and Poirot's "little grey cells" has no place here—despite the later religion-tinged mysteries of Chesterton and his Father Brown.

Such is not the case with Female Gothic. From Radcliffe's Emily to Sherlock Holmes may seem an abrupt leap, for Holmes prides himself on his deductive skills and intelligence, not a heightened, trembling sensibility. Nor does he have attacks of poetry. Yet Radcliffe's universe is rationalistic, having strong similarities to the world-view of Holmes if not of his creator Doyle, who came to believe not only in ghosts, but also in fairies. Much may seem supernatural and inexplicable, but by the end of *Udolpho* the ghosts have vanished with the mystery. All is explained, and perfectly logically too. Tzvetan Todorov in *The Fantastic* typified the Female Gothic as "uncanny", where all supernatural events have a physical explanation—as distinct from the Male Gothic, which is "marvelous", with "the supernatural accepted" as a feature of the world (41–2). It was thus the Female Gothic which comprised perhaps the major "system" contributing to the emergent genre of crime fiction.

Possibly the most significant point of influence was with the protagonist. The narrative role of the detective and Female Gothic heroine have strong similarities. Knight draws on Stefano Tani's argument that detective fiction combines Gothic elements with eighteenth-century novels of reason such as Voltaire's *Zadig* (1748), to describe the function of the detective. He considers the "detective's structural role can be read as a combination of the central roles in the genres of Gothic novel and enlightenment thought", armed not like a knight with a magic sword, but with the tools of "reason, observation, analysis" ("Magnifying Glass" 3). Emily's role in *Udolpho* is to be a woman of reason: she elucidates the mysteries of the castle, an explorer on a voyage of discovery. Indeed modern critics of the Gothic term its heroines "ratiocinative" (Rizzo 61, 73), the texts in which they appear being described as "thrillers" or "whodunnits" (Howells 101).

The emphasis on rationalism is ancestral to Poe's Dupin, with Emily also searching for traces of crimes, following trails of blood, for instance. Furthermore, in an important

anticipation of the modern female detective, Emily and the other Radcliffe heroines walk the mean passages of their various Gothic castles very much by themselves. Their quest is accomplished alone (or with assistance from trusty female servants), without the intervention of a square-jawed hero.

In her function as exploder of mysteries, Emily can be considered as an ur-detective, though not as obviously as her exact contemporary Caleb. She is considerably more passive than him, hampered not only by her petticoats but also by notions of feminine decorum. Yet with the Radcliffe heroine originates a model of narrative, a woman versus crime, woman conquering and explicating crime.

Tentative though this formation was, it had precedents of sorts in classical mythology, in the shape of the justice goddess, the Greek Nemesis, or her Latin version Dea Vindex (Revenging Goddess). These two names recur in both the early depictions of the sleuthing female, and its contemporary reviewing, with the fictional case for an avenging or detecting female strengthened by learned allusions. For example, a Mary Braddon heroine in *Eleanor's Victory* (1863) is described as a "superb Nemesis in crinoline" (259). Furthermore, allegorical representations of justice, say in painting or statuary, were feminized, and commonly located at sites of legal authority, such as the Palais de Justice, Paris (the word justice indeed having the feminine gender in French).

There were also some true crime precedents. As a rule of thumb in early crime fiction, the introduction of a new plot twist is almost invariably influenced by a real-life case. So it also appears with the female detective. Consider the case of Anne Kidderminster, a widow who doggedly brought Moses Drayne, murderer of her husband Thomas, to the gallows. The narrative first appeared in a 1688 pamphlet, *A True Relation of a Horrid Murder Committed Upon the Person of Thomas Kidderminster*; it gained wider circulation via a retelling in the

Gentleman's Magazine of 1745 (Williams 2); and also in George Borrow's *Celebrated Trials, and Remarkable Cases of Criminal Jurisprudence* (London: Knight & Lacey, 1825).

Prior to the development of a centralized and professional police force, a victim of crime could act as the "central agent in criminal prosecutions", for instance tracing thieves and stolen goods (Beattie 38). Anne Kidderminster, though, solved a murder, despite being a female without monetary and legal power; and for this reason the case is worth examining in detail. Thomas Kidderminster was born a gentleman, but, the pamphlet claims, was cheated out of his inheritance (1–3). He found work as a steward, prospering under various employers. Anne was a ladies' maid when they met and married in 1653, during the Commonwealth of Oliver Cromwell. The following year he disappeared. The pregnant Anne sought information about him, from such far-flung locales as Amsterdam and Barbados. Her husband had in fact been murdered in Essex. His body lay for nearly a decade, while Commonwealth became Restoration, in the yard of the White Hart Inn, Chelmsford. The owners of the inn, the Sewells, had with their ostler Drayne murdered Kidderminster for the £600 in gold he carried. He was only unearthed, an anonymous skeleton, during repairs conducted by Turner, the new proprietor.

The skull showed a mortal head wound and a coronial jury found a verdict of murder. Turner lost custom once word circulated that the White Hart Inn murdered its guests. He took steps to have the Sewells charged; in pre-trial examination they denied all knowledge of the crime. Sewell died before the Assizes could be held, and nothing could be proved against his wife. At this point Lord Chief Justice Sir Orlando Bridgman, encountering the case on circuit, intervened. He ordered an advertisement to be placed in the *London Gazette*, in hopes of gaining more information. The advertisement took the case beyond the immediate locality, bringing it to Anne Kidderminster's attention.

Her husband's death had impoverished Anne, and she had been forced to support her infant daughter by working as a wet-nurse. When she saw the advertisement, she was destitute "both of Friends and Money" (*A True Relation* 7). She therefore walked from London to Chelmsford with a companion. Fortuitously they got lost and thus met in Romsford Mary Mattocks, a former Chelmsford townswoman. Mattocks had hearsay evidence about the murder and also knew that Drayne lived nearby. Anne immediately tried to interview him.

This indefatigable collector of evidence not only spoke to Drayne and Mrs Sewell, she travelled to Ely to find her husband's former servant, who could swear to his horse and hat—the latter Drayne had dyed, but still wore. Mary Kendall, a former chambermaid at the White Horse, then absconded rather than give evidence. The Chelmsford Coroner traced her to London, where Anne interviewed her in Newgate Prison. Mrs Sewell had by this time died of the plague, and Mary suddenly became willing to testify what she knew of the murder. The evidence was conclusive, Drayne was tried and hanged. A very pleasing irony in the case, for the modern reader, was that Anne Kidderminster's maiden name was Holmes (*A True Relation* 4).

Where the deficiencies of justice became apparent, as in Chelmsford, there existed a space where a woman, if sufficiently determined, and empowered by chivalric respect for her grief, could act as an agent of justice—despite her sex's exclusion from the legal system. The 1688 pamphlet noted her initiative: "You see what Pains, Trouble, and Expencc [sic] she underwent in enquiry after her Husband, in tracing out the Murderers, and in the Prosecution of them, having little or no Assistance or Advice [...]" However, the writer is working in a pre-Enlightenment context, where Anne Kidderminster's luck, intelligence and tenacity cannot possibly be the only reasons for her success. It is unthinkable for her to be solely the

agent of justice, and the sentence quoted above concludes: “but the Divine Providence, which assisted and directed her in the whole series of this Affair” (19).

The narrative series of actions in the Kidderminster case—of a woman bereft, resolving to find out what had happened to a missing lover or male relative, travelling to the murder site, interviewing witnesses, making fortuitous and even haphazard discoveries, and ultimately succeeding in her quest for justice—would reappear in various crime fictions of the early nineteenth century. In 1825 Kidderminster’s story was printed in *Borrow*, giving it a wider circulation: the narrative was probably also reprinted in contemporary nineteenth-century journals, which had an appetite for true tales of crime. However, one instance does not necessarily create a narrative model, and the prevalence of this mode suggests that other cases of amateur female detection occurred.

Kidderminster was a real-life sleuth; and in Radcliffe can be seen the beginnings of the fictional woman detective, a figure now highly popular and empowering for its female readership. Irmgard Maassen reads it as offering “a rare alternative to the predominant image of the romance heroine [...] equally satisfactory to women’s fantasies of power [but] adapted to women’s experience of the work place, to their newly evolving identities which are no longer exclusively defined in relation to the domestic realm nor solely circumscribed by love relationships” (154–5). Thus the female detective has so far garnered more scholarship than the mothers of detective fiction. Historical anthologies have been compiled of female detectives, such as Michele Slung’s *Crime on Her Mind* (1975) and Laura Marcus’ *Twelve Women Detective Stories* (1997); they have also been the subject of critical studies, as with Kathleen Gregory Klein’s *The Woman Detective* (1995).

The female detective is now a very important trope, both to feminists and readers of crime. Yet it cannot be over-emphasized that its beginnings were not in generic crime fiction.

Nor was it necessarily the focus of the narrative. The amount of narrative space given to female detection tended only to be a few chapters in a greater work, as when Emily wanders down the secret passages of Udolpho castle. Yet in the years following Radcliffe's success, the female proto-detective can be identified as a significant literary presence. Indeed, between Godwin and *Richmond* investigative males in fiction, whether police or amateur, are relatively rare. Their most significant appearance is in the novels by Godwin's follower Charles Brockden Brown (1771–1810), whose 1799 *Edgar Huntly* has been termed by Robert E. Spiller the first American detective novel (qtd. in Landrum 1), although it is more appropriately described as a Gothic confessional with overtones of mystery. Otherwise their presence is scant until 1849, with the advent of William Russell's "Waters" series of short detective series in *Chambers's Edinburgh Journal*. Even then the male detective is not a substantial feature of the literary market until the 1860s. It is the female sleuth that is arguably more numerous, appearing in numbers substantial enough to be termed a tradition, with its own marked features and narrative tropes.

The female detective appears, for instance, in Jane Austen's *Northanger Abbey*, a novel both a parody of and an affectionate homage to the Female Gothic, written only a few years after *Udolpho*, yet not published until 1818. Young Catherine Morland, a great fan of Radcliffe, turns sleuth upon entering Northanger Abbey, convinced that General Tilney has either murdered or incarcerated his wife there. Her snooping is brief, lasting only a few chapters, and is brought to an abrupt close when she discovers her mistake from Henry Tilney, whom she marries at the end of the book. Though this young woman is presented as something of a goose, as regards General Tilney her intuition is perfectly correct. The General is a capricious domestic tyrant: her suspicions of murder and wife abuse, "scarcely sinned against his character, or magnified his cruelty" (201).

Austen's novel was set in contemporary Regency society, which meant realistic limits for its female proto-detective in terms of conventional gender roles. "Remember the country and the age in which we live", Henry Tilney tells Catherine, rebuking her for her Gothic fancies. "Remember that we are English and that we are Christians" (159). For a well-bred heroine to turn detective was unthinkable, at least for more than a few chapters. Nor could there be any suggestion of professionalism, given that the heroine's destination was domesticity, with the marriage at novel's end. But nonetheless the trope, against all typical expectations of contemporary maidenly behaviour, is persistent—narratives involving female detection can be found throughout the nineteenth century, by some very diverse writers, in texts ranging from the Gothic to the domestic or realist, to the polemical and even the frontier romance.

Radcliffe's Emily is merely inquisitive. Her successors, though, could be investigative, avenging and a subversive opposition to the male justice system—even if they conformed to female stereotypes by being generally haphazard, more intuitive than logical, and more lucky than deductive. Against the odds, these women are successful in their quests: they may be amateurs, but they are more than merely competent at detection. Unfortunately, they also tend to an ultimate impotence.

There is a crucial difference between Emily and Catherine Morland, and it has to do with humiliation. Emily, despite her trials, does not suffer the embarrassment that Catherine does, when Henry Tilney realizes she is playing detective and is intent on revealing his father as a Bluebeard. Subsequently, when the General discovers Catherine is not the heiress he thought, she is unceremoniously packed off home—a banishment. Emily is never punished, despite numerous hair-raising adventures; which is one reason why the Female Gothic was so empowering for its women readers.

Austen, in her domestication of the Gothic, imports (and arguably internalises) a trope from another literary tradition—the didactic novel, as written by popular eighteenth-century women writers such as Fanny Burney and Maria Edgeworth. The heroines of these novels were typically naive and thoughtless, needing a sharp lesson in “discretion and moral awareness” (Spencer 168). All Austen’s novels punish the heroine in some way before marriage and this tradition was to pervade the early nineteenth century crime novel, repeatedly thwarting the figure of the female detective. Catherine suffers embarrassment; her successors were lucky to escape with a nervous breakdown, if not permanent incapacity. Gill Plain has noted, in her discussion of Paretsky’s V. I. Warshawski, “the terrifying extent of the forces ranged against any manifestation of the female agent” (148), but these patriarchal and destructive forces were evident from the very beginnings of the female sleuth in fiction, where the law was a masculine domain, and the forces of convention and propriety were weighted against the woman.

Such was not the case, however, for all writers. The female detective was apparently gendered, the male writers initially not tending to visit the burden of society’s expectations for women upon their female investigators. Women may have written thwarted female sleuths, but conversely male writers allowed them to be successful. Consider E. T. A. Hoffmann’s 1820 “Mademoiselle de Scudéry”, a fable of serial killings set in the Paris of Louis XIV that has been claimed as a significant precursor of the detective short story (Lee 63). The setting shows the influence of Pitaval (Hoffmann was to retell Pitaval in his 1821 “Marquise de la Pivardière”), but the structure and content are pure Gothic. The murderer is an insane master jeweller, but his mystery is not so much revealed as concealed by the central character, a historical person, the writer Madeleine de Scudéry (1607–1701). The story behind the crimes is revealed as a series of characters, like witnesses at a trial, confess to her:

Scudéry collects and analyses their stories. In the end she deliberately presents—for altruistic reasons—a false reconstruction of events to the arbiter of justice, the King.

The character of Scudéry is attractive, she being an elderly woman whose perception and intelligence are precursive of Miss Marple. However Scudéry does not actually do any detecting, having mysteries explained to her, rather than solving them herself. In this respect Hoffmann's depiction is reminiscent more of a crime author than of an actual sleuth. Scudéry is not punished for her royal lie, but then this heroine is an elderly virgin of "impeccable nobility" (122). Her age, rank and authority as a writer and friend of a King make her too powerful for the type of humbling experience all too readily given to younger, more marriageable females.

A stronger claim to female sleuthing is presented by two characters in James Hogg's *Private Memoirs and Confessions of a Justified Sinner* (1824). Hogg (c. 1770–1837) was a Scottish writer and farmer, initially noted as a poet. He had a profound interest in folklore and the supernatural, and the novel juggles rational and marvelous interpretations of events, as if mediating between Male and Female Gothic. Sedgwick terms it "paranoid" or homosexual/phobic Gothic, involving doubled males, innocent and persecuting, with this category also including *Caleb Williams* and *Frankenstein* (91, 116). *Justified Sinner* concerns the deadly rivalry between two brothers, George Colwan and Robert Wringhim, the latter being led by a mysterious shape-shifting stranger, an evil genius or devil, into a series of murders, starting with the fratricide of Colwan. The second half of the novel is Wringhim's "confessions", but in the first half appear two women both called Arabella—Mrs Logan and Mrs Calvert—in their independence and initiative akin to Anne Kidderminster.

Both, though, are disreputable. Unlike Austen's Catherine and Radcliffe's Emily, the Arabellas are not romance heroines, a crucial distinction: their narrative fate will not conclude

at the altar. Nor do they belong to the upper classes like Scudéry. Arabella Logan is a housekeeper and defacto stepmother to George Colwan. She turns detective after his murder: “she had hopes of having discovered a clue, which, if she could keep hold of the thread, would lead her through darkness to the light of truth” (67). By chance she encounters the other Arabella, a prostitute, who was a witness to the killing. In order to make a positive identification, Mrs Logan travels with her namesake to Wringhim’s locale or lair. The ID is not only made, the feisty pair fight with their suspect and tie him up with their garters. As Wringhim is a Puritan, the indignity is apt. Only then do the Arabellas go to the authorities, the case successfully solved.

Though only a minor part of Hogg’s dark and complex narrative, the Arabellas are recognisably female agents of justice who solve a murder. Yet, they and Scudéry are anomalous as regards the figure of the female detective as it developed during the early half of the nineteenth century, in being unmarriageable, successful, and without suffering punishment. The tendency was for the female sleuth, particularly as presented in the work of women writers, to follow a different and clearly defined form(ula), functioning structurally as part of the romance plot. For the purposes of the thesis, this formulation will be termed the heroine-sleuth. In using such a term, a distinction is made thus made between the romantic female lead, and the unconventional role played by Scudéry and the Arabellas, whose narrative function is not to be the female love interest, but appear as independent women. They are amateurs in detection, but otherwise defined by their profession—even if it is, as with Arabella Calvert, the “oldest”.

The typical narrative trajectory of the heroine-sleuth is for the hero to vanish, or be falsely accused, causing his sweetheart to turn detective, trying to find out the facts of the case. She thus becomes an avenger, a woman of action or strong-minded female (a pejorative

term in the nineteenth century). However, her detection will only be a temporary aberration. The heroine-sleuth's activities are invariably short-lived: after some effective work she usually collapses with stress or brain fever, reverting to passive femininity in time for a happy marriage with the man she has saved. This representation can be found in a "pure" form, examples of which include Catherine Crowe's Julie Le Moine in *Susan Hopley* (1841), Elizabeth Gaskell's *Mary Barton* (1848) and Wilkie Collins' Marion Halcombe in *The Woman in White* (1860). But it also can appear in "hybrid" form, usually in the context of doubling, where a heroine-sleuth is counterbalanced by a second romantic female lead or fellow detective. In the "hybrid" form, the writer uses elements from the heroine-sleuth in combination with aspects of the independent women depicted by Hoffmann and Hogg. Examples of the hybrid form include Frances Trollope's *The Refugee in America* (1832) and *Jessie Phillips* (1843), to be discussed later in this chapter.

The heroine-sleuth was deeply problematic, even transgressive (wherein may have laid its fascination for writers and readers). In becoming an agent of justice, the heroine was trespassing upon the then exclusively male legal and policing systems. Murder trials may have notably drawn female audiences, but notions of bourgeois femininity were so linked to the private, domestic realm that for a "lady" to testify in court was a "public" act and therefore unseemly. As Mermin notes, "the witness box, for women writers, is the place where the secrets of the female body are exposed to view" (36). The anxieties surrounding the angel in the house vs the police even seem to have affected the plots of some early crime novels. The conclusions of Mary Braddon's *Lady Audley's Secret* (1862) and *Eleanor's Victory* (1863), for instance, avoid confrontation between the law and the lady. In these works the most straightforward narrative trajectory would have been towards a climactic murder trial, as is the formula of a modern crime novel. However, in both novels justice is private,

the family policing itself: wicked Lady Audley is confined to an asylum by her in-laws; Eleanor is forced, through family pressure, to forgive the man she regards as her father's murderer. These examples perhaps indicate a deliberate ploy to keep female protagonists out of the legal system and away from public display in the courtroom.

In its narrative function, the heroine-sleuth is best described in the terminology of the Russian Formalist critic, Boris Tomashevsky, as being a *motif*. Tomashevsky identified the motif in folktale, or classics of Russian literature, but his analysis is equally applicable to crime fiction, which can be as formulaic as a fairy story. A motif is a narrative figure, recurrent, almost stock, found in various story texts. It can be a character—Tomashevsky gives as example the helpful animal from folktale—or an action within the greater story, such as the impossible task set the hero before he can marry the princess (67). The heroine-sleuth has elements of both of the Tomashevsky examples cited—she is a helpful character, as her unmaidenly venture into amateur detection is usually to assist another, and the task she performs does seem impossible, though she succeeds and typically marries after some tribulation.

The heroine-sleuth can be found, for example, in Elizabeth Gaskell's first novel, *Mary Barton* (1848), usually classed as an industrial novel, that is, a novel of social protest about the excesses of the Industrial Revolution. Gaskell's work has crime content, notably short fictions like "A Dark Night's Work", from 1863, the era of the Sensation genre. She even wrote true crime in the non-fictional 1851 "Disappearances", where she recalls reading *Caleb Williams* (412). *Mary Barton*, though not generic crime, includes a murder mystery in its plot structure. The novel has attracted criticism "for becoming a *roman policier*" (Kestner 123), although this term was coined to describe the novels of the French writer Emile Gaboriau in the 1860s.

Blake, in a study of nineteenth-century female detectives, has distinguished between upper-class ladies and working women (29), but in fact the crucial difference was whether the sleuth also functioned as a romantic heroine or not. Hogg's Arabellas are working women, amateur detectives, but also unmarried, as was the aristocratic Scudéry. Gaskell makes her eponymous Mary Barton, a working-class girl and milliner, both love interest and detective, and in doing so faithfully follows the narrative trajectory of the (originally middle- and upperclass) heroine-sleuth motif. Mary's father is involved in the trade union movement, but her secret lover Harry Carson is the son of a factory owner, to whom her father is bitterly opposed. Carson is found shot dead and Jem Wilson, his rival for Mary's love, is arrested on suspicion of the crime.

Chapter 22 is entitled: "Mary's Efforts to Prove an Alibi", which is precisely what Mary does, establishing Wilson's innocence. She is no Emily, not being given to swooning, and rather more practical and streetwise than Catherine Morland. Yet, despite being working-class, when under stress she displays a ladylike fragility quite unlike Hogg's Arabellas. Gaskell does allow her certain abilities: "with the call on her exertions, and her various qualities of judgement and discretion, came the answering consciousness of innate power to meet the emergency" (289). Mary discovers that a sailor can prove Jem's alibi, and instigates a thrilling nautical chase to find him. However it is uncertain whether the witness can return to the courtroom in time and the suspense causes Mary increasingly to show signs of mental distress.

Finally at the trial, while in the witness box and being questioned about her relationships with the murdered man and the accused, she sees the missing witness enter the courtroom. Mission accomplished, she loses her mind, in a sentence unfortunately quite bathetic: "'Oh, Jem! Jem! You're saved; and I *am* mad—'" and was instantly seized with

convulsions” (387). Mary has saved her man, but her achievement is followed by what we would term a nervous breakdown, as if she is being punished for her temerity and its success. She recovers from her “brain fever”, and marries Jem. But her sleuthing days are over.

Of the female detective texts so far discussed in this chapter—*The Mysteries of Udolpho*, *Northanger Abbey*, *Private Memoirs and Confessions of a Justified Sinner*, *Mary Barton* and “Mademoiselle de Scudéry”—only the latter has been previously identified as a precursor of crime fiction proper. *Udolpho* is Gothic, as is also *Justified Sinner*; *Northanger Abbey* domestic fiction that also parodies the Gothic; *Mary Barton* a novel of industrial protest. Diverse these works are, yet they are linked in their use of the embryonic female detective. The trope even appears in an American frontier romance, Metta Victor’s *The Backwood’s Bride* (1860), to be discussed in a later chapter.

This initial discussion of the female detective would tend to suggest that the motif is migratory, being an organic formation that is translated in its entirety from one plot to another and also across genres. It may have begun in the Gothic, but it subsequently *wandered*, infecting a number of the forms of early Victorian fiction, moving to realism, romance, and many other forms, before finding its eventual home in crime fiction.

If the female detective was migratory, so were other elements of the criminal narrative. Detectives (male), murder and mystery appeared in various early nineteenth-century novels, by male and women writers. However, the crime content generally did not dominate the text. The tendency was—the Newgate novels apart—for a crime and its attendant mystery narrative to represent a minor irruption, a moment of disorder and its resolution, into a longer narrative. Several examples are found in Sir Walter Scott: his *Guy Mannering* (1815) and *The Heart of Midlothian* (1818) draw upon real-life Scottish crimes, termed by the author “the *Cause Célèbres* of Caledonia” (*The Heart of Midlothian* 25). The former uses the case of R.

vs Richardson, cited in chapter one; the latter links two historical incidents unconnected in reality, a murderous riot and an infanticide. Neither work can be regarded as precursive of the Newgate novel, nor the crime genre proper: the mystery/murder occupies only part of a larger text.

Perhaps a visual analogue should be considered, if situated on the wall of the virtual gallery is an actual painting, William Frith's famous "The Railway Station" (1862). It depicts a panorama of Paddington station, an assortment of English travellers waiting for the train, it being divided, like their society, into classes. Frith himself appears off-centre in a self-portrait, with selected members of his family. Viewing the painting from left to right, as is common reading practice in the West, is to see the pictorial narrative of "The Railway Station" concluded by a small group of figures: two detectives in top hats arresting a criminal. Arrests at railway stations were commonly reported in the newspapers; and Frith added further verisimilitude by having two well-known detectives, Haydon and Brett, pose for him. When he complimented them on their sitting abilities, they explained they were used to waiting, sometimes for hours, for wanted criminals (Noakes 73). In Frith's narrative canvas, the detective component occupies approximately one eighth of the space, and in a corner, too. It expresses visually D. A. Miller's comment, that in nineteenth-century fiction "a police apparatus [...] frequently stands on the periphery of the representation" (212). Yet otherwise the discourse of crime was increasingly occupying a position of "cultural centrality", in Gladfelder's words (xi).

A fictional equivalent of Frith, one of many genre-blending or multi-genre works of the early nineteenth century, was *Mauprat* (1837) by George Sand (1804–76), one of the best-selling authors of the era. In real life she was Amandine-Aurore-Lucile Dupin, though her title was not Chevalier, as with Poe's detective, but Baronne Dudevant. Sand is popularly

remembered for her notorious personal life; yet her string of celebrated lovers never interfered with her writing, she averaging an output of two books a year from 1831 until her death.

This formidable output included writing across genre, which did include crime, as *Mauprat* shows. The book is partially a mystery, the other elements in its eclectic mix including the bildungsroman and the Gothic. In the novel, Bernard Mauprat recalls his life, which includes growing up as a wild child in a castle with brigand uncles. Most of the uncles are killed in a shootout with the police. Years later, Bernard's sweetheart Edmée is shot while hunting, and he is tried for the attempted murder—which proves, in a dramatic courtroom denouement, to be the work of a surviving wicked uncle.

Mauprat is typical of the hybrid or partial crime novels of the early nineteenth century in that it only becomes a crime mystery *per se* in its last quarter (as does *Pelham*, its most obvious English equivalent). The novel also has no one sleuth, rather a diffusion of the detective role: the chief detective is a hermit named Patience, and various other characters are involved in proving Bernard's innocence. However, despite these differences from the modern crime text, the book, once it begins to relate its case of attempted murder, shows a sure grasp of suspense and mystery. It is also worth noting that *Mauprat* anticipates Sue and various other writers cited as fathers of Francophone crime writing: Paul Féval, author of *Les Mystères de Londres* (1844), Dumas père and Ponson du Terrail.

Yet five years before *Mauprat*, an English woman had written a novel that was rather more anticipative of the crime genre in terms of structure and content. *The Refugee in America* (1832) was by Frances Trollope (1776–1863), best known as the mother of Anthony. She travelled to America partly as vacation from a difficult marriage (to a lawyer) and partly to join a utopian colony. After an unsuccessful business venture she returned to England with the matter for a caustic and controversial travelogue, *Domestic Manners of the Americans*

(1831)—she generally thought they had *no* manners. It made her name and she henceforth supported her family by her pen. She was indomitable, going from the sickbed (her husband and all but two of her children predeceased her) to the writing desk; and it was from personal experience that she prescribed novel-writing as a cure for depression (Mullen 198).

The Refugee in America (1832) her second book and the first of many novels, essentially re-cycled her American experience in a fictional travelogue. The novel has been termed a “hodgepodge” (Stebbins 50), yet a major ingredient in its multi-generic mix, which also included the gothic, anti-slavery polemic and romance, was crime, as a plot outline shows. The hero, Edward, Lord Darcy, becomes a trans-Atlantic refugee after a fight in which he has (with considerable provocation) stabbed Dally, a smuggler who is subsequently hidden by his family and reported dead. A plot is hatched by lawyer Nixon Oglander, a scheming relative of Darcy’s and next in line to inherit. He sends assassins (one of them Dally) after Edward: should they fail, he will facilitate Darcy’s trial in England, with a likely execution for murder.

The Refugee is particularly notable for a figure appearing in a corner of its narrative canvas, one Mr Hannibal Burns, who like Fielding combined the law and the press, being a part-time New York policeman and co-editor of a “semi-weekly” newspaper. Burns acts in the novel to trace and keep Darcy under surveillance. He is quite possibly the first police detective to figure significantly in a novel by a woman writer, although he is no hero, having a “look and manner [...] singularly repulsive [he] eyed every individual of their party with a sharp, but covert scrutiny” (1: 99–100). The source material for this character is clear, Burns being described as:

almost as well-known in London and Paris, as Townsend [John Townsend, the most famous of the Bow Street Runners] and Vidoque [sic] themselves.

No sooner was it known in either of these cities, that a criminal had taken flight, than orders were despatched to Mr. Burns to be on the alert [...] he seldom saw a foreigner without feeling that he ought to have something to do with him. (1: 141)

Thus, upon encountering the fugitive Darcy, the always-watchful Burns waits until he is asleep and cuts a lock from his hair. He also “made sundry memoranda, measurement of shoes, hats, and the like, to assist him” (1: 142). Yet the competence of this interesting if incidental character is undermined by the author: when he attempts to obtain information from a wily Yankee grocer, he gets thoroughly pumped himself, and ends up none the wiser.

Rather more successful than Burns are Trollope’s two heroines, Eleanor, Countess of Darcy, the Earl’s resourceful and intelligent mother; and his American sweetheart Emily Williams. Lady Darcy and the villainous Nixon travel to a coastal village, the site of the supposed murder, to investigate the case. There, “she began to question her professional cousin with a clear coolness which surprised him, as to those parts of the evidence which he thought most open to doubt” (1: 269). Next she changes clothes with her maid and goes investigating herself, questioning the villagers.

Lady Darcy is a mature woman and widow; which does not stop her from assuming the role of the adventurous, Gothic heroine. Going in search of the picturesque (a common Gothic tourist destination) she climbs the cliffs, being no “contemptible ‘cragswoman”” (2: 27). She locates Dally and his secret hiding place, but in her haste to bring the news, overstrains herself, becoming “overpowered by agitation and weariness” (2: 35). In this state it is easy for Nixon to argue she is out of her mind, particularly since Dally cannot be located. Realizing Nixon’s perfidy, she suffers a “violent phrenzy fever” (2: 49) as a result. Nixon, the Gothic male tyrant, is thus enabled to constrain and incarcerate her in remote Yorkshire, with the aid of the Lady’s concerned father.

Emily Williams, despite being described as “almost a child in appearance”, “delicate” and “little” (1: 146, 167) proves to be more of an active figure in saving Edward Darcy, though less of a detective. Like Lady Darcy, she has villainous male relatives, who would confine and control her; unlike the older woman, she thwarts and escapes from them easily. Her uncle, the Reverend Wilson, is an old gambling partner of Nixon Oglander, who pays him to act as his American agent. Wilson attempts a double game, trying to ingratiate himself with the Earl and his travelling partners, and when that fails, to murder Darcy. Like the villain of a melodrama, he arranges a trap for the Earl, which will precipitate him into Niagara Falls; Emily foils the plan.

Her most important act, though, is to meet (by very convenient chance) and befriend Susan Dally, who has followed her husband over the Atlantic. She forms a plan, to bring Dally back to England: “and never to lose sight of him, till, either by persuasion or force, she had led him to make known the innocence of Lord Darcy—this was her motive; by this she was decided, and on this she acted” (2: 286). Through a mixture of bribery, trickery and emotional blackmail she literally takes Dally by the hand and leads him into Westminster Hall, where Darcy is being tried. The murder case collapses, and the narratorial voice exults: “on this occasion the male part of the dramatis personae must, one and all, hide their diminished heads before the females” (2: 298).

Trollope’s doubling of the female protagonist role meant that the typical narrative formula of the heroine-sleuth (inaction; detection; punishment; marriage) could not be applied to both Lady Darcy and Emily without the text becoming overly repetitious. Instead she hybridises, with her most ‘noble’ heroine, Lady Darcy, suffering the extreme penalties of the motif. Emily is not punished but rewarded, with Darcy marrying the “little republican” (2: 295). Lady Darcy too is romantically disposed of, marrying an old sweetheart.

The Refugee has undoubted historical significance as a proto-crime work, yet though spirited and vigorous, the work is too much of a first novel, and an experimental mix, to be wholly successful. Its anti-slavery rhetoric, for instance, was married to the melodramatic Gothic extreme, as in the scenes where kindness towards Negroes results in their revealing Dally's hideout, where he is about to hang Darcy. The reviews were generally unfavourable: the *Quarterly Review* termed the book "absurd nonsense from beginning to end" (509), and the *Westminster Review* also noted "absurdities" re the legal content (218)—something which suggests Frances had not consulted her husband while writing the book. However, despite the hostile press, Frances Trollope was not deterred from her auctorial career.

However, she did not return to crime writing for some eleven years, during which she produced twenty novels. The year 1843 saw her publish two novels exploring crime and its consequences. The first was *Hargrave; or the Adventures of a Man of Fashion*, a title deceptively suggestive of the silver fork. In the novel a romance plot is yoked to a crime mystery, for the eponymous Charles Hargrave, an Englishman based in Paris, will stop at nothing to conceal his debts and get his two daughters well married. This outwardly wealthy and charming man has already been supplementing his income by mugging successful gamblers; now he organises a party with the twin objects of obtaining a princely marriage proposal for his daughter Sabina, and a fortune in someone else's diamonds.

Hargrave diffuses the role of the detective among many characters. On the side of justice are M. Collet, of the Parisian police; a spiteful family servant; and several noble amateurs, among them the sisters' suitors. On the side of obstructing justice, Scudéry style, is Hargrave's gallant and capable step-daughter, Adèle de Cordillac, probably an echo of Hoffman's story, whose villain is called Cardillac (Katritzky 145). Adèle's aim is both to protect her sister and clear Roger Humphries, a faithful family retainer accused both of the

muggings and abducting rich Madame Bertrand, whose diamonds are legend. Adèle organises a midnight flit for the family, and, with Hargrave in a safe haven, returns to organise Humphries' defence. She can provide an alibi for him, but only at the risk of compromising her honour.

The novel expresses conventional concern that Adèle not appear in the courtroom as a witness, something neatly avoided by her marriage, whereupon she becomes legally subsumed by her husband, who provides the required testimony. Yet this attention to propriety conceals a quite outrageous attack on that sacred Victorian figure, the paterfamilias. Hargrave is a scoundrel, and Trollope fashions an entirely fitting punishment for him while acquitting Humphries. Trollope's biographer Teresa Ransom calls *Hargrave* "one of the earliest known murder mysteries" although this description is misleading: Madame Bertrand proves to be alive (v). It is more accurate to term the novel a crime romance—and a most skilful performance.

Previously in this chapter it has been suggested that female detectives of the early nineteenth century tended to be either punished for their temerity or unpunished, the difference reflecting the author's gender, and also if the character also functioned as a romantic lead, the heroine-sleuth. Trollope, it is arguable, takes issue with the latter in *Hargrave*: Emily and Adèle are not only successful but avoid the formulaic limitations, the punishment conventionally demanded of the heroine-sleuth. But with Trollope's other novel of 1843, *Jessie Phillips: a Tale of the Present Day*, Plain's "terrifying" patriarchal forces are apparently internalised, and operating against female agency. Here she has two romantic female leads, but instead of counterbalancing an unsuccessful Lady Darcy with a successful Emily, she thwarts both of her heroines, the most active agent of justice in the novel being a madwoman. Here the hybrid form of the heroine-sleuth does not take vigour from a

contrasting Arabella or Scudéry figure—the double heroines are both enfeebled.

Jessie Phillips was more multi-genre than *Hargrave*, being primarily a work of social protest depicting the evils of the new Poor Laws, specifically the provisions regarding bastardry. To this basic theme Trollope added romance, and even sets up a detective plot in the last eighty pages of the book. The title character, a young village seamstress, is seduced with the promise of marriage by Frederic Dalton, a villainous young aristocrat. Through misadventure, she gives birth under such circumstances that Dalton has the opportunity to kill the child. It is Jessie who is charged with the infanticide.

The mystery of the baby's death attracts the attention of two young upper-class women, Ellen Dalton, sister of Frederic, and her friend Martha Maxwell. Both know that Frederic is responsible for the pregnancy, and is anxious to preserve his reputation. Martha in particular has abilities suggestive of Miss Marple:

Martha Maxwell, with very little in appearance that might distinguish her from a multitude of other tolerably well-looking, tolerably well-taught, and tolerably sharp-witted young females, had, nonetheless, a talent so very peculiarly her own [...] This gift consisted of a shrewdness of observation into character, which, like that of a practised fortune-telling gipsy, often seemed to give her something wonderfully like a power of divination [...] as if she had used a moral microscope to assist her [...] (155–6)

Both witness Frederic showing guilt when the baby's body is found. However, what a modern crime reader might regard as the potential of these young women for female detection is not realised by Trollope. Ellen, without lifting a detecting finger, immediately enters the breakdown stage of the heroine-sleuth motif, becoming dangerously ill at the very thought of exposing her family to public shame. Martha, for her part, instead of rising to the heights of

her observant powers, becomes mysteriously sidetracked. She succumbs to the male authority of a pious clergyman, becoming convinced of Frederic's innocence—but only of infanticide, not of seduction. After an interview with Jessie (who went into a state of insensibility immediately following the birth) Martha becomes equally convinced that the unhappy mother killed her child in a fit of madness.

It is the sick, in fact near-delirious Ellen who assumes the role of *Dea Vindex* and accuses Frederic, in a private interview at her sickbed. He, as a melodrama villain, is hardly conscience-stricken. However, by a chain of circumstance, Trollope contrives to punish him and at the same time absolve her female sleuths of any conscious avenging action. Frederic encounters Martha after seeing Ellen and fancies “that the penetrating glance she fixed upon him betrayed her knowledge of the fearful communication to which he had been listening from his sister” (342). Moreover, he assumes that Martha, who has the habit of wandering about the countryside alone, has witnessed the murder. He flees to a handy riverbank and there encounters the third in Trollope's trio of female avengers—an idiot girl, Sally. She addresses some nonsensical words to him, mentioning Jessie and the baby, and believing himself accused, he throws himself in the river and drowns.

Sally, being an imbecile, has no awareness of her role in the death. Neither does Martha, and when Ellen recovers she can no longer remember accusing her brother. Thus Trollope avoids Ellen being aware of “a truth which must have in some sort obscured the enjoyment of her virtues and happy existence” (351). Ignorance is bliss—the three women have no knowledge of their responsibility for Frederic's death, indirect and unintentional as their agency is.

Joseph Kestner, one of the few critics to note that *Jessie Phillips* was a hybrid text mixing detective fiction and other genres, comments that its “detective function derives from

the search by the characters for the child's murderer [but] The difficulty with this dimension of the novel is that the reader knows Dalton will be the murderer because of his stereotypical portrayal as a rake" (107). The other difficulty is that Trollope apparently sets up Ellen and Martha to act as detectives, and then retreats from any notion of female policing, preferring a passive, even accidental role for them in Frederic's fate. The mystery is ultimately secondary to the novel's political concerns, which pull in opposite artistic directions. *Jessie Phillips* is consequently far less satisfying for the crime reader than *Hargrave*.

Overall *Jessie Phillips* is a novel where the author turns cartwheels, to the grave detriment of the plot's credibility, rather than have female sleuths avenging man's inhumanity to women. Why should this happen, given her earlier confident performance with Adèle in *Hargrave*? One reason, is as Trollope acknowledged in a postscript, that the story "wandered widely [...] from what was intended when the first numbers were written", as a consequence of its serialisation, when she was deluged with reader responses. As she noted: "the author received, during the time it was in progress, such a multitude of communications urging various and contradictory modes of treating the subject, that she became fearful of dealing too closely with a theme which might be presented to the judgement under so great a variety of aspects" (352). Henry Fothergill Chorley, in the *Athenæum*'s review of the book, claimed that she had taken "fright" and thus "was compelled to soften the grim features of her tale", with the result that it "drivelled down into [...] a piece of Minerva Press maudlin [...]" (956).

Certainly she wavered in her purpose re her female detectives. The matter of their investigation—seduction, illegitimacy, infanticide—was, as the reviewer in *John Bull* opined, "repulsive [...] and peculiarly so when made the subject of lengthened conversations between two young, artless, and inexperienced girls" (qtd. in Brandser 179). Martha's acuity is

downgraded by the author—within 50 pages of the description quoted earlier she is termed “eccentric”, with an “inexperienced queer little head” (203). To do Trollope justice, she maintained her critique of the “bastardy clauses”, being overtly polemical re women’s rights, something which radicalizes Martha. Contemporary reviewers found the character “shocking and unfeminine” (Heineman 102), for her attempting to shame or (near-) blackmail Frederic into providing for Jessie. It begs the question what they would have thought had she been the first feminist detective. Martha hardly does any active detection, in contrast to Ellen, a more conventional character, who accuses Frederic from the sickbed. By the novel’s end both young women are happy, devoted wives. And the unfortunate Jessie has conveniently died in the dock upon being declared not guilty.

Subsequently Frances Trollope’s busy pen was active at writing matter out of the range of this study. But she nonetheless represents an intriguing example of a woman writing early crime, particularly in her use of the female detective. Her crime writing was uneven but never dull. She produced two interesting if flawed (partial) genre novels in *The Refugee* and *Jessie Phillips*, and a far more assured performance in the murder mystery of *Hargrave*. Moreover, there are indications of a greater influence: Féval used the pseudonym “Sir Francis Trolopp” for his 1844 *Les Mystères de Londres* (Quayle 29), which clearly refers to Fanny, signifying a cross-Channel echo in French crime writing.

Trollope’s experiments in crime are indicative of how crime fiction was slowly coalescing during the early decades of the nineteenth century. The “hodgepodge”, multi- or partial genre novel was gradually replaced by narratives far more concentrated and controlled, their content dominated by crime, but with adroit use of the Gothic mystery plot. Poe may have exemplified the short detective narrative in the 1840s, but significant developments in the novel form were also occurring. In the canonical view of crime’s development, Trollope’s

crime novels would seem impossibly early: *Hargrave* predates *The Moonstone* by twenty-five years. Yet she was not the only woman writing crime fiction in the 1840s, nor the most precursive of later genre writing. That distinction belongs to an author who was perhaps the first to demonstrate how successfully murder, the mystery narrative and the detective (female) could combine in novel form. Her first novel appeared in 1841 and arguably was the first substantial work of crime writing by a woman. As such, she deserves the following chapter to herself.

CHAPTER THREE

“A MOST PREPOSTEROUS ORGAN OF WONDER”: CATHERINE CROWE

From first to last, she is governed by the pap-spoon and the rod; and whilst, for his own selfish ends, man kneels at her feet and flatters her with mock devotion, he makes laws and enforces customs, that rob her of her free franchise, and of all the rights that God and Nature gave her.

Catherine Crowe, *Lilly Dawson* 183.

The next canvas in the gallery is—regrettably—a blank. No image of the author is known to exist, despite a career lasting several decades, which encompassed various forms of literature, and also a degree of fame/infamy. If a portrait had survived, it would have to be placed next to Poe, in terms of the virtual crime gallery’s chronology. However, the canvases produced by the writer were far larger than the three miniatures of “The Murders in the Rue Morgue”, “The Purloined Letter” and “The Mystery of Marie Rôget”. The author had a deep and abiding interest in crime that resulted not only in true crime articles on such sensational matter as a grave-profaning maniac (the 1849 “Lycanthropy”), but two multi-volume crime fiction novels that significantly anticipated the full-blown genre. Indeed they were far more criminous in form and content than those by the late eighteenth-century and nineteenth-century sleuthing women already discussed, whose brush with crime tended to take up a few chapters of their novels only.

The curious tendency of early crime fiction to synchronicity has already been discussed in this thesis, with 1827–8 notable for a flurry of activity by some very diverse authors. A similar intriguing coincidence likewise occurs in 1841—a year of significance to crime fiction buffs and historians, with Poe’s first Dupin story, “The Murders in the Rue Morgue”, published in April of that year in *Graham’s Magazine*. However, no connection has previously been made with the appearance earlier in the same year of an English novel

called *Adventures of Susan Hopley; or Circumstantial Evidence*, advertised as “Now ready” in the *Athenaeum* of 9 January 1841 (38).

During the nineteenth century circumstantial evidence became increasingly important to the judicial process, as opposed to direct testimony (R. Thomas 34). The topic also fascinated the layperson, for instance being well-canvassed in *Chambers's*, which ran eight articles on circumstantial evidence between 1832–42 (Drexler 128, n.70), some reprints. *Susan Hopley's* sub-title was thus an early use of the legal term in a novel. Subsequent editions had a different title: *Susan Hopley, or the Adventures of a Maid Servant*, which suggested a domestic fiction. However, as the original sub-title indicates, *Susan Hopley* is also a novel of mystery, crime and detection, being constructed around a crime investigation, a murder and disappearance occurring in the first few chapters and only solved at the novel's end. It fulfils John Cawelti's definition of a classical detective story, that is, it “begins with an unsolved crime, and moves toward the elucidation of its mystery” (80).

Susan Hopley preceded Sue's “mysteries”, in being a three-volume novel with crime content and complex interconnected plotlines, yet is far closer to generic crime in its rigorously organized narrative structure. An early reviewer, John Forster (later to be Dickens' biographer), noted that the contents of its three volumes were highly “interdependent and interwoven with each other” (*Examiner*, 28 February 1841, 132). Moreover, the book is most unusual—for the time—in that its story of crime and consequences is generally told through the experience of women. It also features villains with multiple identities, a dramatic trial scene and no less than three female detectives. All were amateur sleuths, and in very different ways highly effective.

Forster gave *Susan Hopley* a favourable if qualified review, which played a significant factor in the book's success (Larken, “The Ghost-Fancier” 204). The novel

puzzled him—indeed it was an original, arguably so far ahead of its time as to defy the contemporary critical vocabulary: “We hardly know what to say of this book. It perplexes us extremely. It is powerful, beyond all question; but unsatisfactory [Yet] When we had read the first twenty pages, the book was not again laid down [...]” He clearly struggles for the words to describe the author’s careful accumulation of clues:

His incidents, at first minute and carelessly thrown in, grow up by degrees into matters of great importance and elaborate art. Precisely as in real life, facts and recollections of apparently the most trivial kind, which have got remotely away in some inaccessible corner of the memory, come gradually out into more and more prominence, until, some last link in a long chain of occurrences wanting, they suddenly and thoroughly supply it. The writer, in a word, has the art of *reality*.

You are struck with the trifling minutenesses, yet find them not so trifling as you at first supposed.

Susan Hopley was a first novel, published anonymously, with no guide to the author’s gender. However, by July 1841 Jane Welsh Carlyle was writing to Forster, mentioning “Susan Hopely” by “Mrs Crow” [sic] which she found ‘good’ (13: 177). A second novel, *Men and Women: or, Manorial Rights*, also focussed on crime, followed in late 1843, as by “The author of Susan Hopley”. Subsequently the author was acknowledged to be an Edinburgh-based intellectual: Catherine Crowe (1790–1872).

Susan Hopley begins with two elderly people, Harry Leeson and Susan Hopley, he being master, while she is companion-housekeeper—there is never any suggestion the relationship extends beyond that. They resolve to make an account of their early lives, Harry to a significant degree the amanuensis of Susan: “whose own words we shall frequently take the liberty of using” (8). Susan is an unusual heroine, given that the narrative totally ignores

the marriage-plot trajectory typical of contemporary novels. She may be a servant, but she is a professional, independent woman, practical and unflappable. The Scottish novelist Susan Ferrier (1782–1854) commented that her namesake was: “a very respectable woman (the only one in the book), who wears a brown gown and knits like me—but otherwise it is all full of bad deeds and bloody murders, so that I could not endure it to the end” (quoted in Larken, “The Ghost-Fancier” 111).

Leeson as a child was part-heir to the fortune of Mr Wentworth, a wine-merchant. The other heir was Fanny Wentworth, engaged to Mr Walter Gaveston, who was resolved to inherit *all* the property. He first tried to drown Harry, but Andrew Hopley, Susan’s brother, saved the child’s life. Subsequently Mr Wentworth was found murdered and Andrew went missing, along with another servant, Mabel Jones. Gaveston accused Andrew of murdering Mr Wentworth for his money and fleeing with Mabel, this story being generally believed. In addition the will benefiting Harry was missing.

Susan, who had had a foreboding dream, turned sleuth, as Thomas Kibble Hervey, the *Athenæum*’s reviewer noted: “Through all the intricacies of the story, she winds her way with preternatural ease—the Dea Vindex, who unties all its knots” (94). In what seems a deliberate gender reversal of man-servant Caleb Williams, Susan becomes a detective. She is not alone, functioning as the principal detective of the text, the first in a series of amateur investigators found throughout the novel. Such was realistic, as in true crime cases such the Kidderminster murder, where though Anne Kidderminster was the most active detective, others, such as Lord Chief Justice Bridgman, played a role.

Susan begins, like a modern detective, with a search for clues. “Her most earnest desire [...] was to go over the house that had been the scene of the catastrophe, and inspect every part of it herself” (34). Although she is without the magnifying glass of Sherlock

Holmes, she inspects the scene of the crime: “She had a notion that she might make some discovery by examining the ground under the window of Andrew’s room” (37). She does, and finds significant evidence. However, it is not evidence this relatively powerless individual can act upon. Susan is only a servant, who could be suspected of “having the purpose of shifting odium from her own family to others” (42). She is also now without a job, and goes to London in search of work. There, she finds more evidence of Gaveston’s perfidy, including Julia Clerk, a fallen woman with a small child.

The narrative technique of *Susan Hopley* switches between viewpoints, from Harry to Susan, and back again. Now in an interlude occupying chapters 16–22 it tells the story of Julia’s mother, Julie Le Moine. This character is an example of the heroine-sleuth in its most thwarted form, Julie being: “born with the spirit of a heroine, the passions of a Medea and the temper of a vixen” (167). Her lover Valentine (the passion unrequited, for he loves another woman) is accused of attempted murder, and this spurs Julie into action, certain that her rival will “weep, but she’ll do nothing” (137). In any case, Julie had been spying on Valentine on the night in question, and saw some suspicious characters in the vicinity. With the help of her maid and confidante Madeleine, she cuts her hair, dresses as a page, and tracks the real villains to their den. She discovers important evidence—but is shut in a cellar with a corpse for her pains. At this point her strength of mind deserts her, as is typical with the heroine-sleuth. Crowe comments: “Many’s the time that love has conquered fear, even in the most timid breasts, as it had thus done in poor Julie’s—she must be forgiven if fear for a short time gained the ascendant and the heroine sunk into the woman” (141).

Madeleine summons the police, who track Julie and rescue her, but during the ordeal in the cellar the sleuth has gone mute, losing her voice permanently. She has proved

Valentine innocent, but gained and lost from the discovery. He marries her, from pity and a sense of duty, and unsurprisingly, the marriage is unhappy.

Within the greater context of *Susan Hopley*, Julie's story represents a perfect encapsulated female detective narrative, told with a skill that would make it eminently suitable for a historical anthology of the woman sleuth. She reappears in the novel, as a mute but formidable figure of action, an innkeeper who gains a cold but highly satisfying revenge by imprisoning in a cellar the same villains who had, long ago, imprisoned her.

The narrative returns first to Harry's adventures, then back to its original female detective, Susan, who moves from employment to employment, generally using her detective skills efficiently. A female employer of hers is accused of stealing lace from a shop—Susan proves her innocent. The next employer has three daughters, the eldest of whom marries a bogus Italian Count, Susan accompanying the bride and her sisters on a continental honeymoon tour. There she meets the missing servant Mabel, now called Amabel, who has become the common-law wife of a French Duke. However, Mabel/Amabel knows nothing of Susan's missing brother. The two women join forces, both having been wronged by Gaveston, to uncover the mystery and find justice. Other detectives are in pursuit too: Simpson, a clerk from Wentworth's firm and the family lawyer, Olliphant. All join in the chase, which culminates in a climactic court scene. Most of the villains in the book prove to be Gaveston and his cronies under different names. At the end, the body of Andrew Hopley, blamed for the murder of Wentworth, is found murdered himself, and Susan is vindicated.

Susan Hopley is a triumph of complex plotting, a woven design of crime whose threads all come neatly together at the end. Forster notes: "there is no end to the circumstantial plots and counterplots, of which [Susan] is first the unconscious and unhappy centre, and at last the quiet and triumphant unraveller" (although in his opinion too many of

its plot threads had been broken for a final successful tapestry). It is significant as perhaps the first substantial novel of crime by a woman, even without its female detectives, the humble-born, efficient and imperturbable servant Susan, Julie and, to a lesser extent, Mabel/Amabel.

Yet, recent critical attention given to the book has been scant, with the exception of Sally Mitchell's *The Fallen Angel* (1981), which noted its sympathetic treatment of fallen women, such as Julia and Mabel. John Sutherland, in *The Longman Companion to Victorian Fiction*, calls the novel a "simply written romance" (615), declaring Susan to be a colonel's daughter. That revelation does not occur in *Susan Hopley* but in Crowe's later novel *The Story of Lilly Dawson* (1847). This mistake has been perpetuated by other scholars, most recently in John Chapple and Alan Shelston's edition of *Further Letters of Mrs Gaskell* (Manchester University Press, 2000, n. 274).

The novelist Adeline Sergeant, writing in an 1897 essay which grouped Crowe with two other female crime writers, Caroline Clive and Ellen (Mrs Henry) Wood, was rather more perceptive. She noted that the book "had all the ingredients of a sensational story" (which term it considerably predated) and that "Susan's energy" for detection was a key factor in exposing Gaveston (157). The richness of *Susan Hopley's* tableaux and its ornate crime plotting deserve much more attention. And its influence cannot be underestimated. Sally Mitchell notes *Susan Hopley's* use of "carefully controlled viewpoints to provide suspense", a "technical experiment" used and "polished" by "later detective writers, most notably Wilkie Collins [...] until it became both a conventional form and a philosophical approach to the question of reality" (164). However, Collins arguably took more than the viewpoint technique from *Susan Hopley*. His 1856 crime story "Anne Rodway" had as its protagonist a maid-detective. Furthermore a plot device from *Susan Hopley*—identifying a

criminal by cutting, unobserved, a scrap of cloth from their clothing, then producing it, like a jigsaw piece, in evidence—reappears in his novel *No Name* (1862).

Susan Hopley was a best-seller among all classes of society, with its editions priced for the circulating library clientele (three volume form), then as less expensive weekly and subsequently monthly numbers, and a “Cheap Genuine Edition”. It also had interference from the hack-writer T. P. Prest (later responsible for the story of Sweeney Todd), who published in 1842 *Susan Hopley, or the Trials and Vicissitudes of a Servant Girl*—described as a “violent romance” by Sadlier (*XLIX Fiction* 1: 56). The novel also enjoyed a second lease of life, much as today’s novels do via filming, being adapted by various dramatists. George Dibden Pitt’s adaptation was first performed in London on May 31, 1841, with great success. “She [ie the play] has been applauded in London for upwards of three hundred nights, and in the provinces for about as many more. She has travelled to America and to Sydney and been kindly welcomed” (Remarks, *Cumberland’s Minor Theatre* 8).

However, the constraints of performance meant that the story of *Susan Hopley* was modified considerably in its progress from book to stage. Pitt, in his need to reduce the narrative to three acts, simplified the text considerably. He removed most of the detection and also Julie, perhaps the most intriguing figure in the book. Thus the play version was not as strikingly precursive of the modern detective story as the original novel. Crowe had no say in the production, indeed the weakness of the existing copyright laws meant that she could not intervene legally, to stop, modify, or even benefit from the performances. *Susan Hopley* was thus pirated and she did not receive a penny of the proceeds.

Mary Braddon was very familiar with the theatre version, indeed professionally so; she was a member of the Henry Nye Chart theatrical company, which performed the play (Carnell, *Literary Lives* 337). She mentions the play in *Aurora Floyd* (332) and almost

certainly she played one of its female roles, possibly even the lead of Susan Hopley herself. Such is suggested by an 1861 letter she wrote to the journalist George Augustus Sala, apropos of his renting a country house called Upton Court:

I am glad you are in Buckinghamshire, and not at that Upton [the site of Pitt's melodrama] where Susan Hopley lived and everybody murdered each other. To a person of my theatrical experience there is always something rather awful in the sound of "Upton." I am sure you must have "my murdered brother, Andrew," walled up in your bedroom. Some day, when you are shaving or hanging up your coat, you will touch a secret spring in the wainscot, and he will come out with a back-fall, green and festering. (qtd. in Wolff, *Sensational Victorian* 486)

Catherine Crowe was a writer of much versatility: in the course of her literary career, she wrote drama, crime, children's books, adapting *Uncle Tom's Cabin* for the younger reader in 1853, and also serious works of non-fiction. This working in various literary forms makes her difficult to categorize. She does not, to quote Foucault's critique of the canon, represent "a certain unity of writing" nor a single "source of expression" ("What is an Author?" 111). Moreover, she was popular—all the easier, then, to dismiss her as a hack and "a pioneer of the lowliest sort of domestic fiction" (Baker 8: 107).

At present published information on Crowe is limited to scattered works of reference, and then only patchily. The only biography is as yet unpublished. Geoffrey Larken researched and wrote her life as "The Ghost-Fancier—a Life of the Victorian Authoress, Mrs Catherine Crowe", but was unable to find a publisher. The reason for the rejections appears to be length: 175,000 words, not a commercial publishing proposition, particularly given the subject's obscurity.

However, the text was otherwise solidly researched and written. It is held in the Templeman Library, University of Kent at Canterbury, along with the material Larken accumulated while researching the biography. Larken's collection is substantial, for Crowe led an active social life, figuring in the diaries and letters of many significant writers in early nineteenth-century England, and assorted visitors of the stature of Hans Christian Andersen and Emerson.

She was born Catherine Ann Stevens in London, the daughter of John Stevens and Mary Nash. As Larken comments, "she was the only daughter of lower-class parents who rose to middle-class status and prosperity through the enterprise and initiative of her father" ("The Ghost-Fancier" 13). John Stevens became an inn-keeper, wine-merchant, and proprietor of Stevens's Coffee House in New Bond Street, London, a gathering-place beloved by such notables as Lord Byron. At the time of Stevens's rise to prosperity, supplies of the luxuries in which he dealt became difficult, due to the wars with Revolutionary and Napoleonic France. Larken suggests he thus may have resorted to some connection with the smuggling trade, which figures in the fiction of his daughter. Moreover, the Kentish villages where she was reared had a long-standing association with contraband. As Larken notes: "No one growing up in Hy Hatch and Borough Green at that time could be totally unconscious of smuggling activity, and there is no doubt that Mrs Crowe's familiarity with the prevalence of Kentish freetrading was a legacy of her childhood" (19). To quote Kipling's poem "A Smuggler's Song", Crowe as a child may well have been told to: "Watch the wall, my darling, when the Gentlemen go by!"

The daughter of a self-made businessman would likely have only received the conventional and scanty female education. She was later to lament, in her novel *Lilly Dawson*, which contains her most fervent expression of feminism, that: "six hours a-day at

Latin and Greek are better than six hours a-day at worsted-work and embroidery; and time is better spent in acquiring a smattering of mathematics, than in strumming Hook's lessons on a bad pianoforte" (181). Little of her life, though, is known before her relatively late marriage to Brevet-Major John Crowe, a hero of Waterloo, which took place in Chichester Cathedral on 6 June 1822 (Larken, "The Ghost-Fancier" 33).

The following year Catherine gave birth to a son, William; and two years later her husband officially retired from the army on half-pay. When living in Bristol, the Crowes became acquainted with the wit and cleric Sydney Smith, who became great friends with Catherine. She would later recall that had she "never known him, I should assuredly not have become an authoress—and I should have lost many pleasures if I had not" (qtd. in Larken, "The Ghost-Fancier" 75). When, in 1837, she left her husband for a new life in Edinburgh, the destination may well have been Smith's suggestion. Nearly forty years previously he had praised Edinburgh: "for a literary man, by which I mean a man who is fond of letters, it is the most eligible situation in the land" (qtd. in Bell 14–15). There he had helped found the *Edinburgh Review*; and the city had become a hub of writing activity, with magazines such as *Blackwoods* and *Chambers's Edinburgh Journal*. Crowe took with her letters of literary introduction from Smith to the *Edinburgh Review* founders, and also what was to be her first published work, the verse tragedy *Aristodemus* (1838).

Crowe referred later to the separation as a time "when 'I fled for my life'" (qtd. in Larken, "The Ghost-Fancier" 82). The use of the quotation marks around "I fled for my life", could mean the expression can be taken figuratively—but it might also be literally true. She was able to leave her marriage thanks to her father: John Stevens had presciently made his daughter financially independent in his will. She would henceforth devote herself to writing, and seems never to have seen her husband again.

Smith had described Edinburgh as congenial for the literary *man*; and it would prove likewise for this unconventional woman. He wrote to her in early 1840, happy to hear that she was “so comfortably arranged at Edinburgh” and “intimate” with *Edinburgh Review* co-founder Lord Jeffrey (S. Holland 425). Crowe was not, by the standards of the time, young; she was financially independent but not wealthy; in the social scale she was no more than an army wife of humble origins—and nobody ever rhapsodised about her beauty. The only two people who commented on her appearance, Henry Crabb Robinson and Thomas Carlyle “do no more than hint that she was a woman of unusual aspect with penetrative and expressive eyes” (Larken, “The Ghost-Fancier” 5). Nonetheless, she impressed a lot of people, both socially, and through her writing. Had Crowe’s Visitor’s Book survived, it would be a cornucopia of collectable signatures, including Margaret Fuller, De Quincey, Harriet Martineau, Thackeray, Dickens and Baudelaire. It is clear that she had the gift of friendship almost as strongly as her gift for literature.

Part of her success was as an intellectual socialite, who hosted select salon-style supper-parties, recalled later by David Masson as:

the most excellent and best-managed things of the kind ever known in Edinburgh or elsewhere. By the kindly tact of the hostess, one was always sure to meet at her table, in the easiest and friendliest fashion, from half-a dozen to ten or twelve of the men and women best worth knowing, on literary or other grounds, among the residents in Edinburgh or the last week’s arrivals. (qtd. in Larken, “The Ghost-Fancier” 259–60)

Unfortunately this aspect of Crowe has caused some writers to depict her as no more than a society woman, to the detriment of her reputation as a novelist. Grevel Lindop, in his biography of De Quincey, calls her “an Edinburgh society hostess” (367) and nothing more;

Juliet Barker notes that Crowe was one of a group of female writers invited by Thackeray to a disastrous evening with Charlotte Brontë, whom she terms: “society women, mere dabblers in the world of literature” (644). A career lasting twenty years, whose products fill nearly a page of the *British Library General Catalogue of Printed Books to 1975*, is hardly “dabbling”.

The most common description left by Crowe’s contemporaries was that she was intelligent and social, if a little odd. Alexander Ireland recalled her as a “very clever, eccentric person” with “the reputation of dabbling a little in science” (xx–xxi; Ireland does not name her, but the identification is made by Secord 376, 379). Two fellow literary women described her in similar terms. Elizabeth Rigby (later Lady Eastlake) called her “one of the oddities of Edinburgh” (1: 32); Camilla Toulmin found her “an eccentric woman, not particularly refined, but at any rate she had the courage of her opinions” (88).

Some indication of her standing within the Edinburgh intelligentsia, as well as her “eccentricity”, is given by the following anecdote. In 1847 Crowe was invited to a dinner for Hans Christian Andersen. It was a memorable evening, the host being Dr James Young Simpson, who would several months later discover chloroform. Simpson used himself as an experimental subject, and also on this night his guests. Andersen recorded in his diary:

Dinner at Dr Simpson’s, where Miss Crowe and yet another authoress drank ether; I had a feeling of being with two mad people, they laughed with open, dead, eyes. There is something uncanny about this; I find it wonderful for an operation, but not as a way of tempting God. (qtd. in Bredsdorff 194)

Yet despite Crowe’s busy intellectual networking, her career path was very much on her own terms. The play *Aristodemus* was published first, but although admired by De Quincey (Larken, “The Ghost-Fancier” 89), was never produced. Her first few years in Edinburgh were spent in writing *Susan Hopley*. It was not until after the book had been published, that

she had, as it were, proved her worth, that she began to appear in what would have been for a different writer a port of first call, *Chambers's Edinburgh Journal*.

The Edinburgh Review, where she had the letters of introduction from Smith, did not publish fiction, but *Chambers's* had from its first issue in 1832 featured the “nice amusing tale”, specifically excluding the Gothic: “no ordinary trash about Italian castles, and daggers, and ghosts in the blue chamber, and similar nonsense, but something really good” (Chambers, 1). Crowe, in offering her talents to the magazine, begged to forthrightly differ with editorial policy. She wrote to Robert Chambers, the magazine's co-founder and editor in April 1841, in a letter that sets the agenda for an actual meeting:

With respect to Essay writing I do not think the Specimens I have sent evince any talent for it—that is *your* forte; mine is story telling, drawing characters, or rather painting them, by their actions and conversations, giving pictures of Human life, and so forth. That I have succeeded in doing this in my novel seems clear—it is that that is the charm of it—which makes the ladies refuse to lay it down to dress for a ball, and which makes the great men of London sit up all night to read it, and say they “can't attend to the Eastern Question till they have finished Susan Hopley.” But to paint human life and character, in the first place, requires space—for to tell a story well requires room for details—its details make the interest and the life. For this reason I look upon your story department as your weak one—for which I don't blame the writers, but the restrictions—they are shells of stories—there's no life, no individuality of character, no freedom, and therefore no interest. But suppose we get over the limited space, there arise other difficulties even more potent—one must mind one's ps. and qs.—no *broad* pictures—no slang—no low dialects—one must wash in till all the colour is washed out. You admire my novel

but how much of it is there you would transfer to your pages unwatered—How much is there of Dickens? Or of Ainsworth? Your stories are of the old school and we are of the new. (Transcript, Larken Collection)

Larken notes on his transcript of the letter that Crowe had a story accepted by the magazine by this date, which perhaps gave her the confidence to thus hector her prospective editor—although she did back down in the latter part of the letter, which switches in tone to the suitably deferential. It is rather a schizophrenic missive, but then, as she admitted in it, she was writing in “great haste”. Presumably she knew that in the 8 May issue of the magazine would appear an extract from *Susan Hopley*, prefaced by a brief review, noting the book was: “marked by a quiet kind of talent, singularly free from literary affectation, and indeed all traces of the profession of letters” (123–5).

In the 22 May issue appeared her first contribution, published anonymously: “Frank Hepburn: a Tale of Tale-bearing”. Young Frank is employed in a draper’s shop, and overhears another employee boasting about cheating the owner. He watches the offender, but is himself observed, then framed in an elaborate fake robbery. This story could have been read as a domestic or moral tale—Frank is at the end found innocent—but its content was indubitably crime. It reads like a slice of life, or true crime. Unlike *Susan Hopley*, however, it lacks any detection.

She continued to write regularly for *Chambers’s*, in a variety of genres, from the domestic (“The Two Miss Smiths”) to the historical (“The Young Prisoner of the Conciergerie”). Her major project, though, was the crime novel *Men and Women: or, Manorial Rights* (1843). *Men and Women* again had a theme of circumstantial evidence, though with a more organized structure. Crowe had claimed to Robert Chambers in her letter of April 1841 that “when I write, I do not form a plan—I could not—my story works itself,



and my people talk for themselves". Yet *Men and Women* could not have been written without considerable pre-plotting: Sir John Eastlake is found shot dead, and three suspects are, one after the other, accused of the crime. As a reviewer in the *Examiner* noted:

The weight of circumstance bears heavily on all three; as one slowly emerges, it is only that the cloud may more darkly envelope the other [...] A great many persons are introduced, and all, with a wonderful constructive art, are made to serve some purpose in detection of the master-crime. Incidents with no visible connection, but of indefinable sympathy rise in almost every chapter: gradually the link is formed, the chain of evidence imperceptibly extends, and the murderer is enmeshed. (16 December 1843, 788)

Larken missed the significance of *Susan Hopley* for early detective fiction, something surprising given the revival of the female (and feminist) detective during the 1970s–1980s—but then he probably never read Marcia Muller, far less Sara Paretsky and Sue Grafton. For *Men and Women*, however, with its tighter, less episodic plot structure, he made a bold claim:

The book has all the elements of a modern crime novel with the one exception of police investigation. It is in fact a detective-story without an official detective and the first of its kind to be attempted by a woman-writer; even to grade it as the earliest full-length English novel in the style of the present-day "whodunnit" is perhaps not too extravagant. ("The Ghost-Fancier" 146)

He even declared that Crowe's handling of suspense was "much after the manner in which the late Dame Agatha Christie enthralled her readers" ("Early Crime Fiction" 10).

Men and Women was the only one of Crowe's novels never to be reprinted, and consequently is held in relatively few libraries. Such may explain the scant attention to the text, which is significant both for its controlled crime plot and critique of class/gender

relations. The motive for the murder revolves around manorial rights, as the title indicates; and Sir John Eastlake's assumption that he is entitled to prey on his female servants and tenants. The young Lucy Graham is his latest prospective conquest, and she is lured into a tryst—at which someone unknown very conveniently shoots the Baron. “There lay Sir John Eastlake, stiff and cold, partly glued to the earth by the blood which had now dried [...]” (1: 242–3)

There are several immediate suspects: Lucy's soldier sweetheart William Bell and her brother Leonard, both of whom had motive and were near the murder site at the time. Their loyalties conflict: if William, a deserter from the army “gave himself up, he should almost be necessarily obliged to become the accuser of Leonard” (2: 69). As in Müllner's “Der Kaliber”, ballistics plays a significant role in eliminating suspects. A pistol borrowed by Leonard is examined, and found not to have been fired: “The charge, which had been drawn from the pistol, was then produced and Duke [the Miller's son and the owner of the weapon] recognised it to be the one he had himself put in: the paper with which he had rammed it down, being part of a memorandum of the quantity of corn brought to the mill that week, written by his own hand” (2: 167).

Here Crowe cleverly makes use of forensic physical matching (linking evidence found at a crime scene with the murderer), but negatively, to prove innocence rather than guilt. The notion of a bullet being both the agent of murder, and of justice, via its incriminating wadding can be traced back to the 1794 Lancashire case of John Toms. He was convicted of murder through similarly using distinctive paper as wadding to pack a bullet in a muzzle-loading gun. The paper was torn from a broadsheet ballad and was actually found in the fatal wound; it matched, like a jigsaw piece, the remainder of the ballad, which was found in Toms' pocket (Marriner 130). This motif appealed to writers, especially the idea of the

fragmentary text-as-evidence and would recur in nineteenth-century literature, particularly of crime: in *Live and Let Live; or, The Manchester Weavers* (1835) by the Revd. Charles B. Tayler, in which the cartridge is made of identifiable paper (Beck 216); Elizabeth Gaskell's *Mary Barton* (1848); in Dickens' *Bleak House* (1852); in Braddon's 1863 *Aurora Floyd* (with the variant that the wadding is a button traceable to the murderer's waistcoat); the mystery *The Mad Hunter*, also from 1863, by the American writer Mary Denison ... and who knows how many other instances, including Melville Davisson Post's "The Tenth Commandment", in his classic *Uncle Abner, Master of Mysteries*, from 1918. Yet it is worth noting Crowe did not merely repeat the motif, rather inverted it.

Crowe now casts suspicion on a third party, Mr Rivers, heir to the Baron's title and property. In the eyes of Lady Eastlake, the bereaved mother, he has a motive: "That shot was well aimed for you" she tells Rivers (2: 181). She has "the determination of detecting what everybody else seemed resolved not to detect", that Rivers was guilty of the murder (2: 173). With this end she interviews Lucy, coming to share her conviction that William Bell is innocent. Rivers was absent from his family at the time of the murder, his whereabouts and what he was doing a mystery: "If we only knew that, it might furnish a clue to track him by" (2: 175). Nelly, her old servant, assists in the investigation. As it eventuates, Rivers was in the vicinity of Sir John, having come to ask him for money; he had guns with him, intending to shoot himself if unsuccessful.

It is ballistics that indeed solves the case, and a gun with the Eastlake crest seen in a pawnbrokers, that had been found in the Baron's park the day of the murder: "he [the murderer] hid the gun; and the gun rose up and bore witness against him" (3: 159). The pawner, a dismissed gamekeeper, also has motive to kill Eastlake but can implicate another party, previously unsuspected. He dies, but is found to have been poisoned with arsenic. A

furious chase ensues—and the (double) murderer proves to be Groves, Eastlake’s manservant and procurer, avenging the ruin of his sister, the clue to which is hidden adroitly in the second volume. The final lines in the book are: “And let those who do not scruple to employ their retainers and dependants in services that debase their minds and corrupt their morals, beware, lest their instruments should better their instructions, and in some shape or other return to their own lips the “poisoned chalice” they have learned to drug for others” (3: 60).

Although Larken noted *Men and Women* lacked a police detective, Scroggs, a Bow Street runner, makes a brief appearance towards the end. However, there is no shortage of amateurs, with various characters drawn into investigating the mystery. Nelly and Lady Eastlake are two; as are also William Bell the deserter; Lucy; and sundry incidental characters such as a Catholic priest, and Russell and Longfellow, a lawyer and artist respectively, who are suitors for Rivers’ daughters. The novel lacks the figure of a principal detective, such as Susan, yet does not need one—the investigation is a combined effort, switching between characters and viewpoints in a complex yet controlled plot. Its structure is that of a mystery, one which interposes a second villain with multiple identities (as in *Susan Hopley*) throughout the book, and introduces a second murder and its investigation in the third volume. Only when the two villains meet is capture and closure effected.

What inspired Crowe to write two major early novels in the crime genre? One intriguing fact is her friendship with a significant and influential theorist of crime: Thomas De Quincey. Indeed, she was the only woman outside his family circle he addressed by her Christian name (Japp 310). John Ritchie Findlay recalled De Quincey’s opinion: “Of Mrs Crowe as a writer he expressed great admiration, especially as to her power in arranging plots. Her machinery was coarse—a murder—but the ingenuity with which in *Men and*

Women she distributes the suspicion of the murder between four or five persons was most masterly” (51).

Yet it should not be assumed that De Quincey was sole inspiration for Crowe, though he no doubt encouraged and possibly critiqued her. Crowe in her novels showed more technical understanding of the crime narrative form than he did in his short fictions, such as the 1833 “Klosterheim”. De Quincey was the less effective as a crime fiction practitioner. Moreover, it seems clear that his 1845 critique of *Caleb Williams*, as cited in Chapter One, is informed by his reading of Crowe’s two novels, and would appear to refer particularly to *Men and Women*, which given its publication date, would have been fresh in his memory. If so, then Crowe’s work is the measure by which De Quincey finds Godwin wanting.

The beginning of her short story “The Morning Visitor” expresses sentiments with which De Quincey would have agreed:

One of the features of our time—as of all times, each of which is new in its generation—is the character of its crimes. Every phasis of human affairs, every advance in civilization, every shade of improvement in our material comforts and conveniences, gives rise to new modes and forms—nay, to actual new births—of crime, the germs of which were only waiting for a congenial soil to spring in; whilst others are but modifications of the old inventions, accommodated to new circumstances. (108)

This remark indicates that Crowe had a habitual and persistent interest in crime, more than could have been solely inspired by De Quincey. As Larken noted: “her preoccupation with crime sprang from genuine interest and a close study of the subject, she was concerned with almost every aspect of it, from motivation to method, and it had served her well” (“The Ghost-Fancier” 219).

Others admired *Men and Women*. Geraldine Jewsbury, a tough critic, wrote to Jane Carlyle that she found it:

a capital book with abundance of plots in it, and it kept even a hard-hearted novel-reader like me in a state of high excitement from the beginning to the end. It is quite a Godsend, for if you begin it you cannot put it down! At least I could not and I neither skipped, nor yet looked on, to see what was coming, but went step by step, cutting my leaves as I went on!—and if that is not a compliment, what is?
(*Selections*, 99–100)

Forster, Jewsbury and Jane Carlyle—who compared several days of her life to a Crowe novel, “futile in the extreme, but so full of plot that the *interest* (such as it is) has never been allowed to flag” (18: 37)—all acknowledged Crowe’s narrative powers. No other early crime novelist allowed so few digressions to get in the way of her crime plot, allowing it to dominate the book. The reactions of her readers were precursive of modern crime reading practice.

Subsequently, Crowe’s interest in crime continued in short form, but she no longer wrote novels that were so purely criminous. *Men and Women* exists in only one edition and this relative failure may have caused her to vary her work. *Lilly Dawson* followed in 1847, the story of a lost heiress raised by smugglers, yet with the crime and mystery less dominant. It was also distinguished by some four pages critiquing conventional women’s roles. Crowe thought women men’s intellectual inferiors, but supported their right to education, work, and the moves in Switzerland and America to give them greater property rights (179–84). The novel was dramatised as *Lilly Dawson, or, a Poor Girl’s Story! A Domestic Drama* by Edward Stirling, Esq.

In the three years between her second and third novels Crowe acquired another interest, establishing herself as a writer on the supernatural. She had been previously intrigued by Phrenology, whose founder, George Combe, told Fanny Kemble that Crowe had “a most preposterous organ of wonder” (Kemble 233). Now she began a profound involvement in the Spiritualist movement. This conjunction of detective writing and spiritualism is something she shared with a later, more celebrated writer, Conan Doyle, although in Doyle’s case it would not result in a personal disaster.

Her publications in this area began with her 1845 translation from the German of Justinus Kerner’s *The Seeress of Prevorst*, an account of a noted clairvoyant. Three years later she followed with *The Night Side of Nature* (1848), an original, pioneering and clear-eyed investigation of psychic phenomena. In its Introduction she declared her belief that the supernatural would eventually come “within the bounds of science” (17).

This work was highly influential, being read avidly and widely. The artist Henrietta (Mrs E. M.) Ward recalled it as “entertainingly weird” (*Reminiscences* 147). The book figures, for instance, in the 1859 ghost story “What Was It?” by the Irish-American writer Fitzjames O’Brien, a narrative termed “the most influential single story aside from those of Poe in the development of modern supernatural horror” (Salmonson 155). O’Brien’s haunted household constitutes a reading group of Crowe fans, who are well-primed by the text for the appearance of an actual apparition:

One of the boarders, who had purchased Mrs. Crowe’s “Night Side of Nature” for his own private delectation, was regarded as a public enemy for not having bought twenty copies. A system of espionage was established, of which he was the victim. If he incautiously laid the book down for an instant and left the room, it was immediately seized, and read aloud in secret places to a select few. (828)

The popularity of *The Night Side*, still regarded as an important text by Spiritualists, obscures Crowe's day side, and arguably her real significance—her work as a fiction writer.

Moreover, her interest in the paranormal was ultimately to lead to a mental crisis, in which she (and her literary reputation) were damaged. It was Crowe's involvement in Spiritualism that led to a scandal, which was reported gleefully and widely, in the newspapers, anti-Spiritualist magazines and by sundry literary gossips. The first and fullest account surviving was from Dickens who on 7 March 1854 wrote to a correspondent that:

[Catherine Crowe] has gone stark mad—and stark naked—on the spirit-rapping imposition. She was found t'other day in the street, clothed only in her chastity, a pocket-handkerchief and a visiting-card. She had been informed, it appeared, by the spirits, that if she went in that trim she would be invisible. She is now in a madhouse, and, I fear, hopelessly insane. One of the curious manifestations of her disorder is that she can bear nothing black. (*Letters 7*: 285–6)

Larken notes that the incident was probably triggered by stress, ill-health, and a night spent with five others, including a clairvoyant, in an Edinburgh haunted house. This psychic experiment elicited the information from the medium that the haunting was the work of murder victims, although the only signs of the supernatural were mysterious white lights—the closest Crowe had yet come to seeing a ghost (Larken, "The Ghost-Fancier" 420–1).

The actual "streak" was brief: Crowe was quickly removed from the street by a medical acquaintance, whom Larken suggests may have been Dr James Simpson ("The Ghost-Fancier" 421). She was sent to a private asylum, and quickly recovered. However, it proved impossible to keep the story quiet: it spread at an alarming rate. Crowe was obliged to write to the press in late March to counter the rumours, allowing that she had experienced what would be now termed a nervous breakdown.

In her own words to the *Daily News*, after an illness in Edinburgh on 26 February, she was “five or six days [...] in a state of unconsciousness” in which she “talked of the spirit-rapping, and fancied spirits were directing” her writing, quite appropriately, as her current topic *was* Spiritualism. She added that she was not “mad about spirits or anything else [...] though very much out of health and exceedingly debilitated”. Later she wrote that she had thought herself “haunted by spirits” (qtd. in Larken, “The Ghost-Fancier”, 429, 430).

Unlikely though the story sounds, especially given late winter weather conditions in Edinburgh, when even a madwoman would hesitate in venturing outside naked, it was apparently true. Moreover it was rather too entertaining to be easily squashed, not least in the absurd visual image created: of a respected middle-aged female author as Lady Godiva.

Additionally it provided ammunition for those who had prejudices against women and their writing, not to mention Spiritualism—against which there was an emergent backlash.

Dickens’ response was probably typical; he had earlier been intrigued by psychic phenomena, in 1848 knowledgeably if sceptically reviewing *The Night Side* in the *Examiner*. His review began with the words: “The authoress of “Susan Hopley” and “Lilly Dawson” has established her title to a hearing whenever she chooses to claim one. She can never be read without pleasure and profit, and can never write otherwise than sensibly and well” (26 February 1848, 131).

Now he dismissed Crowe as a “medium and an Ass”, although she had never claimed to have any supernatural powers. Dickens knew Crowe, for he had published her in his magazine *Household Words*, and had invited her to dinner (the other guests including the Carlyles and Elizabeth Gaskell)—yet he dismissed her illness callously. However, in the same paragraph, he allowed that *Susan Hopley* was “rather a clever story” (*Letters* 7: 288).

Clearly her reputation suffered, yet she was still sociable, as if nothing had happened. Henrietta Ward met her in London, post-breakdown, and noted that she was “a keen Society woman, unquestionably intellectual, but very easily excited” (*Reminiscences* 147); Fanny Kemble did likewise and found her “perfectly restored to her senses” (233). However, Larken notes that “from 1856 onwards she began almost imperceptibly to go downhill” (“The Ghost-Fancier”, 453), mentally and physically. In a private letter of 25 January 1861 she confessed to being literally haunted by the spirit of her first love (Transcript, Larken collection).

Richard Garnett claimed “she wrote little” subsequently (237) but her writing continued to appear, if sporadically and mainly in reprint form. Crowe’s last book was a short non-fiction treatise, *Spiritualism and the Age We Live In* (1859), which Diana Basham calls “obviously troubled”—not surprisingly if it was what she was writing at the time of her illness (154). Her last article, “Brown Seaweeds”, on natural history, appeared in 1863 in *Once a Week*. After that date, like her heroine Julie, she was effectively silenced, though no recluse. Crowe lived on the continent until the Franco-Prussian war in 1870, thereafter returning to England, where she settled in Folkestone, near her son William and his family. Crowe died of “natural decay” in 1872 (Boase 1: 775).

In his biography Larken argues that she kept writing, even returning to the novel form. He devotes much space to an unconvincing attempt to credit her with at least part-authorship of the 1865 *The Notting Hill Mystery*, by the still mysterious and probably pseudonymous Charles Felix. This work has pseudo-scientific and mesmeric content, the basis for Larken’s claim. It has also been claimed to be the first detective novel (Symons 52). *Susan Hopley* and *Men and Woman* are sufficient achievements, without reference to *The Notting Hill Mystery*.

Larken comments that because of the Godiva incident, which he terms a “short-lived lapse [...] Crowe has been pilloried for more than a century” (“The Ghost-Fancier”, 432). In the process, her contribution to crime writing has been quite forgotten. Quite apart from her novels, with her short crime fictions and articles she prepared the ground in *Chambers’s* for its later series of detective’s casebooks, and was still contributing to the magazine when “Waters” “Recollections of a Police Officer”, the first police procedural serial, began in July 1849. Indeed, as Drexler has noted (29), in the preceding month a professional quasi-crime series in *Chambers’s*, “Experiences of a Barrister” by Samuel Warren, made reference to her work. In the story “The Writ of Habeas Corpus” an obvious homage appears, with a bit player in its story of inheritance fraud being a servant named Susan Hopley (v. 11 n.s. 9 June 1849: 354–8).

Larken found her “a strange, unfathomable woman” (“The Ghost-Fancier” 195); she was elusive as well, for she left no descendants, and he could trace none of her personal possessions, far less a portrait. It is perhaps equally strange and unfathomable that she downgraded her own work, writing to De Quincey that she had an “entire contempt” for her novels (qtd. in Japp 311), although this opinion he certainly did not share. If we consider her literary innovations, she becomes the key figure missing from the history of early crime fiction. She was the first major woman author in the form, able to write two novels devoted to crime themes when most of her contemporaries relegated murder to a small part of their novelistic canvasses. She was the first writer, perhaps, to successfully apply what Halttunen terms the “cultural construction of murder-as-mystery” to the novel and sustain it over the narrative unflinchingly. Moreover, she made use of the sleuthing female motif, unproblematically in the case of her protagonist Susan Hopley, making for the first time a

female detective the protagonist of a novel. Given these achievements, it is perhaps most strange and unfathomable that she was so utterly forgotten.

CHAPTER FOUR

TRANSITIONS: 1850–1860

Gives a Peculiar Whistle and Enter a Detective.

Tom Taylor, *The Ticket-of-Leave-Man*, Stage direction (Act IV, Scene 2).

The Virtual Gallery of Crime Fiction, the visual analogue of this thesis, began in Chapter One with a thorough and “multifarious” collection of the systems involved in the creation of the literary genre of crime, mystery and detection, ending with the work of Poe. Chapter Two added women to the exhibition of pre- or proto- crime, either as writers or appearing in texts as nascent female detectives. Chapter Three considered Catherine Crowe’s crime novels of the 1840s, the counterpart, in longer narrative form, of Poe’s three Dupin miniatures.

In the canonical critical crime tradition, a generation gap would now occur between Poe and the Sensation novels of Wilkie Collins in the 1860s, in accordance with the “progressive model of fathers and sons” noted by Munt (3). The Virtual Gallery, on the contrary, can show an unbroken continuity in written crime from the 1840s–1860s. Poe and Crowe may have ceased to write crime, but other writers filled their place, consolidating the emergent genre. How many early crime narratives were published during the 1850s is unknown, but given that “murder-mania” was classless in its appeal, a healthy thirst for blood can be posited, with the market ranging from the literary novel to serials in working-class periodicals.

This fictional crime continuity took diverse forms. While the crime mystery plot would increasingly dominate both the short story and novel, there were various sports or anomalous texts. In particular the presence of the detective was not necessarily guaranteed, and indeed one of the most interesting murder mystery novels of this period eschewed the

sleuth altogether: *Paul Ferroll* (1855) by Caroline Clive (1801–73).

Of all the women writers discussed in this thesis, Clive had the least monetary need to write, being an heiress from the country gentry. She was perhaps the least conventional, particularly as regards contemporary ideals of female beauty, being described as: “an ugly little thing. Her bright eyes were squinny, her mouth enormous, her jowl heavy” (Mary Clive 10). Clive was also a victim of what would appear to have been polio, the disability and her fortune resulting in an unusual personal freedom. She was recalled as being “in irons as to her legs, but rode about all over the country unattended and used to get awful falls now and then, but her pluck was indomitable” (qtd. in Mary Clive 114). She similarly travelled in Europe unchaperoned, one trip with the local Vicar, the equally wealthy Archer Clive. It proved a courtship tour and they married, very happily.

Just before her marriage Caroline had published a well-reviewed collection of verse, *IX Poems by V*. However, her next book was the product of a fascination with sensational crime entirely typical of the female Victorian, as noted in Chapter Two. Caroline Clive collected newspaper murder reports (C. Mitchell, introduction xiii) and recorded macabre anecdotes in her diary. A story outline, or dream, in her commonplace book concerns a man who marries his own grandmother, ending with the words: “Puts out some naughty mans Eyes—takes away anothers fortune etc—convinces an English jury that he has acted well” (reproduced in Mary Clive 23).

Paul Ferroll, her first and most successful novel, was not as extreme, but still outrageous for the time. The title, in a curious reversal, came from an early pseudonym of hers (minus the final “l”), attached to a volume of theological essays. However *Paul Ferroll* was hardly a religious work, the hero murdering his wife without subsequent punishment or repentance. Moreover, it lacks authorial comment, let alone sanctimonious moralising: “its

most radical feature” (C. Mitchell, introduction xii).

Some critics have seen that *Paul Ferroll* as an inferior follower of Bulwer-Lytton’s *Eugene Aram* (Tyson 154–9), and its focus on the villain places it in the Newgate camp. Yet it is more of a mystery than most Newgate works and more compact than the Mysteries form of Sue and Reynolds. The novel has been called “one of the best of the early mystery stories” (Desmond Flower, qtd. in “Popular Reading Taste” 63). Adeline Sergeant states that *Paul Ferroll* was “often looked upon” as “almost the first ‘sensational’ novel [...] of the century”. She notes that “the mystery enfolded in its pages is more easily penetrated than would be the case in a modern sensational novel [...] our novelists are cleverer in concealing or half revealing their mysteries [...]” (164–5). Yet the opening chapter of the novel is a piece of controlled scene-setting that a modern crime writer might well envy. An idyllic countryside is painted, through which landowner Paul Ferroll rides. Then its peace is disrupted by crime, with the discovery of his wife’s murder.

Paul Ferroll is an odd and unsympathetic character. The investigation into his wife’s death is inconclusive, and he marries again, settling down to domestic bliss, such as he did not enjoy with the first Mrs Ferroll. He seems almost completely self-contained within his second family circle, despite being a successful writer. He shuns the invitations of his country neighbours, but protects them during labour disturbances, where he murders the ringleader of a riot very coolly, if not in cold blood. It is only when, nearly twenty years after the death of his wife, an innocent party is convicted of the murder, that he confesses. Yet even then he is never punished, escaping from prison, with the last words of the novel (in its original edition) being his daughter’s affirmation that she still loves him, despite his crime.

The novel was successful, to the extent of having a verbena named after Ferroll (Mary Clive 276). It is probably best classified as a psychological thriller, and one clearly influential

on Sensation fiction, both in English and probably also via its French translation. Elizabeth Gaskell wrote that the novel was “more distinguished [...] by power, than by beauty [...] The great skill is in the working out of this plot. People here condemn the book, as ‘the work of a she-devil’, but buy it, and read it [...]” (*Further Letters* 147). It was perhaps these reactions that caused Clive to retreat from the seeming amorality of the work. Indeed, she diluted its impact by a prequel, *Why Paul Ferroll Killed His Wife* (1860) which paints the first Mrs Ferroll in the blackest of colours. Although Clive lived to old age, she suffered ill-health and her fictional output was scanty, including no more crime. Only her end was sensational: she died when a spark from a domestic fire set her dress alight.

Despite the success of *Paul Ferroll*, in writing a detective-less crime novel Clive was working against the trend. During the 1850s the sleuth would increasingly move from the corners of Frith’s emblematic narrative canvas to the centre of the text. The most striking development was the ‘Casebook’, what would now be termed the police procedural. Although in the 1820s Vidocq’s memoirs and *Richmond* had privileged the police, during the following two decades police appearances in fiction were largely incidental, and isolated, one exception being Bulwer Lytton’s inheritance mystery *Night and Morning* (1841), which included both a Bow Street Runner and a French detective clearly based on Vidocq.

It was not until the 1840s, notably in England from 1843 (when Scotland Yard’s detective office was established) that the new professionalism of detectives and their widely-reported successes drew attention, firstly in the newspaper press. By the end of the decade the transition into fiction was made, with police sleuths the narrator-protagonists, something that would continue as a healthy publishing sub-genre into the 1860s. The initiative came from male writers, and they effectively changed the direction of the crime genre. It is necessary to consider their work, thus briefly breaking from the thesis’ focus on female crime authors. Yet

women soon followed the trend, with one writer, Mary Fortune, the subject of Chapters Nine and Ten, building a forty-year career from the male police detective.

The trope began with Waters, the hero/narrator/“author” of “Recollections of a Police-Officer”, which ran in *Chambers’s* from 1849–1853. The series, the first to feature the police, was the logical continuation of a fictional process beginning in 1830–7, with Samuel Warren’s “Passages from the Diary of a Late Physician” in *Blackwood’s Magazine*. Warren wrote a series of short encapsulated stories, which blurred fiction and fact through the authority of their narrator, a professional man. This paradigmatic form was widely imitated, as has been noted by Drexler (124, n. 20) with different professions, such as Warren’s “Experiences of a Barrister”—also in *Chambers’s* in 1849, running concurrently and overlapping in subject matter with Waters’ “Recollections”.

Waters was actually William Russell, an obscure figure but apparently no policeman, as he seems to have derived his pseudonym from a genuine “Runner” (Browne, n. 123). Waters applied *Richmond* and Vidocq to Warren’s professional form and created a literary sub-genre, the Casebook, from July 1849. Most historians of crime have noted how the Scotland Yard detectives influenced Charles Dickens, firstly as subjects for articles in his magazine *Household Words* (co-written with co-editor William Henry Wills), beginning in 1850. But Waters was first, and wrote Casebooks for some years. Dickens, says Ronald Thomas, has been “recognized as the originator of the detective story in Britain” (12), but this distinction more properly belongs to the pseudonymous hack Waters.

Certainly Dickens had Inspector Bucket in *Bleak House* (1852–3). However, that a canonical writer included a detective in a novel does not necessarily make the work canonical crime. Bucket only figures from chapter 22 onwards, and the murder he solves occupies chapters 49–54. Had Poe lived to critique *Bleak House* as he did *Barnaby Rudge* (qtd. in

Chapter One) his comments regarding its plot would probably have been similar. *Bleak House* lacks the taut mystery narrative of the Dupin stories; and also that of Crowe's more diffuse but still murder-dominated *Susan Hopley*, which Dickens read. Appropriating Dickens' novel into the detective genre is thus problematic, even with Bucket. It might seem heresy, but *Bleak House* can be read as less of a detective narrative than a partial crime text, being most clearly a late example of that non-canonical form, the "Mysteries", specifically G. W. M. Reynolds' *The Mysteries of London* (1844–8). The resemblance was noted by Dickens' contemporaries, such as Ruskin, and other subsequent critics (Maxwell 197).

Why was Bucket a marginal figure, not privileged, as was Richmond or Waters? The reason was that the police constituted problematic subject matter. *Richmond* noted "every body has a dislike and horror at the very sight of an officer" (89). He ascribed this feeling to guilt, but another factor was class: contemporary police belonged to a low social stratum seldom heroes in fiction aimed at the middle and upper classes, most protagonists in novels being "gentleman". Anxiety tended to surround the police, as being powerful yet "non-U". Dickens may have featured detectives in the *Household Words* articles but in 1859 the magazine commented: "It is never a wise or safe proceeding to put arbitrary authority and power in the hands of the lower classes [...] we shall never have a well administered police system till gentlemen hold commissions in the police as they do in the army" (508). The writer was Charles Allston Collins, brother of Wilkie and Dickens' son-in-law (Lohrli 232).

Snobbery with violence is the term applied to aristocratic detectives of Golden Age crime fiction, such as Lord Peter Wimsey, but it is also relevant to the way in which many Victorian novelists depicted their police characters. It manifested itself most obviously in denigrating comic names: Blathers and Duff in *Oliver Twist*; Bucket (despite *Bleak House* postdating Dickens' acquaintance with and admiration for the detective force); and Bozzle in

Trollope's *He Knew He was Right*. When police professionals occupied the centre stage, it was only because of acceptable if not superior class. This factor operates in detective fictions from the Australian colonies (to be discussed in Chapter Eight); *Richmond*; Emile Gaboriau's M. Lecoq; and Waters. Richmond's origins are plainly middle-class: he works for a while in a Liverpool "counting-house" (14–15). Lecoq and Waters had higher social status, its loss precipitating their entry into the force as distressed gentlemen. Waters protests that: "adverse circumstances—chiefly the result of my own reckless follies—compelled me to enter the ranks of the metropolitan police, as the sole means left me of procuring food and raiment [...]" ("Recollections" 55).

Russell was the first writer to specialize in crime fiction. Initially, though, he seemed unaware of the mystery form, despite being preceded in *Chambers's* by a reprint of Poe's "The Purloined Letter" (November 1844). His police stories began as adventures, long on coincidence and short on ratiocination. He did eventually develop more of a deductive plot: "Murder under the Microscope" (from *Experiences of a Real Detective*, 1862) carefully reconstructs a crime, with clues such as a washing-line, used to trip a horse, and bloodstains subjected to forensic examination. That said, the story is still not exceptional for its time. Though Waters was popular, Russell's writing was essentially hackwork and today is known only to crime specialists.

However, it had a profound influence, with numerous imitators. In the mid-1860s Gaboriau created the *roman policier*, the police novel. He began with an amateur sleuth, Tabaret, in the 1865 *L'Affaire Lerouge*. His models were Dupin and Vidocq, but when in *Le Crime d'Orcival* (1866–7) policeman Lecoq became the protagonist, the influence of Waters and the Casebooks can be surmised. No other works of the time so privileged the police. As Symons notes, the French were even more distrustful than the English of the police, because

of their function as agents of state repression (54). Yet Gaboriau's move was significantly not followed by his English contemporaries, the Sensation novelists, who with an eye on the circulating library (middle-class) market, tended to have their sleuths amateur detectives, genus gentlemen. Even a "gentlemanly" police hero seemed unthinkable, in novel form at least.

More immediate was Waters' influence upon short story writers. "Recollections" was collected in book form, in America (1852, a pirate edition), England (1856), followed by a German translation (1875). It was also reprinted as a staple of the "yellowback" market, cheap yellow paper-covered booklets, railway kiosk fare. Russell wrote other police series; and so many Casebooks appeared, particularly in the 1860s, that it became necessary to differentiate the protagonists. One way was via geography: writers would localise the form by applying it to their respective police forces, creating titles such as *The Irish Police Officer* by Robert Curtis (1861) and *The New York Detective Police Officer*, ed. by John B. Williams, M. D. (1865).

Coincident with the latter appeared the short story "Mr Furbush", also from 1865 and featuring a New York police sleuth. It was not written in the form of a memoir, rather being a third person narration, but otherwise in form was indubitably a Casebook. Moreover, the story was by a woman and openly ascribed as such: the American writer Harriet Prescott, later Spofford (1835–1921). Her long writing career included poetry, novels and short stories, the form in which she displayed her skills to greatest effect. A modern cleriheer written about Spofford sums her up thus:

Harriet Prescott Spofford

Sold every story she offered.

To Hawthorne she owed debts.

She walked in Poe's footsteps. (Stephen Davies)

Harriet Prescott came from Boston Brahmin background, although financial vicissitudes meant that at age 21 she was supporting her family. She had been unusually well-educated, attending the Pinkerton academy, which, while granting degrees only to males, gave female students the identical education (Salmonson 2). The Boston story papers paid for fiction, if poorly, and she began to contribute anonymously to them. For two years she wrote in extraordinary quantity, an apprenticeship of hackwork, from which she emerged two years later as if from a cocoon, the Grub Street writer metamorphosed into a brilliant butterfly.

By the time she began to contribute to the more literary American magazines, she had skills that belied her youth. Her favourite mode was Romantic and Gothic, her style richly ornate. One story made her reputation in 1859, and it was perhaps the most direct and important American successor to Poe. "In a Cellar", her first venture into crime, was sent to the *Atlantic Magazine*, where it caused consternation. The story told of jewel theft, political intrigue, and devious diplomacy. It was stylishly written, with a Parisian setting and a cosmopolitan, worldly narrator. "No American writer had ever done anything like it", states Bendixen (ix). It is therefore perhaps not too surprising that the *Atlantic's* editor James Russell Lowell wondered if an American really *had*—particularly a "demure little Yankee girl" (qtd. in Bendixen ix). Lowell suspected "In a Cellar" was an unacknowledged French translation, and publication was delayed until he was convinced otherwise. The story appeared, to acclaim, in the February 1859 issue of the magazine.

Catherine Nickerson has called Louisa May Alcott's February 1865 novelette "V. V.; or, Plots and Counterplots" (published in *The Flag of Our Union* under her pulp pseudonym of A. M. Barnard) "the first appearance of a detective in American women's letters" (23). However, Spofford preceded her by five years. Interestingly, neither of these sleuths are

police detectives, rather being gifted amateurs, like Dupin. Alcott's Antoine Duprès (the name and his alias of Dupont a clear homage to Poe) is a peripheral, incidental character summoned to assist in a murder investigation. This task he apparently undertakes not as a hired hand but for sheer love of mystery. He comments, "I should make a superb detective" (128) although just what he *is* remains unclear.

Duprès is no more of a professional than Spofford's unnamed narrator, an English ex-diplomat retired to Paris, moving in high society but still willing to be consulted re the matter of an enormous, stolen diamond.

The police and I were old friends; they had so often assisted me, that I was not afraid to pay them in kind, and accordingly agreed to take charge of the case, still retaining their aid, should I require it [...]

It is not often that I act as a detective. But one homogenous to every situation could hardly play a more pleasanter part for once. I have thought that our great masters in theory and practice, Machiavel [sic] and Talleyrand, were hardly more, on a large scale. (7–8)

Unlike Duprès, Spofford's "detective" is the narrator and centre of the story. His telling of it, though, is idiosyncratic, eschewing a simple narrative progression: he claims "it has become impossible for me to tell a straight story" (4). The plot of "In a Cellar" is thus as involved as a noir thriller, although its detection is rather more straightforward, being based on coincidence and simple misapprehension. The tale is something of a shaggy dog story—in effect, the butler did it. And yet it is a tour-de-force, largely because of its narrative voice, which is allusive, cynical, knowing and magniloquent. A different writer might have commented simply that a young thief would end up on the gallows. Spofford, in a punning circumlocution worthy of Nabokov, expresses it thus (with a gratuitous drug reference, like a

sting in the tail): “With so promising a beginning, he will graduate and take his degree from the loftiest altitude in his line. Hemp is a narcotic; let it bring me forgetfulness” (9). “In a Cellar” has been called “one of the best detective stories produced by an American during the nineteenth century; it is rivaled only by Poe’s best tales of ratiocination” (Bendixen xxii). Stylistically and in terms of narrative sophistication, it is in a class of its own.

Yet five years later, with “Mr Furbush” (published in the April 1865 *Harper’s Monthly*) Spofford eschewed the detective-narrator, despite writing in Casebook mode. She was not aiming at authenticity, impersonating a “real detective”, for she now had had sufficient reputation for her name to be affixed to her work. She also used a simpler style, though still tending to the orotund. Detective Furbush resembles the hero of “In a Cellar”, being “a man of genteel proclivities, fond of fancy parties and the *haut ton*, curious in fine women and aristocratic defaulters and speculators” (624). The story (which in *Harper’s* immediately preceded an instalment of Wilkie Collins’ *Armadale*) begins with the murder of a beautiful heiress. Detective Furbush has not been assigned to the case, but pursues it “on his own account and in a kind of amateur way” (624). The murder occurred in a city hotel at the same time as a major parade, which passed in the street between the hotel and a photographic studio opposite. Furbush, happening to visit the studio for a portrait, discovers photographs were taken of the parade. He examines them:

procuring, though channels always open to him, the strongest glasses and most accurate instruments, [he] had the one chosen window in that picture [the window opening onto the murder scene] magnified and photographed, remagnified and rephotographed, till under their powerful, careful, prolonged and patient labour, a speck came into sight that would perhaps well reward them. (624)

His prize is an image by which he is able to identify the killer.

This plot twist probably originated in Dion Boucicault's play *The Octoroon* (1859), where a character is murdered while sitting for his photographic portrait in Act II, with the evidence of the exposed plate being discovered two acts later. However, Spofford's variation—the enlarging of a photograph to discover evidence of a crime—would be famously used in Antonioni's *Blow-Up*, filmed just over a century later. It also plays a part in another early Casebook story written by a woman. Besides “Mr Furbush”, a “blow-up” appears in the short story, “The Dead Witness; or the Bush Waterhole” (*Australian Journal*, 20 January 1866), by Mary Fortune, a Canadian living in Australia. It is possible “Mr Furbush” informed or influenced “The Dead Witness”. The time interval (nine months between the two publications) was certainly sufficient for a copy of *Harper's* to reach Australia: four years later the September 1870 *Australian Journal* commented on the June issue of *Harper's* (54).

“Mr Furbush” was not intended as a series, ending with the detective retiring to become a professional photographer. Yet Spofford published at least one other Furbush story. “In the Maguerriwock” appeared in the August 1868 *Harper's*, with no reference to any career change. Furbush now would appear to be a private eye, accepting work from “clients”, even if it means travelling to the frontier. Ten years ago a pedlar vanished in the lawless Maguerriwock, in Maine; proof of his death is required, and so Furbush follows this cold trail, with the help of the local sheriff. As with Spofford's first story, it leads to a cellar, where in a butt, not of malmsey, but cider, the remains of the peddler are found—after Furbush, in an exquisitely ghoulish touch, has been invited to taste the brew.

Spofford's three detective stories are diverse, with “In the Cellar” gloriously unique; “Mr Furbush” of interest largely because of its photography theme; and “Maguerriwock” very accomplished in its use of suspense, Gothic horror and regional detail (anticipating the Uncle

Abner stories of Melville Davisson Post). Moreover, they are isolated in terms of her *oeuvre*. She wrote firstly hackwork, then in a mode ornate, Gothic, and macabre—only to find literary tastes changing towards the realist. Indeed she was the subject of an admonishing review in January 1865 by the then 22-year-old Henry James, which would be later termed “one of the important early manifestos of American critical realism” (Bendixen xix). James advised Spofford to “study the canons of the so-called realist school” (272). It would seem she did adjust to the new literary orthodoxy, finding a niche with New England sketches, though never with the acclaim accorded “In a Cellar”.

Plainly detective fiction was clearly not something which Spofford felt compelled to continue. Her current literary reputation is highest as a writer of the weird but she should certainly be considered a significant early crime writer, even if only of three known detective stories, the same number as produced by Poe. She was an innovator—the first woman with a series detective, and certainly confident enough to sign her recognizably female name to a story of police detection, that very masculine preserve.

Despite the popularity of the professional police sleuth, the amateur detective (of either gender) continued, as did the heroine-sleuth. Examples from the 1860s include Metta Victor’s 1860 *The Backwood’s Bride* (to be discussed in Chapter Eleven), Mary Braddon’s 1863 *Eleanor’s Victory*, and most famous, Marion Halcombe in Wilkie Collins’ *The Woman in White*, also from 1860. It has been noted that this novel, with its Italian villain and its mysterious ghostly (but in fact earthly) white lady, looks back to the work of Radcliffe. The closest parallel occurs in Sir Percival Glyde’s attempt to bully his wife, heiress Laura, into signing over control of her fortune, which is “patently modeled” on a similar scene in *Udolpho* (Heller, *Dead Secrets* 113). In the character of Marion Halcombe, Laura’s half-sister, it also partook of the female detective tradition originated by Radcliffe.

Collins is an author intrigued by gender; he writes characters who operate outside typical Victorian sex roles, “manly” women or “effeminate” males. Marion is a strong and androgynous figure, seen as “ugly” (27) by the novel’s male amateur sleuth, Walter Hartright. Yet despite having a small inheritance she is not an independent woman, far less with the professional (if lowly) status of Susan Hopley and Wilkie Collins’ Anne Rodway. Furthermore her masculinization does not render her unmarriageable: she is admired by the villainous Count Fosco. Collins even received letters from readers who wanted to meet the “original” of Marion and propose to her (preface). Nor does it save her from the inexorable narrative trajectory of the heroine-sleuth.

Marion tries to protect the frail and feminine Laura from Glyde and Fosco. Transgressively she removes all but a petticoat and cloak to walk the roof and eavesdrop on the villains. In the process she is soaked by rain, and falls ill soon after, thus failing as the protector of Laura. Her breakdown is physical rather than mental, but not the less punishing. Marion is changed irrevocably, her face looking: “as if years had passed over it! The eyes large and wild, and looking at me with a strange terror in them. The face worn and wasted piteously. Pain and fear and grief written on her as with a brand” (315).

The modern audience, informed by their reading of later hardboiled female detectives, may well wonder why Collins does not make more use of Marion. Indeed to Hennelly, she is “the most dramatic depiction of the true detective” in the novel (104). *The Woman in White* is a story told by multiple narrators, but Marion’s diary ends in illegibility with her breakdown, and Collins never privileges her voice again in the novel. Admittedly Marion does eventually rescue Laura from the asylum where she has been incarcerated, yet her sleuthing is brief, and abruptly cut short. She plays no major role in the novel’s later detection, that being assumed by Hartwright. Marion, despite her “wasted arms”, only acts as servant-drudge to the

incognito household of Hartright and Laura: “What a woman’s hands *are* fit for [...] early and late, these hands of mine shall do” (333). It is Hartright who restores Laura to her fortune, and like a fairytale hero, marries her.

Some critics have termed Marion “that fascinating pioneer woman detective” (David 140), but she does not initiate a tradition. Rather she represents the transmutation of the detecting heroine trope begun by Radcliffe in 1794. Within sixty years this formulation had changed like a Chinese whisper in the telling and re-telling, into a narrative of thwarted detection. It might accord with contemporary gender roles that a woman’s active detection would be brief, prove physically/mentally dangerous, and be followed by a happy retreat into marriage and motherhood. However, by the 1860s an alternative narrative form was proving popular, in the short fiction Casebooks, of the professional detective. These characters were defined by work, not by romance, being used for case after case, from blackmail to murder. The detection was continuing, and the narratives climaxed not in matrimony, but the successful capture of the criminal/solution of the crime. It was a narrative model against which the heroine-sleuth could not compete.

Collins, interestingly, did attempt a reversal/revival of the heroine-sleuth in his *The Law and the Lady* (1875), where Valeria Woodville sets out to prove her husband Eustace innocent of murdering his first wife. Collins based the novel on the Scottish non-proven verdict in the 1857 case of Madeleine Smith, who had been accused of poisoning her lover. He reversed the gender of the accused, giving detective agency to Valeria while in the process feminizing the rather useless Eustace. Here he reprised the effeminate husband and strong wife theme of his earlier *No Name*, though in that novel his heroine Magdalen was primarily avenger rather than detective. Valeria conforms to the heroine-sleuth motif in her helpful, romance-motivated detection, but is successful, unlike Marion. In what is perhaps Collins’

most intriguing reversal of the text, he gives Eustace the mental breakdown normally reserved for the heroine (in his earlier novels experienced by Marion and Magdalen). In this innovation, Collins was ahead of his time, perhaps too much, for there seem to be no contemporary responses to his Valeria, the lady not starting a trend. The novel, while by no means inferior, was not accorded the canonicity of *The Woman in White* and *The Moonstone*.

Perhaps the ultimate heroine-sleuth appeared in *Eleanor's Victory* (1863) by Collins' formidable rival Mary Braddon. Eleanor Vane's father has committed suicide after being cheated by card-sharps, and she seeks vengeance on the men she regards as his murderers. This not unreasonable desire is frustrated at every turn: Eleanor is repeatedly told that she is being unchristian and (worse) unwomanly, that to play detective is a humiliating business of lies, "pitiful deceptions, studied basenesses" (173). Braddon also makes her haphazard to a fault. Though with "the will and the courage [...] she [does] not possess one of the attributes which are necessary for the watcher who hopes to trace a shameful secret through all the dark intricacies of the hidden pathway that leads to it" (177).

Eleanor has been described as one of the "least efficient" of female sleuths (Willis 412). Nonetheless, with the help of a devoted male admirer (and much coincidence) she does find the villain, one Launcelot Darrell, and exposes his misdeeds. However, the revelation goes no further than the cosy walls of an English manor house, although Darrell wronged her twice, also cheating her out of an inheritance. Braddon writes: "The hour of her triumph had come; and in this supreme moment doubt and fear took possession of her breast" (396). Eleanor stops short of the law, out of pity for the mother of her quarry; she gets her money back, and has the satisfaction of seeing a (somewhat unbelievably) repentant and humbled miscreant. The final sentence states: "Eleanor's Victory was a properly womanly conquest [...] The tender woman's heart triumphed over the girl's rash vow" (400).

Thus this “superb Nemesis in crinoline” (259) effectively thwarts herself. She is self-destructive, self-undermining. Braddon, moreover, paints her as being contented with the choice. Eleanor, who in her pursuit of vengeance is genuinely wilful, settles in the end for womanly restraint, and a life of domestic bliss—with Darrell living in similar happy domesticity next door. The only variation Braddon brings to the heroine-sleuth motif is to have Eleanor’s obligatory brain fever, “brought on by intense, mental excitement” (67), precede her detection rather than brutally conclude it.

Two female detectives produced the following year, in 1864, provided a contrast to Eleanor in their combination of the intelligence and practical skills of Hopley and Rodway with the police detective’s professionalism. Both were written in the Casebook form, apparently a decision by the writers to differentiate a police detective not only by geography, but by gender: women detective police. As such, they are aptly described as “freakish variations” of the male detective (Blake 39).

Women police was an advance on police wives, such as Mrs Bucket; and an unnamed woman, the wife of a London police officer called L---, who assisted her spouse during an abduction case in William E. Burton’s 1837 story “The Secret Cell” (*Gentleman’s Magazine*, v. 1, 206–10, 255–61). However, though Mrs L--- has been termed “the earliest example of the woman detective who is engaged by others to investigate crime in a professional capacity” (Nevins), her role in the story is insignificant.

The two 1864 women detectives followed the Casebook model, being narrator-protagonists. Both appeared in short stories collected in book form: the anonymous *The Revelations of a Lady Detective* and *The Female Detective* by Andrew Forrester Jr., an apparent pseudonym. The similarities of theme and form indicate that one was an imitation of the other. Which came first has engaged many crime fiction historians, from Ellery Queen to

Kathleen Klein (see the latter's *The Woman Detective*, 30, for a summary of the research).

The literary innovation of *The Revelations* and Forrester was in real life impossible. The police force was then an exclusively male profession: policewomen, let alone women detectives, did not appear (with one Chicago exception from 1893) until the following century (Blake 31). Thus some auctorial justification was needed, with reference to the French. In the opening story of *The Revelations*, "The Mysterious Countess", the protagonist explains her employment by Colonel Warner:

head of the Detective Department of the Metropolitan Police. It was through his instigation that woman were first of all employed as detectives. It must be confessed that the idea was not original [...] Fouché, the great Frenchman, was constantly in the habit of employing women to assist him in discovering the various political intrigues which disturbed the peace of the first empire. (1-2)

Warner was a fiction; and while Fouché may have been Napoleon's Minister for Police, in the context of his *Memoirs* his female employees were only informers. He does no more than note them in passing: "I had salaried spies in all ranks and all orders; I had them of both sexes" (275).

Even with the spurious French precedent, the idea had considerable shock value: "A female-detective [...] I should as soon have thought of seeing a flying fish or a sea-serpion with a ring through its nose", comments a character in *The Revelations* (260). The very notion was absurd to the Victorians, something expressed by the repeated use of the word petticoat, a very feminine, immobilizing and intimate garment, in connection with a female sleuth. "The Mysterious Countess" notes that Fouché's "petticoated police were as successful as the most sanguine innovator could wish" (2); and a Braddon heroine describes her maid as a "Fouché in petticoats" (*Sir Jasper's Tenant* 38). Forrester's sleuth recalls that: "Under my corkscrew-

like qualities as a detective he had no more chance than a tender young cork with a corkscrew proper. I believe [...] he never comprehended that I was a detective. His mind could not grasp the idea of a police officer in petticoats (“The Unknown Weapon” 25).

A factor evident here was the genuine contemporary anxiety about applying the concept of professionalism to women, except in the context of home and family (the Angel in the House). Yet, while the petticoat police were an oxymoron, there is no denying their effectiveness. They were detecting heroines, professionals not punished by humiliation, nor a symbolic castration. Moreover, they evaded class issues, *The Revelations*' Mrs Paschal being “well born and well educated” (“The Mysterious Countess” 2) and the social position of *The Female Detective* quite unclear.

Also unknown are the authors behind these books. *The Revelations of a Lady Detective* was credited to the author of *Anonyma*. “Anonymous was a woman!” was a famous feminist graffito, and *Anonyma* suggests a woman’s work. Some crime historians have erroneously stated that *Anonyma* wrote *The Revelations* (Craig and Cadogan 15). This comment is rather like suggesting the author was the noted detective writer Fanny Hill: *Anonyma* (1864) is the memoirs of a woman of pleasure, its full title being *Anonyma or Fair but Frail. A Romance of West-End Life, Manners, and “Captivating People”*. The book’s title page listed other publications by *Anonyma*’s author, including such gems as *The Soiled Dove* and *Love Frolics of a Young Scamp*.

Anonyma was a fake, as distinct from genuine courtesan confessions by Frenchwoman Céleste de Chabrilan, later a Countess. Furthermore it is far more discreet than *Fanny Hill*, with bibliographer Michael Sadleir pronouncing it “a grave disappointment” for a reader in search of “impudicity” (*XIX Fiction* 2: 8). Typical is when *Anonyma*’s lifestyle is described as “Orgie succeeded orgie” (75), but with no further, let alone lewd detail. Yet it would have

been regarded as immoral in its time, especially as it ends with the bad girl well married.

Anonyma's author has been identified as various male hack writers (or a syndicate thereof). The British Library catalogue attributes the work to an obscure popular author, William Stephens Hayward, "almost certainly incorrectly" (Carter n. 54). Sadleir found "the most categorical" attribution was to Bracebridge Hemyng, chiefly known for researching and writing the prostitution section (v. 4) of Mayhew's *London Labour and the London Poor* (1861). In terms of *Anonyma*'s content he is thus a likely candidate, and as regards the content of *The Revelations* he was a qualified lawyer and wrote for the US true crime *National Police Gazette* in 1874. However, Sadleir doubts that he was responsible for all of the *Anonyma* works (*XIX Fiction 2*: 8). Indeed *Anonyma* and *The Revelations* may be by different hands; certainly the former is better written.

Whoever the culprit was, anonymity allowed him a certain refreshing irreverence and freedom of opinion: Robert Owen, the utopian socialist, is namechecked favourably (as he is also by a prostitute in Mayhew 4: 256), unlike several members of the British Royal family. And the author certainly had the knack of writing lively female protagonists. *The Revelations*' cover depicts a woman in voluminous crinoline, though short enough to display dainty ankles. She is smoking a cigarette, which to a twentieth century reader would suggest a hardboiled detective, but in the 1860s was a sure sign of a fast femme. It is possible this cover was originally meant for a more typical *Anonyma*-style production. Certainly it would have misled the Victorian bookbuyer, for the demi-monde was abandoned with this book. However, in *The Revelations* the lady detective does confess to having been in "my younger days [...] employed as a barmaid at a large refreshment saloon at one of the railway stations" (276).

She is a respectable if impoverished widow, "verging upon forty" ("The Mysterious

Countess” 3). We know her only as Mrs Paschal, the name, like Waters, claiming a spurious authenticity from one Colonel Paschal (also mentioned in *Anonyma* 78), then a high-ranking London police official. There may have been an in-joke here, as Paschal was very much alive and in charge of London’s traffic in 1864. “Little or nothing is known about him” (Browne 131)—let alone whether Paschal had a wife, detective or not.

It is sometimes argued that crime fiction is read as much as for the character of the detective as for the plot; which may explain the reprinting of “The Mysterious Countess”, in the 1997 *Twelve Women Detectives* (ed. Laura Marcus). The story tells how Mrs Paschal investigates a woman with suspiciously limitless wealth, gaining a job as her lady’s maid, which leads to a chase through subterranean secret passages, for which she removes her crinoline. Unlike Marion Halcombe, she receives no punishment for this immodesty. As a puzzle the story is feeble, as the villain proves to live in handy proximity to a bank to which the passages conveniently lead, something which Sherlock Holmes would have ascertained immediately. Yet Mrs Paschal’s character is confident and attractive, with something of the inspirational qualities of the modern feminist sleuth. “My brain was vigorous and subtle”, she boasts. “For the parts I had to play, it was necessary to have nerve and strength, cunning and confidence, resources unlimited [...]” (2).

The Female Detective (which had two editions, 1864 and 1868) was the work of an author writing as Andrew Forrester Jr. If this was a pseudonym, then it probably alluded, as Bleiler has noted, to John and Daniel Forrester, two brothers employed as semi-official private detectives by the Corporation of the City of London (introduction, *Three Victorian Detective Novels* ix). However, confusingly there were also two other London contemporary Forrester brothers, minor literary figures. Whether Andrew Forrester had connections with either pair of siblings is unknown.

He published various collections of short stories in the 1860s, such as *Secret Service* (1864). Much of his work comprises simple crime adventures à la Waters, until he encountered Poe, whom he terms “the great enigma-novelist” (“The Unknown Weapon” 59). Thereafter he improves markedly, to become arguably the best Casebook writer. Interestingly, his development parallels that of Collins. Both wrote responses to “The Purloined Letter”; both created female detectives; and both used the notorious Road Murder as subject matter. Forrester’s explanation of the latter crime in *The Female Detective*, “A Child Found Dead: Murder or No Murder” was that the murder was involuntary, involving a somnambulist as killer. Collins had a somewhat similar denouement in *The Moonstone*, with his crime also being committed unconsciously, under the influence of hypnotism. It seems likely that Forrester was read by Collins.

Forrester’s best work was *The Female Detective*, yet for fans of the woman sleuth he disappoints, his lady being singularly reticent and self-effacing. “Who am I?” she begins in a teasing guessing game, offering a series of possible answers. “It may be that I took to the trade [of female detective] because I had no other means of making a living” or “for the work of detection I had a longing which I could not overcome.” She is equally vague as to what sort of woman she is: “It may be that I am a widow working for my children—or I may be an unmarried woman, whose only care is herself.” She is specific only about her cover “My friends suppose I am a dressmaker” while her enemies “are in a great measure convinced that my life is a very questionable one”, as if she were another Anonyma (1–2).

The lady justifies her profession: “it cannot be disproved that if there is a demand for men detectives there must be one for female detective police spies” [a comment suggestive of Fouché]. Criminals are both masculine and feminine” (3). Thereafter she is discreet, taking “great care to avoid mentioning myself as much as possible” (3). Her sex is thus incidental to

the stories, with rare exceptions, as in “The Unknown Weapon”, where the plot depends upon the detective gaining information from the domestic sphere, woman to woman, conducting interviews on the pretext of hiring servants, etc.

The Revelations’ tales are crude, on the mystery level, despite their intrepid female sleuth; *The Female Detective* has a protagonist whose gender is almost invisible, and yet figures in a series of intricately constructed crime puzzles. Forrester’s work culminates in the novelette “The Unknown Weapon”. In this story, a young man is found dead, with a barb in his chest—but no other indication of how and why he was murdered. The female detective sets out to solve the mystery, the case finally resolved by the discovery of a man-size box, in which a would-be robber was carried into his target house. There were only two women, a servant and housekeeper, in the home at the time, the latter being capable, formidable and quite the female detective’s match. On hearing noises from the box late at night, she had stabbed the intruder through an air-hole—then efficiently concealed the crime, for the dead man was her master’s son.

“The Unknown Weapon” is curiously reminiscent of Elizabeth Gaskell’s *Cranford* (1855), in its rural setting and preponderance of women. Moreover, the *Cranford* narrative “The Panic” is arguably a source. Both “The Panic” and “The Unknown Weapon” contain a story within a story, a northern folk or rural myth concerning a robber carried into a house concealed in a peddler’s pack. The bag being seen to move, a gun is shot at the pack, killing the hidden man. Commentators on Gaskell and Forrester generally cite James Hogg’s 1817 short story “The Long Pack”, as a version of or source for this story. However, in Hogg’s original, a girl was scared by the pack moving and a boy shot at it. Gaskell, in her retelling of the core story, loses the boy. The step of making the thief’s killing an act of female heroism was made first by Gaskell; Forrester’s housekeeper-murderess would seem to be mediated

both by Hogg and Gaskell.

With this story, Forrester showed he could deploy the detective plot over a substantial narrative with ease. The length of “The Unknown Weapon” suggests he was capable of writing a detective novel, but subsequently the writer vanishes. He has been termed “one of the great might-have-beens in the history of the detective story” (Bleiler, *A Treasury* 15). Given the flair for crime fiction Forrester displayed, it seems unlikely that he gave up writing “when he was established in another profession”, as Bleiler speculates (*A Treasury* 15). More likely he died young, but the enduring mystery is somehow extremely fitting for this early master of the detective narrative.

The word “master” was used in the previous paragraph, although Forrester’s gender is not known—a possibility being that the author was a woman. There is, however, little evidence to support female authorship. In addition, the fact that Forrester shows a more than casual acquaintance with legal terms and procedures suggests that he was a lawyer or law student (another interesting parallel with Wilkie Collins), which would argue against female authorship.

These two female detectives also appear to have little direct influence, because of the mode of their production. *The Revelations* and *The Female Detective* were yellowbacks, and as such they were not part of the circulating libraries’ stock, where most middle-class readers obtained their three-decker reading matter. The yellowback was essentially pulp fiction, ephemeral and disposable. It was also disreputable, *The Revelations*’ cover, with its dubious female smoker, being typical—and off-putting for the bourgeoisie. Popular Victorian novels (such as work by Mary Braddon) could migrate down to the level of the yellowback, but texts originating in yellowback form did not generally move upwards to the more prestigious literary outlets. Thus—leaving aside the suspicion that Collins read Forrester—they were

effectively marginal to the development of the crime genre. The result was that these two innovative books disappeared, the notion of the female police detective only being reinvented late in the century, but significantly this time by women writers influenced by the New Woman movement and its challenge to traditional female representation in fiction.

They were also, despite their prophetic significance, not the most important development in crime fiction during the 1860s. That distinction belonged to the novelists: in France Gaboriau, as already noted; in America Metta Victor (to be discussed in Chapter Eleven); and in England the writers of the Sensation school, chiefly Collins, Mary Braddon and Ellen (Mrs Henry) Wood. All made adroit use of mystery, murder and detection at novel length.

The many Sensation novels were not miniatures, or collections of miniatures like the Casebooks (their short fiction counterparts), but huge, three-volume tomes. Crime did not occupy a corner of the narrative only, as with Frith's "The Railway Station", but could be central to it, dominating the composition. Sensation will be discussed in the following three chapters, being an area where women wrote almost as much as they were featured, despite the often murderous and sexually-charged matter. If Sensation is a room in the Virtual Gallery, then its walls are covered by huge canvasses, showing scenes bright and lurid: ladies white and scarlet; raven-haired villains and also heroines; shootings, stabbings and drownings.

CHAPTER FIVE

GETTING AWAY WITH MURDER: MARY BRADDON

I do an immense deal of work which nobody ever hears of, for Half penny & penny journals. This work is most piratical stuff, & would make your hair stand on end, if you were to see it. The amount of crime, treachery, murder, slow poisoning, & general infamy required by the Half penny reader is something terrible. I am just going to do a little paracide [sic] for this week's supply.

Mary Braddon to Edward Bulwer Lytton, December 1862.

In 1860 the townsfolk of Beverley, in Yorkshire, had two visitors: Miss Mary Braddon and her mother Fanny. The pair had been brought to Beverley by a local country gentleman, the wealthy John Gilby. He was notably attentive to Mary, who was in her twenties and attractive. Gilby in contrast was a cripple, having both legs paralysed, and walked with the aid of canes (Carnell, *Literary Lives* 108).

The Braddons had visited Beverley several years previously, Mary appearing as an actress under her professional name of Mary Seyton. At the time actresses were commonly regarded as being little better than whores, and Mary Braddon's double identity would not have been circulated among respectable Beverley during her second visit. In Beverley her relation with Gilby was that of artist to patron, and it provided the means by which she entered the world of professional writing. The irony is that within a year of leaving Yorkshire Mary Braddon did indeed cross the invisible but public barrier of virtue, the demarcation line for Victorian women.

Two years later Braddon published the best-selling novel, *Lady Audley's Secret* (1862), and continued her literary career so successfully that she was termed "Queen of the Circulating Libraries". In all she wrote over eighty books, while editing popular fiction magazines and managing a household that included ten children, half her own. When she died

in 1915, she was popular and wealthy, the friend of celebrities as diverse as Henry James and Bram Stoker. Thereafter, interest in Braddon's work declined. It was not until 1979 that a biography appeared, Robert Lee Wolff's *Sensational Victorian: the Life and Fiction of Mary Elizabeth Braddon*.

Wolff changed Braddon's reputation, not only as regards her literary works, but also in the moral sense, as applied to nineteenth-century tenets of female behaviour. He revealed something known to Braddon's contemporaries, but conveniently elided, as in the *Dictionary of National Biography*, which noted her 1874 marriage and five children (Sadleir, "Maxwell, Mary Elizabeth" 378). It did not mention that all Braddon's children were born prior to her marrying their father, the publisher John Maxwell.

Mary Braddon had found herself living the dilemma of one of the Victorian era's most famous heroines, *Jane Eyre*: in love with a man who was legally unable to marry her, because he had a wife living, and insane. Jane Eyre fled temptation, returning after Bertha Rochester had conveniently immolated herself; Braddon chose not to wait for the first Mrs Maxwell to die. She cohabited with her lover and bore children, still alive when Sadleir wrote his entry. He did not therefore refer to their illegitimacy, which would have been regarded as a substantial blot on their mother's history.

This information, and Wolff's praise of Braddon's work, helped revive interest in her. In 1984–5 Virago reprinted her two most "feminist" and also notorious novels, *Aurora Floyd* (1863) and *Lady Audley's Secret*. Further reprints and critical studies both in book and article form have followed. Belatedly, Braddon is entering the Victorian literary canon. In the process the genre which made her famous—the popular Sensation school of the 1860s—has undergone a critical reevaluation.

The term Sensation applied firstly to what was perceived by contemporary critics as

an unashamed appeal to the emotions, or viscera, with graphic depictions of violence and terror. The genre was also sensational in the sense of being topical—works quite often addressed some dramatic event or issue current in the newspapers, such as bigamy. Novels were additionally often marked by a relentless narrative drive, caused by the practice of serialization, with its “structure of deferral” (Kapetanios 19) and need for cliffhanger endings with each instalment, designed to keep the reader hungry for more.

The Sensational novel, like *Rookwood*, domesticated the Gothic, using its dramatic set-pieces, like the trapped heroine, in a contemporary, realist setting. It also borrowed from the Newgate novel (in terms of crime content), and has been described as bringing these two elements “back to the three-volume novel of the circulating library”, after being relegated for decades to “cheap serials for the working class” (C. Mitchell, introduction 14). Was it a genuine crime genre? Certainly Sensation produced Wilkie Collins’ *The Woman in White* (1860) and *The Moonstone* (1868), subsequently reclassified as mystery and detective fiction respectively. These two novels represented a convergence of crime content and the mystery narrative form very close to if not identical with modern generic crime.

Four writers dominated the market for Sensational fiction: Collins, Braddon, Ellen (Mrs Henry) Wood and Charles Reade. The first three wrote novels that were crime both in subject and form, often structured around a detective search. Indeed, in 1864 an anonymous writer in the *Saturday Review* noted that: “Of all forms of sensation novel-writing, none is so common [with probably a double meaning here] as what may be called the romance of the detective” (“Detectives in Fiction and Real Life” 712). However, not all Sensation novels were as anticipatory of the modern crime genre. Reade, for instance, tended towards an episodic and action-packed structure, solving his murders quickly, with little build-up of suspense. In terms of plot, he is therefore not a mystery novelist, and this distinction can be

applied to various other works classed as Sensation.

Braddon was, however, a significant contributor to crime fiction. *Lady Audley's Secret* and *Aurora Floyd* feature subversive, even criminal, heroines, and have well-developed crime plots. Both can be classified as mysteries, though they do not use the detective, except at the amateur level (*Lady Audley*) and as an incidental character appearing towards the end of the book (*Aurora Floyd*). Other Braddon novels are structured around crime mysteries, again not making a major feature of the detective, though there are exceptions, such as Faunce in *Rough Justice* (1898), whom Wolff calls Braddon's "first notable detective" (*Sensational Victorian* 386).

In this claim he was wrong, as Braddon's first novel, *Three Times Dead* (1860), did have a detective, one Peters, a major character, whom Wolff does not even mention in his summary of the plot. *Three Times Dead* (later reissued as *The Trail of the Serpent*, from which text quotations shall be made in this chapter) was the significant achievement of her time in Beverley. It was a by-product of her patron's pet project: Gilby, like a schoolmaster, had set Braddon the subject of Garibaldi, to be expressed in the form of an epic poem.

Gilby's intentions were honourable—he wanted to marry Braddon after having made her name as a writer, "that it might be she who did me the favor" (qtd. in Wolff, *Sensational Victorian* 79–80). The marriage was not therefore to be between a wealthy man and an impoverished young woman, but with the couple on a more equal, literary footing. Yet he insisted on playing the pedagogue, as his surviving letters attest, with their injunctions to learn Latin, Greek and astronomy. At times sexual frustrations show, as when he cites as an exemplar a young woman writer with "a good dear father" (a schoolmaster in actuality), who kept a "cane for her *special* use" and "applied it effectively" (qtd. in Wolff, *Sensational Victorian* 93). Braddon's riposte has not survived, but her reaction can be gauged by a

passage in her novel *Lady Lisle* (1861). She describes Colonel Marmaduke, “a severe and awful man” to his family of daughters, having “beaten the eldest with a cane after that young lady had attained her majority” (152). However his youngest child Olivia, the novel’s heroine, is his match and bosses him unmercifully. The Colonel admits that “She’s the only creature I was ever afraid of, and, upon my word, she sometimes makes me shake in my shoes” (154):

In an 1894 essay Braddon called her six months of writing at Gilby’s expense “perhaps the happiest half-year of my life” (“The Trail” 119). It was clearly an oasis of tranquility in what had been a difficult existence—which was to become even more difficult with the advent of John Maxwell. Braddon came from a family of country gentry in Cornwall, although her father Henry was a London solicitor. He proved wayward and improvident, causing a separation from his wife, who reared three children in conditions of decreasing gentility. The elder daughter married an Italian, the son emigrated to the colonies, eventually to become Premier of Tasmania. Fanny Braddon and Mary were left alone, congenial—Mary described her mother’s society as “always all sufficient for me”—but poor (“The Trail” 119).

Writing of her girlhood in the 1909 “The Woman I Remember”, Braddon recalled how limited her options had been. She cites only two possible female employments: becoming a governess, or an actress. The latter was her path, a brave and astute decision. The nineteenth-century theatre provided, if a woman was sufficiently talented and determined, a means to be self-supporting. It was, though, a scandalous move. She describes a typical (her?) family reaction as: “the lapse of a lost soul, the fall from Porchester Terrace to the bottomless pit” (5). However Fanny was supportive, accompanying Mary during her adventures in theatreland, both as chaperone, and because mother and daughter were best

friends.

Mary Braddon was not a conventional woman of her era. Her surviving note- and commonplace books, held in the Wolff collection (University of Texas at Austin), reveal an intellect intrigued by such matters as the distance of the sun, Hindustanee grammar, and Australian Aboriginals. Necessary economies would appear to have curtailed her schooling; but Fanny Braddon was a cultured woman, well able to teach Mary skills including the craft of writing. She had contributed to popular magazines, both with her husband and after their separation. Mary Braddon recalled as a child reading Byron aloud to her mother (“The Trail” 110), and the love of literature fostered by Fanny made her a voracious reader—she was well versed, for instance, in the French novel, conventionally considered a bad influence on young women.

During her time on the stage she worked mostly with provincial companies. In terms of acting ability she was clearly capable, handling roles ranging from Shakespeare to the stage version of *Jack Sheppard* (Carnell, *Literary Lives* 60) and the pantomime. Yet after seven years, beginning in her seventeenth year (as estimated by Carnell, *Literary Lives* 15), she abandoned the stage for literature. This career move had precedents, though it was rather more common in the previous century than the rigidly moral Victorian era. Alison Adburgham comments, re the number of eighteenth-century actresses who became writers:

It took courage to act, and it took courage to write. A woman could only succeed in either career if she were possessed of exceptional determination and endurance.

She also needed exceptional optimism [...] Since the stage and literature were the only two paid professions open to women with creative talents, if one failed her she had no choice but to attempt the other [...] in order to avoid resorting to the profession that required no talent. (183)

Braddon began with verse, published in the newspapers of the provincial towns where she was acting (Carnell, *Literary Lives* 94), and later an unsuccessful play “The Loves of Arcadia”, briefly performed in London, 1860. She claimed that printer W. H. Empson had been impressed by her poems in the *Beverley Recorder* and offered her ten pounds for a serial novel (“The Trail” 115). So much is improbable but true in Braddon’s life that this may indeed have been the case; but it was Gilby who admired her verse, thought it even a paying proposition. An alternative scenario is that the pair visited Empson regarding the Garibaldi opus, which Gilby would eventually publish at his own expense.

Empson set up and printed her serial in Beverly, which was then published on commission by the London firm of W. & M. Clark. *Three Times Dead* made its debut in penny numbers, with Carnell noting that at least the first two parts appeared in February 1860, while she was still acting in Brighton (*Literary Lives* 103). It then was bound in boards and published as a book. The arrangement meant that she wrote the bulk of the novel and the Garibaldi opus concurrently; but then in Beverley she had six months with nothing to do but write.

The novel begins in Dickensian stylistic mode, the first of its only partly digested influences. Empson had wanted for his serial “the human interest and genial humour of Dickens with the plot-weaving of G. W. R. [sic] Reynolds”, (“The Trail” 116). Braddon duly provided the former and with the latter showed far more control of the plot than Reynolds. Both *Bleak House* and *Three Times Dead* open with ominous descriptions of wet and foggy November days, which seems a deliberate act of homage by Braddon. “I have always wanted to know a detective, like Bucket, the beloved of my childhood”, says a character in Braddon’s 1899 novel *His Darling Sin* (119–20). However, Braddon’s detective Peters is far more central to proceedings than *Bleak House*’s Bucket, appearing in chapter five and being a

continual presence throughout the novel.

His centrality indicates other influences beside *Bleak House*, notably the theatre.

Peters is distinguished by his muteness; and the mute played an important role in melodrama, appearing for instance in Pixérécourt's "Le Chien de Montargis", which also has a crime theme. Braddon would later describe De Quincey's "On Murder" essay as "wonderful" ("Thou Art the Man" 329), another likely influence. One striking detail—the murderer washing the blood off his hands in a basin, then drinking the incriminating evidence—can be easily traced. Sarah Waters finds this image "original" (xvii), but it was borrowed from Bulwer Lytton's *Pelham*. *Three Times Dead* also mentions Vidocq, Jack Sheppard and contains a passage listing additional ingredients in the mix, which reads like a self-referential description of the novel. Towards the end of the book a character accidentally knocks over a shelf of cheap fictions, which disintegrate. He sits in the middle of the mess, unable to stop: "reading from the loose leaves the most fascinating *olla podrida* of literature, wherein the writings of Charles Dickens, George Sand, Harrison Ainsworth, and Alexandre Dumas are blended together in the most delicious and exciting confusion" (*The Trail of the Serpent* 240).

To summarise the plot: in a provincial town lives an apparently virtuous young schoolteacher, Jabez North (Ephraim East in *Three Times Dead*, the reason for the name change being unknown). Within a few chapters North commits two murders, then incites his mistress to drown herself and baby. The deaths are not whodunnits: North's agency is depicted onstage. Thus the novel is essentially a narrative of how-will-the-villain-be-caught, as indeed was much of *The Woman in White*. This plotline can be described as an inverted detective story: the reader sees the crime committed and the suspense derives from anticipating the villain's capture. The form has been credited to Austin Freeman's 1912 "The

Case of Oscar Brodsky”; but actually originated decades earlier in the work of Braddon and others. Indeed, it was more prevalent in early crime fiction than the whodunnit.

Detective Peters appears first as a lowly police operative, one of two men sent to arrest Richard Marwood, whose rich uncle is North’s first victim, murdered for his money. Peters becomes convinced of Richard’s innocence, from the deduction that, when grasped by the shoulder during arrest, he does not jump like a guilty man—whereas North, whom Peters brushes against subsequently, does. Yet there is no evidence against North, as there is against Richard, and the trial is fast approaching. Peters advises counsel and defendant—in the latter case, by sign-language—to plead not guilty for reasons of insanity. Book One of *Three Times Dead* thus ends with Richard committed to a lunatic asylum.

Peters continues to investigate North, whose infant son he has rescued with the intent of rearing the child to be a detective. But his enquiries reach a dead end, with North faking suicide and escaping to France. Book Three concerns his career of evil in Paris, which involves tricking an heiress into marriage. This section is written in the style of contemporary French melodrama and is perhaps the least successful part of the book. Book Four returns to Peters, and his successful rescue of Marwood from the asylum. For this deed, Richard’s mother gives him a pension, and the detective settles in London, only to see a ghost: Jabez North, now the Count de Marolles, and a successful banker.

Peters enlists Richard and his friends as assistant detectives, including North’s son, Slosby, a prodigious young detective. The first attempt at an arrest occurs as North/Marolles confronts the man whom he has discovered to be his father, a French aristocrat, the Marquis de Cevennes. Like parent, like child, for North discovers in this richly comic scene that his father is even more of an insouciant villain than he is. “Good Heavens! the Marquis de Cevennes implicated in a murder! Why, it would be talked of in Paris for a month.” (262).

Cevennes does, however, assist North to escape, the filial response being to steal his hat.

The climax of the novel, showing that Braddon even in her debut was a dab hand at suspense, occurs on the Liverpool docks, as passengers are waiting to travel to America. The oddly-assorted band of detectives, including Peters in disguise, wait for North—before, in a touch of pure Gothic horror, arresting a coffin. It is said to contain the body of an American tourist, but when opened North is revealed: “hot, flushed, and panting, half-suffocated, with desperation in his wicked blue eyes, his teeth locked in furious rage at his utter powerlessness to escape [...]” (299). He is tried but cheats the hangman by suicide, this time genuine.

In the novel Braddon wrote convincingly of police procedures, showing Peters collecting evidence:

“Do you remember as one of the facts so hard agen Mr. Marwood was the blood-stains on his sleeve? You see these here cracks and crevices in this here floorin’? Very well, then; Mr. Marwood slept in the room under this. He was tired, I’ve heard him say, and he threw himself down on the bed in his coat. What more natural, then, than that there should be blood upon his sleeve, and what more easy to guess than the way it came there?”

“You think it dropped through, then?” asked Gus.

“I *think* it dropped through,” said Mr. Peters, on his fingers, with biting irony; “I know it dropped through. His counsel was a nice un, not to bring this into court,” he added, pointing to the boards on which he knelt. “If I’d only seen this place before the trial—But I was nobody, and it was like my precious impudence to ask to go over the house, of course!” (280–1)

The bloodstained ceiling reappears, interestingly, in chapter 56 of Thomas Hardy’s *Tess of the D’Urbervilles*.

Three Times Dead is apprentice Braddon, being in construction and style inferior to her later crime novels. It is overly coincidental, even for early detective fiction, which found coincidence a useful plot device. Jabez escapes from Slopperton via a chance encounter with his identical twin brother Jim, whose existence he has never previously suspected. Even more conveniently for him, Jim is dying, enabling a switch of identities. Yet the book is written with great good humour and a sure sense of narrative drama; despite the aforementioned faults it is very hard to put down. It was reprinted in 2003 (New York, Modern Library), with the claim that it was “probably the first British detective novel” (Willis 408).

The overwhelming impression given by *Three Times Dead* is of a frolicsome abandon, as of a schoolroom of children released for the day. Braddon enjoyed writing it almost as much as she came to hate her *Garibaldi* project. She recalled that the novel came easily to her, running “merrily off my pen” while Empson’s devil waited for the copy in the farmhouse kitchen (“The Trail” 122). However, the first numbers did not sell well. Empson cut his losses, insisting she trim the manuscript to half the projected length and accept a reduced fee (never paid).

The time in Beverly showed Braddon the direction she would successfully follow. It gave her the opportunity to realise her literary capabilities. *Three Times Dead* she re-sold to John Maxwell, who reissued it in February 1861 under the title *The Trail of the Serpent*—the novel having also been cut. That same month, *Garibaldi* also appeared, and promptly sank like a stone, “a failure, as it is the nature of all early volumes of poems to be”, she wrote in her 1864 novel *The Doctor’s Wife* (14). Her association with the increasingly petulant Gilby also ended around this time, for in John Maxwell she had found a far more congenial and powerful literary mentor.

In the Wolff collection three letters survive from Maxwell to “Polly”, as he called Braddon, from successive days in February 1861, and they show a relationship between author and publisher that has already moved beyond the professional. The first is a missive of sentimental adoration, from a man plainly not expecting rejection. In the second, he has found her part-time work on the *St. James Magazine*, one of his publications. In the third he announces that *The Trail of the Serpent* has sold a thousand copies in a week without even being reviewed. They are the letters of a man in courtship mode, offering practical gifts, sweet nothings and perhaps most important of all, news of her literary success. Gilby had believed that Braddon would love and marry the man who made her reputation as a writer; Maxwell proved him to have been right. Just over a year later their first child was born.

With Peters, Braddon had created a character both attractive and unusual. From the viewpoint of a modern crime writer (or an 1860s Casebook writer), Peters was a perfect series detective. Yet she never wrote of him again, Peters being as much of a one-off as was Bucket, despite leaving herself an opening to write of Slosby’s adventures. As Peters proudly comments of his foster son, in a passage whose gallows humour was far removed from the usual Victorian sentimentality as regards children: “He’ll be a great man, sir, if he lives; for his heart, boy as he is, is all in his profession. Would you believe it, sir, that child bellowed for three mortal hours because his father committed suicide and disappointed the boy of seein’ him hung. That’s what I call a love of business, and no mistake” (318).

Mary Braddon almost certainly knew of Detective Waters, to judge from a reference to Russell in the third of Maxwell’s 1861 letters. She was no admirer of him, nor was Fanny: something apparently reciprocated when Russell criticised *The Trail of the Serpent* to Maxwell (Carnell, *Literary Lives* 131). Yet despite Waters’ precedent of the continuing

detective character, there was no equivalent in novel form. Even when Casebook stories were collected in books they were recognizably compilations rather than novelistic narratives. The step to a series of novels featuring a single police detective character, later so typical of the crime genre, would not be made until Gaboriau's 1867 *Le Crime d'Orcival*. Thus Braddon had no immediate models for continuing with Peters. It seems a pity, for there is no snobbery in her depiction of this working-class character, something Carnell attributes to *Three Times Dead's* appearance in penny numbers, aimed at the lower classes (introduction 17–19). For this audience, working-class police were heroic. In later works, written when Braddon was “Queen of the Circulating Libraries” with their middle-class clients, more typical anxieties are expressed. In *Henry Dunbar* (1864), it is observed of Detective Carter: “if there is any thing degrading in the office [of police detective], that degradation had in no way affected him” (360). The possibility of degradation was not even considered with the engaging Peters.

In the 1860s Braddon produced a positive flood of fiction, much of it containing crime, for various markets: pulp, for such periodicals as the *Halfpenny Journal* and also for the better-paying magazines like *Temple Bar* (both Maxwell publications). She and Maxwell began to cohabit, though when is unclear, since they were obliged to be secretive. Nor is it known when she and Fanny assumed the rearing of Maxwell's five children. One potentially problematic matter was that the Maxwells were Irish Catholics, as had been Fanny Braddon's father, she being the product of an (unsuccessful) mixed marriage. Yet, while the Braddon women were Protestant, they were not bigots; in the blended family of mother, daughter, lover, children and stepchildren, the two faiths co-existed.

Fanny Braddon, of whom Mary said “no act or feeling of mine was complete without her sympathy”, was crucial to the irregular arrangement made by the couple (Wolff, “Devoted Disciple” 147). Unlike Jane Eyre's mother, she did not (spectrally) advise her daughter to flee

temptation. Having experienced virtuous poverty, sin with financial security might not have seemed an unspeakable alternative. The rate at which Mary published suggests that it was Fanny who managed Maxwell's household, leaving her daughter free to write. By the end of the year 1861 she was working on five serials concurrently, while being pregnant for the first time.

However, Fanny also worked for Maxwell, putting her early journalism experience to use. The teenage George Sims (1847–1922), later to write *Dorcas Dene, Detective* (1897), sent verse to the *Halfpenny Journal*, which was published with an encouraging note from the editor. Many years subsequently he discovered from Mary that this editor had been her mother. As Sims was fifteen at the time, Fanny's editorship of the *Halfpenny Journal* can be dated in the early 1860s—when Mary was writing serials for the magazine. Mother therefore probably edited daughter (*My Life* 31).

A comparison with Braddon's contemporary George Eliot is illuminating, both women being in the same situation—although they moved in different literary circles and seem never to have met. Braddon read Eliot, claiming she was the only English realist writer she cared to read “& she seems to me above all criticism” (Wolff, “Devoted Disciple” 134). Whether this comment also applied to Eliot's private life is unclear.

Mary Anne Evans was established as a translator and literary journalist, when in 1854 she eloped with writer George Lewes. Both were at the time free-thinking if not actually bohemian, and Lewes had the reputation of being a libertine. He and his wife Agnes had what would be termed now an open marriage. It failed, with Lewes unable to get a divorce because he had condoned Agnes' adultery. The elopement was common knowledge; but what was kept secret (initially) was that Evans wrote fiction under the pseudonym of George Eliot. Her *Scenes from Clerical Life* (1857) and *Adam Bede* (1859) were published to great success and

acclaim before the woman behind the writer was revealed. The revelation did not diminish Eliot's following, though it did make a temporary dent in her reputation as a moral writer.

Eliot regarded her decision as an exceptional case, and certainly not as an example for other women. Yet it is possible to suspect some influence upon Braddon, who would have noted Eliot's literary success in spite of her personal infamy, and did indeed quickly follow suit in both areas. The cross to bear, though, was ostracism. As Jane Austen commented in *Mansfield Park* "the public punishment of disgrace should in a just measure attend *his* share of the offence" (427), yet of her adulterous lovers, the man suffered no penalty, but the woman was banished. George Lewes could be received in polite society; but not his de facto wife. Eliot was thus socially inhibited, while gaining extra time for writing. She was not completely isolated, as male friends were able to call on her and Lewes, even if they could not bring their wives. In addition women "either so emancipée as not to mind what the world says about them, or [who] have no social position to maintain" (Charles Norton, qtd. in Laski 91) did visit, increasingly as Eliot became celebrated.

Braddon's time as a scarlet woman is not as documented—during her lifetime the scandal was almost entirely kept quiet and is with rare exceptions unmentioned by her literary contemporaries. The absence hints at a campaign of secrecy, possibly involving Braddon's publishers, who would have had a commercial interest in keeping her private life obscure. More importantly, Maxwell was a powerful figure, physically and as a publisher. There may also have been some sympathy for the couple. Maxwell was not the only literary man with a hopelessly insane wife—the novelist Thackeray (an admirer of *Lady Audley's Secret*) being another example.

Isabella Thackeray's illness was puerperal mania (post-natal psychosis), a possible diagnosis also for Mary Anne Maxwell, although little is known except that she went mad

subsequent to the birth of her son John in 1856. The disorder was recognized in the nineteenth century as a hazard of childbirth, treatment being mostly to wait, as in most cases the patient would naturally recover her wits within a few months. Some did not, and Maxwell is on record as describing his first wife as “*de-funct*”. His language was brutally precise: the lady had for all his intents and purposes ceased to function (Mayo 220).

Thus it was as “Miss Braddon” that Mary experienced the runaway sales of *Lady Audley*, and also first-time motherhood, something of which her readers were totally unaware. Clearly a rigorous discretion was maintained. As Claire Tomalin has observed, the “era of the crinoline [...] was the optimum era for concealing pregnancy till the very last moment” (175–6); and Mary Braddon had six children between 1862–70.

During this time her life is documented by the letters she wrote to Bulwer Lytton. They had met in 1854; when she wrote asking permission to dedicate *Lady Audley's Secret* to him, a correspondence ensued between the elderly author and his “devoted disciple”, as she termed herself. From the letters we glean an image of Braddon living entirely within the domestic sphere, like a conventional lady of the middle-class. While her letters are mainly concerned with the craft of writing, it is significant that her social life seems scant and involving only men. “If you knew how entirely my life is absorbed by daily labour and how few literary people I see”, she wrote in 1865 (Wolff, “Devoted Disciple” 32).

The only woman described as a friend was the writer Miss Emma Robinson. In August 1866 Braddon wrote that she had not seen Robinson “since the Conservatives came into office”, implying two months previously (Wolff, “Devoted Disciple” 137). It could be argued that she had not seen Robinson for longer than that, since she describes Robinson as living with her father, when the latter had been dead ten years—something with which Robinson’s friends would have been familiar.

Braddon had feminine company from Fanny, writing, and the demands of a young family. Were these sufficient for her needs? She wrote in December 1862 that: “I have very little inclination for spending money, & positively no time to be extravagant, if I wished to be so. I go no where where I require fine dress. I can’t drink wine. I am not free to stir from London, or would spend my money in travelling; but am altogether bound hand & foot by hard work [...]” (Wolff, “Devoted Disciple” 10).

The above is disingenuous, as indeed is the whole correspondence with Bulwer Lytton. He did not know (or if he did, cared not) about her extra-marital situation, nor that she had a baby. Her description suggests an inkstained drudge, and while it provides an explanation of why she was reclusive, it is not the full story. Her life after she became the legal Mrs Maxwell was full of socialising; she might have wanted to do so in 1862, but as an unwed mother her position was invidious. Under the circumstances the writing of sensational tales probably provided much-needed emotional relief.

Although Braddon would never again give a police detective the space she gave Peters, much of her writing in the 1860s involved crimes and mysteries. It also addressed the theme of transgressive femininity. *Three Times Dead* contained some women characters, though it was males who dominated the narrative. With her next short novel, *The Lady Lisle*, serialised in Maxwell’s the *Welcome Guest* from April–August 1861, she began to give her female characters more space and personality. There are three Lady Lisles in the novel, the first two being indicative of her heroines to come: Claribel being a pink and white doll-woman, physically a precursor of Lady Audley; and Olivia, dark, horsy and strong-minded, who would seem to be a preliminary sketch for Aurora Floyd.

The Lady Lisle contains a villain as calculating as Jabez North, but charismatic with it. Major Granville Varney is an unabashed blackmailer:

I am an officer in the East India Company's service. I have only a major's pay. No one ever bequeathed me a sixpence; no one ever gave me a sixpence; I am never in debt; and I live at the minimum rate of a couple of thousand a year. I never in my life have placed myself in the power of the law; I never ran the risk of being dressed in prison clothes and fed on prison fare; but I know more of other people's crimes than any man living, except the members of the detective police. You may ask why I cultivate this class of information. I shall merely tell you that it is a study I have a fancy for. "The proper study of mankind," observes the poet, "is man." I am decidedly of the poet's opinion. The most profitable subjects for a wise man's study are the peccadilloes and delinquencies of his weaker brothers. When I want a man [...] I set myself to work to hunt up his past history! I want you, my dear Arnold, and I have made it my business to find out all about you.

(89)

Claribel, widow of Baronet Lisle, is wooed by Captain Arthur Walsingham, a man with a "past history" which puts him at Varney's mercy. Yet the Major is unable to exploit fully the Lisle estate, for it belongs to the new Baronet, Claribel's son Rupert. How can a child be blackmailed? Varney causes the heir to go missing and then apparently to return as an adult, a substitution having been effected. Interestingly, Braddon clearly felt sufficiently remote from her acting past to make Mrs Ada Varney a former actress, as conniving and deceitful a figure as ever confirmed the Victorian prejudice against thespians. With Ada, Braddon also introduced a major theme of her next few books, that of bigamy: Mrs Varney is actually the first Mrs Captain Walsingham.

The false Rupert takes residence at the manor, and marries Olivia Marmaduke. He soon gains a reputation for ill-bred boorishness, hardly surprising in Victorian terms, since he

is the son of the Lises' former lodgekeeper, Gilbert Arnold, whom Varney blackmailed into a (false) confession of kidnapping the heir. When Arnold's wife Rachel returns for a glimpse of her son, Rupert strikes her; at which the high-spirited Olivia publicly declares her contempt for him. She is appalled to later hear the truth but is forestalled from any action by Varney. He has Rachel declared insane, threatening Olivia: "And remember, my dear Lady Lisle, that the highest rank will not save anyone from a madhouse" (246). In fact, justice comes from another quarter—a gypsy family, whose daughter the false Rupert has murdered, join forces with Gilbert Arnold to wreck vengeance on the Baronet and the vampirish Varney. The conspiracy is revealed, and the real Rupert found, to be restored to his fortune a perfect gentleman.

The novel is short, and hurriedly resolved, probably because of two reasons—the *Welcome Guest* was about to close, and Braddon had begun work on her first long novel, *Lady Audley's Secret*, which began in July its serial run in *Robin Goodfellow* (another Maxwell publication). In its crime *The Lady Lisle* is again coincidental. Yet the triple blackmail run by the Major, first forcing Walsingham to concur in his stepson's abduction, then Arnold, to confess to having stolen the child, finally controlling the false Rupert with the threat of exposure, is brilliantly plotted and observed.

A rather more sombre work was the novelette "Ralph the Bailiff", published from April–June 1861 in Maxwell's *St James Magazine*, where Braddon worked editorially part-time. It is also a mystery, beginning with the funeral of Arthur Carleon, a young gentleman farmer. His brother Dudley inherits and is soon being noticeably shadowed by his sinister Bailiff Ralph Purvis, and his equally sinister sister Martha. Braddon tantalizes the reader as to the nature of the dependency between master and man, though Dudley himself uses the word "extortioner".

While the Purvis siblings are absent, Dudley woos and marries Jenny Trevor, a friend of Agnes, the fiancée of Arthur Carleon. Agnes is opposed to the marriage, telling Jenny she believes Dudley poisoned his brother. Jenny, though, accompanies Arthur to the farm, where she soon develops a dislike for Ralph. She increasingly becomes ill, as had Arthur, and begins to wonder if she too is being poisoned. One night she dreams of a wailing child, and waking, hears the noise in actuality. She follows it, to eavesdrop on a meeting between Dudley, Ralph and Martha, who nurses a baby.

Jenny learns, in her horror, that Dudley and Martha have secretly married, and the child is his heir. Moreover, Dudley is in thrall to the pair, as Ralph it was who obtained the poison to kill Arthur—the motive being that Dudley was in debt, and needed the money from his brother's inheritance. Dudley signs a document renouncing the farm to the Purvis siblings, but Ralph wants Jenny's marriage settlement—which is Dudley's property should she die childless. Her husband is thus powerless to prevent her slow poisoning ...

After a short but effective suspense sequence, Jenny escapes from the farm. Dudley drowns himself, leaving a will bequeathing the farm to the Purvises, who sell up and emigrate to Australia. The novelette ends with brother and sister the owners of a rich sheep farm: "They are neither of them liked by their dependents; but they are feared, and are better served than a better master and mistress might be" (42–3).

Braddon had, in little over a year, written and published two crime novels and a novelette, both by the standards of the time skilled and credible efforts. On *Three Times Dead*, *The Lady Lisle* and "Ralph the Bailiff" she learnt her craft—and what she did next would attain classic status.

CHAPTER SIX

“THE GENIAL JOYS OF MURDER, BIGAMY, ARSON AND DIVORCE”: MARY BRADDON CONTINUED

[S]ince I've taking to writing novels, I don't think I've a desire unsatisfied. There's nothing I haven't done—on paper. The beautiful women I've loved and married; the fortunes I've come into, always unexpectedly, and when I was at the very lowest ebb, with a tendency to throw myself into the Serpentine in the moonlight; the awful vengeance I've wreaked upon my enemies; the murders I've committed [...] I suppose it isn't I that steal up the creaking stair, with a long knife tightly grasped and gleaming blue in the moonbeams that creep through a chink in the shutter; but I'm sure I enjoy myself as much as if it was.

Sigismund Smith, in Mary Braddon's *The Doctor's Wife* 229–30.

Consider two black and white Victorian engravings on the wall of our imaginary gallery. In both women preen, unaware they are the object of masculine gaze. The first, captioned “Lusignan”, shows a dark-haired woman half-naked and bathing in a lilypond, accompanied by bats and a glaring black cat. A man watches from a distance, the feather on his medieval-style hat as coiling and upright as the tail of a squirrel. The second engraving, “The Lady of the Land”, shows a blonde woman combing her long hair in a grotto. Behind her stands a man, also in medieval dress, hand on his dagger—though his gaze is on the woman and not the severed and decaying human head in the foreground.

Both engravings illustrated poems in the journal *Belgravia*, a Maxwell publication between 1866–76 and during that time “conducted” by Mary Braddon, which meant that she wrote much of the contents if not actually being the full-time editor (see Carnell, *Literary Lives* 175–6). They were drawn by artist Alfred Thompson, their dark fantasy distinct from the other illustrations in *Belgravia*, which tended to mundane Victoriana. “Lusignan”'s subject was the French legend of Mélusine, a woman apparently normal, except that she spent one day a week as a serpent from the waist down. “The Lady of the Land”, described as

“Adapted from Sir John Mandeville”, tells of a similar shape-changer, a woman-dragon. The latter was by Braddon, and quite probably the anonymous “Lusignan” was also her work. Braddon admitted to many unacknowledged publications (C. Holland 700). Both poems have, beside their similar subject matter, a consistent quality—no more than competent. Indeed “The Lady of the Land” descends into outright bathos:

Gramercy! it was a ghastly sight;
 To flee had I good cause,
 When she came forth from the cavern-door,
 Clashing her bony jaws.

These poems and their illustrations are vivid representations of the Victorian preoccupation with female dualism, angel versus devil/monster. Opposed to the “Angel in the House”, as eulogised by Coventry Patmore, was the sexual female, the scarlet woman or temptress. That the two aspects of femininity were mutable, that behind an angelic face a woman might conceal snake-like malignancy, was a contemporary source of anxiety, explored both by Thompson and Braddon.

Braddon would make her name with two novels, *Lady Audley's Secret* (1862) and *Aurora Floyd* (1863), which boldly explored the theme of women with hidden, even criminal depths. Like Thompson's beautiful fiends, to borrow a phrase from *Lady Audley* (71), her heroines were contrasted, Lady Audley being fair and Aurora dark. The books dealt with matter which she had already used—murder, bigamy and blackmail—but with women this time the centre of the narrative. She had written of villains, such as Jabez North and Major Varney, but now she privileged female transgression, creating two subversive depictions of Victorian femininity.

The plots of both novels deal with gradual revelation, their heroines having a secret

which is via detection and accident gradually disclosed. The narratives therefore have a mystery structure, though murders also occur. Both Lady Audley and Aurora make first marriages which end in separation, whereupon both women, believing their husbands are dead, remarry—only to have the first, and unfortunately legal, spouses return. The sequence of events following is occasioned by the need for the women to maintain their good name, despite now being, in Victorian terms, bigamists and adulteresses.

Lady Audley's accomplished mystery plot features one Lucy Graham, a name that with the identical spelling had been used by Catherine Crowe for the heroine of her murder mystery *Men and Women* (1843). Probably Braddon intended an in-joke here. Her Lucy is the Victorian feminine ideal embodied: a pettily pretty blonde doll, sweet, innocent and vapid. Such is the image, which Braddon proceeds to deconstruct with a vengeance, as various critics have noticed (see Skilton xvii). Lucy, a governess, has a proposal of marriage from the middle-aged baronet Sir Michael Audley. She accepts, though the reader knows from the end of chapter one that Miss Graham is a dubious character.

The early part of the book has alternate chapters devoted to persons who will eventually converge. One is George Talboys, returning wealthy from the Australian diggings, eager to see Helen, the wife he left three years ago—despite not sending a word to her in the intervening time. He is grief-stricken to discover from a newspaper notice that she is dead. His old friend Robert Audley, a lawyer and nephew of Sir Michael, cares for George, even taking him to visit Audley Court, his uncle's seat. There, George vanishes.

This incident turns Robert Audley into a detective, as he sets out to discover what has become of his friend; and then as foul play becomes increasingly evident, to avenge him. Initially he is fascinated and puzzled by his aunt by marriage, but gradually his suspicions become aroused. She faints when he delivers, like a prosecution lawyer, a lecture on

circumstantial evidence:

that wonderful fabric which is built out of straws collected at every point of the compass, and which is yet strong enough to hang a man. Upon what infinitesimal trifles may sometimes hang the whole secret of some wicked mystery, inexplicable heretofore to the wisest upon the earth! A scrap of paper; a shred of some torn garment; the button off a coat; a word dropped incautiously from the over-cautious lips of guilt [...] a thousand circumstances so slight as to be forgotten by the criminal, but links of steel in the wonderful chain forged by the science of the detective officer; and lo! the gallows is built up; the solemn bell tolls through the dismal grey of the early morning; the drop creaks under the guilty feet; and the penalty of crime is paid. (119–20)

It is by such an elaborate chain that Robert entraps Lucy Audley, though the lady is a formidable opponent. One example: when Robert states he will examine George Talboys' effects for information regarding his wife, Lady Audley forestalls him. She bribes a locksmith and removes her letters to Talboys, through which her handwriting might be identified. She leaves behind, though, a book containing her distinctive signature, and from that Robert has proof that the wives of George Talboys and Sir Michael Audley are one and the same.

In concentrating on villainy, and eschewing the detective (except at amateur level) Braddon withdrew from her innovatory Peters. “[Y]ou ought to have been a detective police officer”, Lady Audley tells Robert (141); and so in a different novel he might have been, had not Braddon been aiming for the middle-class market. Nonetheless, as Barzun and Taylor have commented, *Lady Audley's Secret* contains “much mystery and more detection than is found in many a modern thriller” (71).

Lady Audley's initial crime was bigamy. She does not become murderous until George reappears and she pushes him down the nearest well—under the circumstances a perfectly logical reaction. Yet her career of evil is marked by slips, which lead to blackmail and finally exposure. She bungles George's murder and also an act of arson, which would have rid her of both the blackmailer and Robert Audley.

Robert responds by revealing all to Sir Michael, who gives him *carte blanche*. With George presumed dead, Helen is guilty of petty treason (husband or master murder, as opposed to high treason against the state), as late as the eighteenth century penalized by burning at the stake. Robert takes the law into his own hand, not immolating the accused, but immuring her in a lunatic asylum. There she eventually dies.

The ending of *Lady Audley* can be read as good triumphant in Victorian terms: Helen's unwomanly behaviour is explained by insanity, for which she is punished. Yet every crime of Lady Audley's, however extreme, stems from a perfectly sane self-interest. Her secret, as stated in the book, is to have had a mad mother and thus the taint of hereditary insanity, which manifests after parturition. This madness is, like Hamlet's, a little too methodical to be true. Even the doctor who commits Lady Audley declares she is "not mad", the illness being "latent". Instead he tells Robert: "She is dangerous!" (379). Thus the apparently conventional and optimistic conclusion of *Lady Audley's Secret* has to be treated with some caution. Showalter, for instance, finds that "Lady Audley's real secret is that she is *sane*, and moreover, representative" (4). In fact the whole text is ambiguous, and can be read as both supporting and subverting Victorian patriarchy.

Moreover, to place the novel in its literary and social context is to realise that the Victorian distinction between mad, bad and recalcitrant women could be blurred. One notable instance involved Braddon's friend Bulwer Lytton and his rancorous marriage. After

Rosina publicly denounced her husband to his electorate in 1858, he had her committed—she was released a month later. *The Woman in White*, *Lady Lisle* and *Lady Audley's Secret* were published within several years of this event, and in all three novels the madhouse functions as a depository for difficult women. Braddon and Collins were, if commenting on the Bulwer Lytton case, doing so indirectly (Braddon was certainly not conscious of any parallel, or else she would never have asked Bulwer to be *Lady Audley's* dedicatee). However, it is perhaps significant that Rosina read and appreciated *The Woman in White*, for she wrote to Collins complaining that Count Fosco was insufficiently villainous, and recommending Bulwer as exemplar of evil (Robinson 154).

By a curious coincidence, a short story published in the *Dublin University Magazine* (November 1861), dealt with uncannily similar matter to *Lady Audley* and provides an alternative “happy” ending. “The Woman with the Yellow Hair” was published anonymously, but the author is given in the *Wellesley Index* as the novelist and historian Percy Fitzgerald (1: 317). He worked for Maxwell as a journalist in the late 1850s, and would later come to know Braddon well.

In Fitzgerald's story a beautiful blonde woman murders her brother-in-law to be, who, playing detective, seeks to expose her sexual duplicity. The story later appeared in *The Woman with the Yellow Hair and Other Modern Mysteries* (1862), comprising tales “Chiefly” reprinted from Dickens's *Household Words*, which Bleiler describes as “possibly the first anthology of detective and mystery stories” (*A Treasury* 52).

There is the possibility of literary influence here, given the curious publishing history of *Lady Audley*: though it began serialisation in Maxwell's *Robin Goodfellow* in July 1861, the magazine ceased after thirteen issues, leaving the novel incomplete. By Braddon's own account, she put *Lady Audley* aside while writing *Aurora Floyd*, which appeared in *Temple*

Bar from January–April 1862. Yet the interrupted narrative in *Robin Goodfellow* had left its audience intrigued and *Lady Audley* reappeared, from the beginning, in Tillotson's *Sixpenny Magazine* from January 1862.

Lady Audley and “The Woman with the Yellow Hair” have some striking similarities, significantly the game of cat and mouse played by the murderess and her detective victim. Another is the space given in both texts to lavish garden description. And a third mermaid/siren imagery: “[T]he lovely woman with the fishy extremities”, was how *Times* reviewer Eneas Sweetland Dallas described *Lady Audley*, the phrase being even more applicable to Fitzgerald's story (4). A notable difference, though, is that the detective is killed by being lured into a quagmire—although his fate does anticipate Braddon's explanation of George Talboy's disappearance. Another is that there is no madhouse waiting for Fitzgerald's murderess. Instead the story ends with bad triumphant: “She, who drives about in that deep, dark blue brougham, one of the most “stylish” in the capital, is Mrs. St. John Smith. She leaves her cards. She is very beautiful and placid, and with a line—her yellow hair is famous; and she has really nothing to trouble her” (70).

Aurora Floyd begins with similar outrageous subversion to Fitzgerald's story, although at the end of the narrative retreating into the conventional, as with *Lady Audley's Secret*. The novel offers a heroine the physical reverse of *Lady Audley*, Braddon using the stock image of the Victorian villainess, the woman whose heart is as black as her hair. Moreover *Aurora* is fast, fond of horses, and ungovernable enough to elope with Conyers, a groom. She returns home alone, yet her inability to account for the lost year in her life loses her a prospective if stuffy suitor. Another proposes, and believing her husband dead, she marries again. Subsequently Conyers returns. She secretly negotiates a pay-off to ensure his permanent departure—but then he is found dead, shot with *Aurora's* pistol.

She is of course innocent, being at heart a good woman, even if appearances go against her. Unlike Lady Audley, she has menfolk to defend her, with even her previous suitor turning detective, aided by a London professional—a figure, as in Frith’s “The Railway Station”, that concludes the narrative rather than being central to it. The guilty man proves to be a vengeful servant, whom Aurora had, in the novel’s most outrageous scene, horsewhipped for mistreating her dog. Aurora resumes her place in society, marrying (this time legitimately) her second husband again and finally becoming an exemplary Victorian mother.

My “pair of Bigamy novels” was how Braddon described the works to Bulwer (Wolff, “Devoted Disciple” 12). This subject had contemporary relevance, being much in the headlines during the 1860s. Yet the topic also had particular and painful relevance to Braddon—as did female madness. Insanity was not grounds for divorce, as *Jane Eyre* had forcefully noted and for a couple unable to marry legally bigamy was an option (indeed, Rochester attempted it with the unwitting Jane Eyre). However, given the prominence of Maxwell and Braddon, a “poor man’s divorce”—disappearance, then remarriage—was impossible.

Both *Lady Audley’s Secret* and *Aurora Floyd* became best-sellers. Yet at the same time there were murmurs as to what sort of woman had written such daring books. Maxwell could not prevent gossip, or allusion, such as in Margaret Oliphant’s anonymous and hostile review of Braddon in *Blackwood’s Magazine* (September 1867), which hints at impropriety. Braddon was not George Sand, with the protection of aristocratic status. Nonetheless she had taken risks, both personally and in the depiction of her wilful heroines. Subsequently her depictions of women were far more conventional, as if she sought to avoid comparisons between the writer and her fiction. Mrs Grundy, the frequently invoked fictitious gatekeeper of Victorian morality, was a powerful force. Never again would Braddon push the envelope

of propriety with her heroines, at least not *quite* so obviously as she had with Lady Audley and Aurora.

Her workload during the early 1860s was frightening: during 1862, the year her first child was born, she worked on eight serials. Of these four bore her name, the others being published anonymously or pseudonymously in Maxwell's pulp *Halfpenny Journal*. The reason for this extraordinary activity was that Maxwell was in serious financial trouble. He had two magazines fail in 1861 and suspended payment to his creditors in October of that year. His remaining magazines were mortgaged, and in December 1862 he executed a deed of assignment of all his estate and effects (Boase 6: 187). In brief, he was taking strong measures to avoid bankruptcy.

Braddon had considerable earnings from *Lady Audley*, but these were clearly not sufficient to pay the debts. Therefore she wrote Maxwell into the black again. Carnell notes that the couple's unmarried status actually was a benefit here, as otherwise "her earnings would have been sequestered to pay his debts" (*Literary Lives* 151). Her strength of will seems awesome. She was repeatedly pregnant, she was working like a slave, bankruptcy threatened. A woman with lesser spirit would have been crushed, even without the additional burden of living in what was, by the standards of her time, a highly irregular and censorable household.

Previously in this thesis comparison has been made between Braddon and George Eliot. But in terms of genres (the Sensation novel, and crime) and also personal transgressiveness, a comparison with Wilkie Collins is even more fruitful. He had his own unusual domestic arrangements, which like Braddon, he was able to keep clandestine. Braddon knew him well,

though little of their correspondence survives. She was, though, among the close friends informed in confidence of his final illness: in the Wolff collection a letter (c. 1888–9) survives in which she notes that she did not tell anyone, even Maxwell “ [...] who is somewhat of ‘a leaky vessel’” (Letter).

This letter was sent to “Mrs Bartley”, Wilkie’s secretary and de facto stepdaughter, Harriet Graves Bartley. Harriet’s mother was Caroline Graves, the real-life equivalent of the woman in white. Wilkie was said to have met Caroline one moonlit night, as she fled through the streets of London in an outfit of flowing white robes, possibly her nightwear. The source is John Guille Millais’ 1899 biography of his late father, *The Life and Letters of John Everett Millais*, who witnessed the incident. It would seem to be a conflation, of truth and the fiction of *The Woman in White*. Wilkie and Caroline cohabited for the rest of Wilkie’s life, the only apparent disturbance being her brief marriage in 1868 to another man, and Wilkie’s concurrent relationship with a second mistress, Martha Rudd, which produced three children. Did Braddon know about this complicated lifestyle? Her letter to Harriet was intimate and kindly, tending to suggest she did know Collins’ secrets; and he probably knew hers as well.

The two were not only friends, but rivals, clearly mutually influential during the era of the Sensation novel, the 1860s. Braddon was quoted as saying that she admired *The Woman in White*, but was not impressed by his choice of heroine (Tilley 198). It is possible to read Lady Audley as a demonical response to Collins’ Laura Fairlie, pale, pretty, submissive, and incarcerated in an asylum by a fortune-stealing husband. The question of Braddon’s influence on Collins needs more critical attention, but one instance is surely Lydia Gwilt, the red-haired femme fatale of his *Armada* (1866), whose devilry seems to owe much to Lady Audley, and who indeed is portrayed in a similar balancing act of auctorial ambivalence, being both villainess and victim.

Braddon regarded Collins as worthy competition, writing to Bulwer Lytton : “My next story [Sir Jasper’s Tenant] is to begin in Temple Bar in January, if I live—& is to be sensational, for Wilkie Collins in *Cornhill* will be a most powerful oponent [sic] & I can only fight him with his own weapons—mystery, crime, &c.” (Wolff, “Devoted Disciple” 26). Later she commented on the opening numbers of Collins’ *Cornhill* story, which was *Armadale*. “I do not fancy that so far it is anything equal to ‘The Woman in White’”. She found the serial “too openly & inartistically sensational”, that Collins was telling the story too “rapidly”, his “peculiar art” being “the slow & gradual development of his plot” (Wolff, “Devoted Disciple” 30). There is no malice in these comments, for she does not crow that *Sir Jasper’s Tenant* (in fact, not one of her better works) is superior to *Armadale*. Nonetheless her critique of the novel proved prescient—though intriguing, it is not regarded as Collins at his best.

A problem for modern critics with both *Armadale* and its immediate predecessor, *No Name*, is that though they are recognizably crime thrillers, they are not quite so easily categorized as *The Moonstone* (a whodunnit) and the mystery of *The Woman in White*. Perhaps for this reason the latter are the only Collins works accorded pioneering and canonical status. Though much of Collins has been recently reprinted, out of his many works they remain best known, with *The Woman in White* being repeatedly televised.

If Collins’ domination of the early history of the crime novel rests on *The Woman in White* and *The Moonstone*, to the exclusion of his other writing, then it is hardly surprising that Braddon’s work has also been overlooked. Nearly all her 1860s novels involved crime and its solutions, usually presented within a mystery framework. Even her fictional response to Flaubert’s *Madame Bovary*, *The Doctor’s Wife*, included fraud, murder, and an ironic self-portrait in the sensation novelist Sigismund Smith, whose comments open this chapter. It is

not generally recognized that Braddon wrote much more of what we would now term generic crime than Collins. Despite the problems of quality control caused by the sheer quantity of her production, she matched and could even surpass him. Moreover, even when they had similar material, as with the heroines of *No Name* and *Eleanor's Victory* (1863), both of whom are avenging wrongs and incidentally gaining themselves husbands, it was Braddon who veered more to the detective mode: Eleanor is an amateur sleuth.

A notable Braddon novel from this period was the 1864 *Henry Dunbar*, serialised as “The Outcasts” in the popular *London Journal* (September 1863–March 1864), and complicated by a sub-plot involving blackmail, murder and a missing heir. For the novel publication Braddon cut the narrative, severing the two plots where they met. The result was *Henry Dunbar*, a dark and gripping study of criminality, and a lesser but still interesting novella, *Lost and Found*. She also rewrote much of *Henry Dunbar*, necessary given that with the severance of “The Outcasts” sub-plot had gone two major characters, including the villain.

Braddon seldom did extensive revisions, and that she had time for rewriting indicates that by 1864 she and Maxwell were past the danger of bankruptcy. In the following years they invested in property and thereafter were prosperous. Her ostensible reason for revision was, she claimed, a *Times* review criticising her hasty writing (qtd. in Wolff, *Sensational Victorian* 136). Actually the review, of *John Marchmont's Legacy* (1863) had largely been favourable. However, it did remark that: “She is too intent on the story to care to make finished portraits of the personages [...] one of these days when she is willing to write more at leisure we dare say she will draw us characters complete [...]” (“Novels in Season” 6). Yet Braddon’s revisions were less in the area of characterisation than improving her plot. She also corrected some technical problems, such as “The Outcasts” excess of watery graves.

The novel is about switches in identity, which occur, in an elegant example of plot turning, twice in the narrative. Henry Dunbar is a wealthy banker, returning to England after many years rustication in India for an attempted fraud of the family bank. He is met by Joseph Wilmot, a former servant and partner in his crime, who unlike Dunbar suffered severe consequences from it. Shortly afterwards Wilmot is found murdered at Winchester. An inquest is inconclusive and Dunbar returns to his estates, a gloomy recluse—because of remorse?

Margaret Wilmot, daughter of the dead man, suspects Dunbar of his murder; he refuses to see her, though sending her hush money. She enlists Clement Austin, her lover and a cashier in Dunbar's bank. After Margaret secretly confronts Dunbar one night, she unexpectedly changes her mind: the banker had not murdered her father. She now also refuses to marry Austin, who consults a Scotland Yard detective, Henry Carter. The pair travel down to Winchester and re-open the original inquest. Margaret follows them, watching as they come to the conclusion, which she already knows, that the dead man was Henry Dunbar, whom her father Joseph murdered and has subsequently impersonated. She hurries back to warn him, and the result is a superb chase sequence, largely via steam train, as Carter pursues Wilmot. He fails, thanks to another switch in identity, Wilmot escaping with Margaret in a possible echo of Clive's *Paul Ferroll*. He later dies peacefully in bed, repentant, she claims.

There is much to enjoy in *Henry Dunbar*, not least the game of character-chameleons which is adroitly handled. Here Braddon arguably surpassed Collins, for Andrew Lang wrote that in the area of impersonation—he cites *Armada*, which *Dunbar* preceded—the master “did not cope with M. Gaboriau, nor perhaps with Miss Braddon in *Henry Dunbar*” (266).

Dunbar was skilled, but *Birds of Prey* (1867) and *Charlotte's Inheritance* (1868)

showed Braddon handling a plot over two novels with aplomb. Bedell calls it a “six-volume *tour de force*” (25). *Charlotte’s Inheritance* in particular contained French scenes, reflecting her interest in French literature, as with *The Trail of the Serpent*. However, she may have been absorbing the influence of a new arrival on the crime scene, Emile Gaboriau. Although Gaboriau’s books took over a decade to appear in England, keen readers of French literature, as Braddon and Collins were, would have been aware of him. It seems possible that all three writers were mutually influential, as sensational crime fiction began to appear in French translation in the early 1860s. Indeed *The Trail of the Serpent* had been published in French as *La Trace du Serpe* in 1864, the year before *L’Affaire Lerouge*.

Birds of Prey and *Charlotte’s Inheritance* concern Philip Sheldon, a dentist given to solving his financial problems with slow poison. The narrative can be categorized as an inverted detective story but with an added genealogical mystery, several characters seeking the heir of an intestate fortune. One of these researchers, the hero Valentine, describes himself as a “salaried private enquirer” (*Birds of Prey* 289). The various genealogists try to outwit each other, before joining forces against Sheldon when the heir appears to be his stepdaughter Charlotte. The young lady has just had her life insured by her loving stepfather and has suddenly become sickly.

Here Braddon hints at a future development in the crime novel, the forensic mystery:

The symptoms of that poor Yorkshireman were the symptoms of arsenical poisoning; the symptoms of which you have told me to-day denote a vegetable poison. *That* affords very vague diagnosis and leaves no trace [...] It is older than classic Greece, and simple as *a b c*, and will remain so until the medical expert is a recognized officer of the law, the faithful guardian of the bed over which the suspected poisoner loiters—past-master of the scene in which the murderer is

rarely more than an experimentalist, and protected from all the hazards of plain speaking by the nature of his office. (*Charlotte's Inheritance* 212)

The two novels appeared in Braddon's *Belgravia* (November 1866–October 1867 and April 1868–February 1869 respectively) though *Charlotte's Inheritance* appeared in book form in late 1868, some months before the serial's close. During this time, *The Moonstone* began its highly successful serial run in Dickens' *All the Year Round*, from January–August 1868, with book publication in July. It is not known what Braddon's reaction to *The Moonstone* was, though a character in *His Darling Sin* describes it as “that most enthralling book” (112). She does not cite it as influence or inspiration, unlike *The Woman in White*.

If 1868 was a good year in terms of book production for the rivals in crime writing, it was also a bad year for both on the personal level: for they suffered bereavement (their mothers died), ill health and emotional stress. During the composition of *The Moonstone* Collins was afflicted with what he called “rheumatic gout” so acute that he was reduced to dictating from the sickbed to copyists, including young Harriet Graves. He had also entangled his personal life with the introduction of Martha Rudd, Caroline decamping late in the year for a short-lived marriage to another, less complicated man.

Braddon's crises that year were even worse. Firstly, her sister Maggie died in Italy. The death coincided with her brother Edward's return from the colonies, where he likely discovered for the first time that his famous younger sister was, to use the Victorian phrase, “living in sin”. How much Braddon's kin knew of her situation is unknown. The fact that contact continued, as with the aunts whose inscribed copies of Braddon's books are held in the Sadleir collection, suggests the relatives were either ignorant, or turned a convenient blind eye when in need of Mary's money. Certainly there was no objection when she bought the ancestral Braddon home, Skisdon House, rather than let it be sold out of the family.

George Eliot's brother Isaac shunned her until she belatedly became an honest woman and Edward's reaction seems to have been similarly patriarchal. Shortly after Maggie's death in October 1868, he struck Fanny Braddon "another & more cruel blow" (Wolff, "Devoted Disciple" 146). A likely reconstruction of events is that Edward disowned Mary and also Fanny, for condoning her daughter's fall. The combined shocks prostrated Fanny, and within two weeks she was dead, on 1 November 1868.

Thus ended, Mary wrote Bulwer Lytton two days later, "thirty years of the most perfect union, I believe, that ever existed between two human beings of the same sex" (Wolff, "Devoted Disciple" 147). She had lost her best friend, and in a later letter to him described this time as "the bitterest hour of my life" (Wolff, "Devoted Disciple" 148). Moreover the management of a household comprising eight children from two families was now Mary's responsibility and she was in the last stages of another pregnancy. Her 3 November letter to Bulwer Lytton ended ominously: "my brain is much over excited & I scarce know what I write" (Wolff, "Devoted Disciple" 148). The subsequent birth may have been difficult, as Braddon's descendants recall that she developed puerperal fever, described in Braddon's *Lucius Davoren* (1873). A nurse comments on a patient:

[...] I nursed a poor dear lady in Stevedor-lane, in purpleoral [sic] fever [...] and she used to fancy her poor head was turned into a york-regent [a variety of potato], and beg and pray of me ever so pitiful to cut the eyes out of it. I'm proud to say, tho', as I brought her round, and there isn't a healthier-looking woman between here and the docks. (315)

The most interesting thing about this description is that it involves delusions, as was not uncommon with a patient delirious from a high fever in the pre-antibiotic era. Such a mental

condition would normally abate with the fever; but Braddon was ill in mind if not body for months. She later described herself to Bulwer Lytton as living through a period in which “life was a blank [...] imagination ran riot & I was surrounded by shadows [...]”. Wolff has suggested “imagination ran riot” refers to hallucinations; certainly she felt she was living in an “unreal world” (Wolff, “Devoted Disciple” 148). Clearly her condition was worse than post-natal depression or even a nervous breakdown, as Wolff posited in his foreword to “Devoted Disciple” (8).

The journalist George Augustus Sala, who knew and worked with both Braddon and Maxwell, heard the rumours. In a letter to Edmund Yates, undated, but from November or December 1868, he records an encounter with Maxwell. The latter was either “the biggest liar out [...] or the Braddon business has been exaggerated. I think however the first is the case”. A query about Braddon had elicited the response that “she was ‘rapidly recovering from a slight attack of nervous prostration into which she had been thrown by the death of her revered parent’”. Sala thought that Maxwell was: “[...] in a tremendous funk. The last run of the ore in the Richmond mine [where the couple were living] has been worked. It really does look like Nemesis. How many more 3 vol novels, each representing a ten-roomed house and an acre of land may he not have calculated upon?” Two hours later Sala met an acquaintance who shared the Maxwell’s physician: “according to his showing poor Braddon is altogether off her chump” (qtd. in McKenzie 118–9).

Postpartum psychosis, which afflicted Isabella Thackeray and perhaps Mary Anne Maxwell, is a likely diagnosis, though the difference between them and Braddon was that she recovered. In fact the condition even in the Victorian era had a hopeful prognosis, it being recognized that this form of insanity was, however severe, generally only temporary. Furthermore, the period of Braddon’s illness—six months—is around the median duration in

some studies of post-partum psychosis (Brockington 211). She was no *Lady Audley*, but that she had a post-natal mental disturbance is an eerie coincidence—life imitating art—between author and character.

John Maxwell thus briefly had two mad wives, legal and de facto. In all Braddon lost a year's writing, though it may have taken longer to physically recover. A photograph of the Maxwells at the seaside, dated from the early seventies, shows her looking bloated and exhausted. Around her are grouped Maxwell, two of her step-children, and four children of her own. She had borne, by this time, her sixth and final child, and had started writing again—accomplished crime, as if nothing had happened in the interim to affect her work.

To Bulwer Lytton she described her first attempts to write after the illness as “feeble” (Wolff, “Devoted Disciple” 148). Braddon tended to self-deprecation, and her next novel, *Fenton's Quest*, serialised in *Belgravia* from April 1870, was in fact careful and compelling. The novel was another mystery, this time the story of a woman who vanishes twice. Her patient and ultimately successful lover acts as the detective, despite the fact that on the first occasion she eloped with his best friend. The second time her fortune-seeking father shuts her “up like a mad woman” (344)—a plot device again echoing *Lady Audley*, with the added biographical twist that Braddon herself had only recently escaped from the confinement of genuine mental illness.

She made another escape, from her dubious social status, in 1874. Mary Anne Maxwell finally died, and a month later Braddon and Maxwell married, though not without some difficulties. Maxwell's brother-in-law Richard Brinsley Knowles inserted obituary notices in the papers stating that the dead lady had been the wife of John Maxwell, publisher—when Braddon had already been signing herself as Mary Maxwell in her letters to Bulwer Lytton. Maxwell responded, Knowles counter-attacked, and the affair became public.

The Maxwells' servants largely resigned, and the family moved away from their home, returning after a year when the scandal had subsided.

Yet even before the marriage her letters to Bulwer Lytton described an increased social life. She wrote in 1872 that: "We had private theatricals on a small scale, & from seventy to eighty people to witness the same & dance afterwards till five next morning" (Wolff, "Devoted Disciple" 156). Braddon was clearly a socially confident hostess. After her marriage she was legally a woman of good fame, with, like Fitzgerald's yellow-haired murderess, "really nothing to trouble her".

Two paintings by her friend Frith can be situated on the walls of the Virtual Gallery, and indicate her changing fortunes. The first is an 1865 portrait of Braddon standing alone in an interior, accompanied only by her writing desk. The second, made after her place in society was assured, was a panorama, "A Private View of the Royal Academy in 1881". In it Braddon appears among a fashionable crowd of art lovers, including Oscar Wilde and Anthony Trollope.

From 1870 onwards, Braddon wrote more of character and society than crime. She may have taken the advice of critics, such as the *Times*' review of *John Marchmont's Legacy*, which commented that "the machinery of secrets has been done to death" ("Novels in Season" 6). She was no doubt aware, being an acute businesswoman, that the fashion for the sensation novel had passed. However, she never quite abandoned the crime mode, which she clearly enjoyed writing, despite her protests. In 1872 she wrote to Bulwer Lytton, with typical zest, that:

The worst part of the business is that the books with murders in them—Lady A. & H. Dunbar—the whole interest centering in the murder—sell better than any others, & the critics say Thou shalt do no murder. However I think this time I

shall once more make my dip in the lucky bag of the Newgate Calendar [...]

(Wolff, “Devoted Disciple” 158)

The remainder of this chapter could be filled with plot synopses of Braddon’s later crime, mystery and detective novels, to its detriment—for the reader ultimately surfeits on books described rather than personally read. Suffice to say that the first decade of her writing career was almost entirely occupied with crime fiction. Of her work in the 1870s, *A Strange World* (1875), *Dead Men’s Shoes* (1876) and *The Cloven Foot* (1879), stand out as three fine novels of mystery, murder and inheritance. In the 1880s–1890s, her work continued to contain crime themes and structures, such as *One Life, One Love* (1890) and she wrote two excellent whodunnits in *Wyllard’s Weird* (1885) and *Rough Justice* (1898). The adventures of the latter’s Detective Faunce were continued in the still interesting but lesser *His Darling Sin* (1899).

Among her minor innovations was possibly the first clerical detective in “George Caulfield’s Journey”. This short tale was collected in *Flower and Weed and Other Tales* (1884), nearly all of whose narratives concern crime. The title character of the story is a mild-mannered curate, who finds his train companion, a young lady, dead of laudanum poison. He calls in a sleuth, Reverend Edward Leworthy, the unconventional Vicar of Freshmead. Leworthy traces the victim’s history, and locates the real murderer with ease. However, his appearance is a one-off and he does not, unlike Chesterton’s Father Brown, make a continued hobby of detection.

Occasionally Braddon merged her crime and social modes, as with *The Fatal Three* (1888), a sombre tale of a young woman as amateur detective. There is no crime in this novel, only family history, as Mildred Greswold seeks to find the truth behind her husband’s first marriage, to a woman suspected of being her own illegitimate sister. The mystery is

social, the murderer Mrs Grundy, as a child born out of wedlock is condemned to a loveless existence and finally commits suicide. *The Fatal Three* was perhaps Braddon's best work, an almost perfect marriage between the mystery plot and the wider social concerns deployed in Wilkie Collins' later work—yet never quite as successfully as in this novel by his friend and rival.

Braddon wrote continuously for the rest of her life, her age being almost equal to the number of her books when she died, aged eighty, in 1915. Her friend Henry James termed her, in a fannish and orotund letter held in the Wolff collection, “a magnificent benefactress to the literary estate” (qtd. in Wolff, *Sensational Victorian* 11). Braddon can also be regarded as a magnificent benefactress to the crime fiction estate.

Her work has been through a steady process of rediscovery and -assessment. In Victorian studies she is now regarded as a major figure, though her reputation within the generic bounds of mystery and detective writer is somewhat less. In most historical crime studies she is described as an also-ran in the race whose placings go to Poe, Collins and Doyle. Audrey Peterson's *Victorian Masters of Mystery* is typical. She notes that Braddon's work “provides today's mystery fans with some delightful and rewarding reading”. Yet, despite this praise, she assesses Braddon among “the minor writers of mystery fiction in the three decades before the advent of Conan Doyle”, while conceding she is “the finest craftsman” (italics mine) among this group (171).

These two chapters on this tough, irrepressible, and inventive woman have argued that she is, on the contrary, a major writer of detective and mystery fiction. Certainly she was influential, if we consider that she was namechecked by writers as diverse as Fergus Hume, in *The Mystery of A Hansom Cab* (46) and Agatha Christie, in her short story “Greenshaw's Folly” (338). Conan Doyle found her good company, the pair spending two days reading a

play together in 1912 (Wolff, *Sensational Victorian* 376). He also told her, in a 1909 letter held in the Wolff collection, that “I respect yourself & your work so deeply [...]” (Doyle). In the virtual gallery of crime fiction, she can be placed in a prominent position, beside her friend Collins and their French rival, Gaboriau.

CHAPTER SEVEN

“DEAD! AND ... NEVER CALLED ME MOTHER”: ELLEN (MRS HENRY) WOOD

She is mysterious because there is no mystery about her.
Margaret Oliphant on Ellen Wood, 1895.

In early 1862 the publisher Richard Bentley wrote to one of his authors, with a query: did she happen to know M. E. Braddon, or know who this person was? Only the undated reply to this letter survives in the Bentley archives, yet it reveals a keen awareness of Braddon as a literary rival. The writer had ascertained “M. E.” was “a Miss Braddon” but was unable to discover anything else. She then gave her opinion of Braddon’s work:

Lady Audley’s Secret [is] the best of her works, so far as I have read. I have read one or two short tales of hers very far-fetched in plot, very inferior altogether. Some of her writing I think excellent; some not so. She is a most unequal writer. There is a great sameness throughout her stories; but they are (most of them) far superior to the run of the present day. (L147, UI)

Why Bentley asked the writer of this letter, Ellen Wood (1814–1887) about Braddon is unknown, although given that they both wrote of murder and deviant femininity, he might well have wondered if they were one and the same. By the end of 1862, both women would be rivals in earnest, best-selling and famous. They comprised the leaders of the Sensation School, along with Wilkie Collins and Charles Reade.

Grouping these four for a Virtual Gallery portrait is an imaginary exercise: they may not all have met. Furthermore, the label of “Sensation” derives from their criminal or racy subject matter. The quartet might have headed a bestselling literary trend, but were very

different on the artistic and personal level. As stated in Chapter Five, Reade was an episodic plotter, unlike the other three, whose taut, mystery-driven narrative structures were recognizably those of modern detective fiction. Another point of difference was that Reade, Braddon and Collins, who were great friends, had private lives as “Sensational” as their fiction. They “lived in sin”; Ellen Wood’s life was blameless. She married a businessman and was mother to a dutiful family.

A façade of formidable and rather repellent respectability surrounds Ellen Wood. She wrote as Mrs Henry Wood, and her one entry in the *Oxford Dictionary of Quotations* is: “Dead! and ... never called me mother” (572). The sentimentality of the quotation, and the conventional form of the name attached to it, seems to epitomise high Victorianism, like the stories of table legs wearing decorous little pantalets. However, like the shrouded legs, it is, if not apocryphal, then certainly dubious. These famous words were not Ellen Wood’s; the credit goes to T. A. Palmer, in a pirated stage adaptation of her novel, *East Lynne* (1861).

East Lynne is sentimental and moral—and also a murder mystery, one of many Ellen Wood wrote. The work is complex; yet its creator is known only as an irreproachable, even dull Victorian woman. Artist Henrietta Ward, who knew Wood, wrote:

I never found any point of contact with her. She was a very nice woman but hopelessly prosaic. Calling upon her one day when she was alone I hoped that perhaps she would reveal some hidden depth yet unseen. But alas! the topics she clung to and fully explored were her servants’ shortcomings, and a full account of the cold she had caught, she being one of those tiresome people who like to trace its career from infancy. (*Memories*, 183–4)

Ward’s words constitute a small but significant contradiction of the major biographical source

on Wood, the memoirs by her son Charles, a travel-writer. He wrote about his mother first in 1887, in the magazine *Argosy*, and later published his recollections in book form, as *Memorials of Mrs. Henry Wood* (1894). In both he depicts his mother as a perfect housekeeper, commenting in the 1887 version that: “The complaints about domestics so often heard in these days were never heard in my mother’s house and never existed” (“Mrs. Henry Wood” 260).

Indeed, to believe Charles Wood, his mother was the Angel in the House personified. Margaret Oliphant, in an anonymous review of the *Memorials* for *Blackwood’s Magazine*, found it “a memoir on the old lines, descriptive, eulogistic” (645). The “hidden depth” sought by Henrietta Ward is also absent from the memoirs. At biography’s end, wrote Oliphant acidly, “we are as little acquainted with her as we were at the beginning” (645). Instead, she found an “ideal commonplace” presented, “more inscrutable than all the mysteries” (646). Charles Wood’s *Memorials* is thus a frustrating and uninformative text, although in approaching it some consideration of its generic affiliations is useful. It is in part travel-writing, with Charles providing lengthy descriptions of his parents’ journeys in Europe. Ellen Wood was also devoutly Anglican, and in depicting this important aspect of his mother’s life, Charles draws on the Victorian form of the religious memoir, a Saint’s life for Protestants. The *Memorials* is thus more akin to works such as *Clear Shining Light* (1882), Emily Leakey’s memoir of her novelist sister Caroline, than, for example, Froude’s life of Carlyle. The lives depicted tend to be unabashed hagiographies, uncritical and frequently naïve. They are, however, sometimes profoundly revealing on the sub-textual level. *Clear Shining Light*, though written with perfect sincerity, is readable as a life in which Caroline Leakey’s evangelical piety was offset by extreme frustration, indulgence in alcohol and laudanum, and

possibly anorexia (Shirley Walker 85, 87–8). Charles Wood is more discreet than Leakey, providing less “hidden text”, but is similarly unaware of how unctuously he reads. About the only faintly naughty thing his mother did was disguise herself as a monk and secretly enter a monastery at midnight. Yet even this event proves innocuous, as she was accompanied by her husband, whose ruse it was to witness midnight mass at The Grand Chartreuse (*Memorials* 135–141).

Charles Wood revised and expanded his text for book publication, toning down some of the earlier hyperbole, and deleting some comments perhaps judged too self-revealing, such as that as a child Charles was considered “the fool of the family” and surely destined for the Church (“Mrs. Henry Wood” 427). However, both memoirs depict Ellen Wood as improbably flawless, the son’s words forming a whited sepulchre to his mother’s memory. If there are aspects of Ellen Wood as sensational as Woolf’s revelations about Braddon, they remain hidden, although recent research has begun to reveal more to Wood. Riley notes that she was born two months after her parent’s hasty marriage, and that her family owned a public house—the latter particularly embarrassing for a woman whose first novel was in the temperance genre (166, 173).

Charles Wood’s memoirs reveal a great love and twisted psychology. It is typical of Charles’ naivety that he unblushingly declares he and his mother had “an intimacy between mother and son perhaps never exceeded” (*Memorials* vii), plainly forgetting Oedipus and Jocasta. Charles’ devotion is so total that it raises questions as to the reliability and possible dishonesty of his testimony.

One contradiction, by Henrietta Ward, has already been noted and there are other instances where his account can be questioned. As Wolff stated in his *Nineteenth-Century*

Fiction, in the *Memorials* Charles Wood quoted a letter to Johnny Ludlow (a pseudonym used by Ellen Wood for a series of stories in the *Argosy*) from Tom Hood, the editor and humorist. It invited Ludlow to an evening of cigars and Oxford reminiscences (4: 275–6). In Charles’ version, the anecdote demonstrates his mother’s writing skills, her ability to mimic the male voice convincingly: the joke is on Hood for inviting a woman to such a masculine evening. When the said letter was acquired by Wolff, he discovered that Charles had performed an act of elision. Hood had indeed written to “Johnny Ludlow”, but regarding errors in “his” depiction of Oxford, which Hood offered to correct—convivially, over cigars. The act of censorship is revealing, showing that Charles was intolerant of anything, however minor, that showed his mother to be less than perfect.

The modern photographic term “airbrushing” is clearly applicable to Charles Wood’s memoirs. Alternative witnesses are however few: it seems that after her literary success she became angelically house and study-bound, devoting herself to writing. “[To] a very great extent,” says Charles, she gave up ‘the world’”, his wording again suggestive of a Saint’s Life (“Mrs. Henry Wood” 440). Yet she was not a recluse: in a Bentley letter of 1874 Ellen noted a day spent “out making calls”, in the course of which she encountered Eliza Lynn Linton and visited Mrs Frith, wife of the artist (15 May, L83, UI).

Unfortunately Charles remains the best source on Ellen Wood, dubious though his account may be. However in his defence it should be noted that his friend, *Argosy* writer Isabella Fyvie Mayo, thought that he had done his mother “justice” (166). The second-best source on Wood is her surviving letters, almost exclusively written to her publisher Richard Bentley and preserved in the Bentley archive. They can be read as a useful counterbalance, and even contradiction to Charles. He claimed, for instance, that his mother was unworldly:

“What is vulgarly called ‘a bargain’, she could never think of or attempt. She shrank from the very word” (“Mrs. Henry Wood” 352). However, the overwhelming impression given by the Bentley letters is of a shrewd and tough businesswoman.

The third source on Wood, though it has to be treated with some caution, is her published works. “I rarely write anything but it has some foundation in truth”, she told Bentley (15 October 1851, L3, UI). Autobiographical gleanings can be found in her writing, though filtered by the medium of fiction. These asides and hints are strongest in her earliest works, which were printed anonymously, and thus gave her license to speak more freely than as the iconic Mrs Henry Wood. In addition certain themes, notably financial ruin, recur almost obsessively in her work. It has also claimed that when writing of her birthplace, Worcester, “many of her chief characters” could be locally identified, including Archibald Carlyle of *East Lynne*, “an eminent citizen of Worcester” (Ede 221). Ellen herself admitted the text’s real-life origins. In 1871 Caroline Norton wrote to the *Times* accusing Wood of plagiarizing *East Lynne* from one of her short stories (6). Ellen retorted that *East Lynne* “was taken partly from my own imagination, partly from a romance enacted in real life, some of whose actors are living yet and will recognise what I say as true” (Letter).

Here Ellen also publicly departed from the accepted female virtue of modesty, giving her own (good) opinion of her auctorial quality. She described herself as having “the gifts of imagination and power of construction [...] possessed together in a large degree” (Letter). Here she is hardly the retiring violet painted by her son, “perfectly aware of her own power [but] always very modest about her writings” (“Mrs. Henry Wood” 342). George Eliot read the exchange and wrote: “One feels rather ashamed of authoresses this week [...] One hardly knows which letter is in the worse taste” (208).

Charles Wood's memoir does, however, contain valuable information as to his mother's life and working methods. She was the eldest daughter of Thomas Price, a wealthy Worcester glove manufacturer, her mother's maiden name being Evans. These names indicate Welsh ancestry. Charles makes much of his mother's connections with Cathedral society, but repeatedly in her writing she tells a different story. In several "gendered interventions" (to use Robyn Warhol's term) she directly addresses the reader, stressing a crucial class distinction: "In those days, to be in trade, no matter how high a class it might be, was looked upon by the upper classes as next door to being in Purgatory. For all social purposes you might almost be in one as the other. Trading was a social crime, and nothing less" (*Court Netherleigh* 7). In *Mildred Arkell* she is similarly forthright, describing:

a cathedral that shrouds itself in its unapproachable exclusivity, as if it did not belong to the busy town outside. For that town is a manufacturing one, and the aristocracy of the clergy, with that of the few well-born families time had gathered around them, and the democracy of trade, be it ever so irreproachable, do not, as you know, assimilate [...] There were those of the proud old prebendaries, who would never have acknowledged to knowing a manufacturer by sight; who would not have spoken to one in the street, had it been to save their stalls. You don't believe me? I said you would not. Nevertheless, I am telling you the simple truth. (1)

The child Ellen was gifted: Charles claims that: "At seven years old she had gone through, without effort, the studies of girls twice her age". At the age of ten she "had read a great part of Shakespeare," and "invariably" spent her "unlimited pocket-money" on books ("Mrs. Henry Wood" 253–4). In the book version Charles presents his mother as less of a prodigy, though still very bright. There is no indication, however, that she received education beyond

that considered suitable for a gentlewoman of her era.

In 1825, crisis struck Worcester: the free-trade reforms of the politician William Huskisson saw the market flooded with foreign imports. Glove-making was badly hit, both workers and employers losing their livelihood. This incident recurs in Wood's writing: in "A City's Desolation" (1854), for instance, she describes the joy in Worcester when Huskisson was hit by a train and killed (360–1). She later toned down the *schadenfreude* when revising the text for inclusion in *Mildred Arkell*. Her father tried to keep his factory open rather than close and leave his workers without employment; in the process, says Charles, he "lost each week what to many would have been a large fortune" ("Mrs. Henry Wood" 262). It is indicative of his exaggerations that he amends this clause to read "small fortune" in the *Memorials* (44).

Her adolescence was marked by illness, a lateral and inward thoracic spinal deformity. "She had 'grown aside', as the familiar saying runs", she notes of Lucy Cheveley in *Mildred Arkell* (106). If we can believe Charles, she apparently presented this character as her "counterpart" (*Memorials* 38), Lucy being a beautiful woman with "delicate, transparent features [...] rich loving brown eyes, and [...] damask cheeks" (83). There seems little doubt that Ellen Price suffered from scoliosis, in its most common adolescent idiopathic form, which predominantly afflicts females. The diagnosis of scoliosis dates back to Hippocrates; it was treated by bed rest and therapeutic corseting, in this case apparently successfully.

In her youth the spinal curvature "was not so apparent to a beholder", as she wrote of Lucy Cheveley, but it grew "more formidable" with age (106, 115). Keddie observed that by "middle-life" she had developed "a slight hump" back (322). The condition would eventually kill her. Charles remarked that "her dresses were so arranged with scarves and lace that the

curvature was less evident than it might otherwise have been” (*Memorials* 230)—some, like Henrietta Ward, appear not to have noticed it.

Elizabeth Barrett Browning, eight years Ellen’s senior, was another gifted teenager diagnosed (wrongly) with spinal problems; although her case is better documented, and would seem to involve psychosomatic factors and possibly anorexia. She spent a year in bed, or suspended in the hammock of a spine crib (Forster 24). Ellen Price was immobilized for four years. We can only wonder at the effect such confinement had on her. As Margaret Forster, Barrett Browning’s biographer, observed:

All female illnesses in the first half of the nineteenth century were supposed to be cured only if total inactivity was observed. This set up a vicious circle: the strictly enforced rest produced the weakness it was designed to cure and any possible physical improvement was more than cancelled out by the immense harm done to the mind. (30)

The invalid Ellen Price was allowed brain work: “Reading and study, always her great pleasure and passion, now became her chief resource” (*Memorials* 34) and she even wrote stories, though “when finished they were consigned to the flames” (“Mrs. Henry Wood” 344). At seventeen, the spinal “curvature became confirmed and settled”, she was no longer in pain, and “it was no longer necessary to be always reclining”. But she was enfeebled, “without muscular power” for the rest of her life (*Memorials* 36–7).

Charles had conventional views as to the cause of his mother’s illness:

[probably] the strength and activity of the brain overpowered the weaker body [. . .]
many writers have suffered in a similar fashion [. . .] There is no doubt that the

cultivation of the intellect is often purchased at the expense of muscular power. The constitution may remain vigorous, but whatever is done or accomplished in life has to be done through the brain. (“Mrs. Henry Wood” 261)

Despite Ellen’s illness, and the Price family’s reduced fortune, she married at twenty-two. The groom, Henry Wood, was “at the head of a large shipping and banking firm” (*Memorials* 49). He also acted as a diplomat, being “English Consul at a French trade centre” (Keddie 321). Charles Wood noted that Henry Wood was a “first rate Conservative politician”, fluent French speaker and intellectual. His rare demurrals are intriguing: Henry Wood “was almost devoid of imagination”, had little taste for novels and none for poetry, and “wanted the solidity of character and earnest steadfastness of purpose” of his wife (“Mrs. Henry Wood” 263, 268). In the book, he went further, noting that his father possessed “a mind a little wanting in ballast” (50), which could imply instability.

The Woods lived for many years in France. Children were born, of whom four survived to adulthood. Ellen continued to write at an amateur level. She would become fluent in the French language and probably its literature as well. In some early magazine pieces, such as “War—and the Paris Mesmerists”, she writes of French settings and people with ease; *East Lynne*’s plot is arguably an English version of *Madame Bovary*. Indeed, Henry Wood reportedly considered becoming a French citizen (*Memorials* 146). Certainly he was active in French public life: undertaking “to establish and bring into operation one or two of the large French railways”, something in which he “triumphantly succeeded” (*Memorials* 143).

Then, as Charles Wood puts it in the *Memorials*: “There came a day when their early home knew them no more, when much that life held dear and sacred had to be parted with for ever [...] She never spoke of it. It must have been trouble too deep for words” (144). The

elision indicates a breakdown in their perfect confidence, a point where son cannot bear witness. Precisely what happened is unclear. Charles' narrative vaguely notes "years of trial" (*Memorials* 144). The family continued to live in France, where "money goes twice as far", (to quote from Ellen Wood's "Featherston's Story", 5) only returning to England circa 1857. Elwin makes the "reasonable deduction", that Henry Wood "committed an indiscretion meriting the disapproval of his employers, and lost his job" (235). It seems most likely that Wood went bankrupt, for as his son comments he "failed in nothing but the administration of his own affairs" (*Memorials* 143), through unwise business speculation, perhaps those self-same French railways mentioned in the following sentence of the *Memoirs*.

Mayo wrote that Ellen Wood "had had her time of storm and stress, but it had left no scars on her, save keener sympathy for others" (166). While it may be reading too much into her fiction, it is nonetheless worth noting that capital is a significant theme. Repeatedly and knowledgeably she presents both sides of financial ruin, often that of bankers, and has scenes where a family's goods are seized by bailiffs. Some examples are *The Shadow of Ashlydyat* (1865), and the 1870 short story "Out in the Streets". Moreover, in "Three Hundred a Year" (1858) she offers practical hints on how to survive on that amount and still preserve gentility; in straightened circumstances a lady should not be too proud to contribute to her own housework and cooking.

A slow downwards financial trajectory for the Woods can be surmised, beginning in the late 1840s—early 1850s, which spurred Ellen's move to professional writing. She would serve a decade-long literary apprenticeship, publishing first in journals, then, after repeated attempts, book form with the temperance novel *Danesbury House* (1860), before the best-selling *East Lynne*. Her earliest business correspondence (7 December 1850, L1, UI) is

preserved in the Bentley archives, being a letter of introduction from a would-be writer, and sent from Dunkirk.

However, the submission mentioned in it, “Seven Years in the Wedded Life of a Roman Catholic”, did not appear in a Bentley publication. Bentley rejected the story for its “political matter” (20 January 1857, L2, UI). It was published in the February 1851 issue of the *New Monthly Magazine (NMM)*, started by the publisher Colburn and edited by William Harrison Ainsworth, the Newgate school author of *Jack Sheppard*. Ellen Wood began to appear regularly in the magazine, and from January 1855 also in *Bentley’s Miscellany (BM)*, the change being due to Ainsworth’s taking over the magazine.

Ainsworth’s role in Ellen Wood’s career is downplayed by Charles, who gives more credit to his cousin, William Francis Ainsworth: “To him all my mother’s MSS were forwarded, and most of the correspondence was carried on between them” (“Mrs. Henry Wood” 337). However, the *Wellesley Index* gives his role in *BM* and *NMM* during the 1850s as only that of sub-editor (3: 170). In addition, he was predominantly a non-fiction, travel writer, and her tutelage in fiction would more likely have come from the experienced William Harrison.

Charles Wood further accuses the latter of firstly not paying his mother at all, then subsequently underpaying her. This claim has been accepted, most recently by Wynne (63). However, S. M. Ellis, in *William Harrison Ainsworth and his Friends*, notes the “parsimonious” treatment of Ellen Wood was uncharacteristic: “without exception, the records of his transactions with his other magazine contributors demonstrate that he was ever over-generous in payment” and indeed, in the help he gave aspiring writers (237). That Ellen Wood wrote *gratis*, even as a novice, seems dubious, as her family background was in trade

and she was married to a businessman. Even in the initial Bentley letter she hinted at payment: “Should you sufficiently approve of it to give it a place in the Magazine, I should feel obliged by its being inserted upon your usual terms, whatever they may be”. Quite probably she did have some financial dispute with William Harrison, as is indicated by an 1862 letter. In it he writes to Ellen Wood, being friendly, even admiring, but informing her that the *NMM* “is not in a condition to offer you better terms” for serialisation of *The Shadow of Ashlydyat* (Wolff, *Nineteenth-Century Fiction* 4: 279).

Her apprentice pieces vary. The earliest *NMM* contributions (1851–2) were without exception anti-Catholic, clearly the “political matter” objectionable to Bentley. Such was not unusual, with Fanny Trollope and Wilkie Collins (for example) expressing similar sentiments in *Father Eustace* (1847) and *The Black Robe* (1881) respectively; Reilly terms it a literary market “niche” (168). Wood, though, was particularly vehement. This preoccupation culminates and ceases with the non-fiction “A Word to England” (March–April 1853), which claimed that England was in imminent danger of re-conquest by Catholicism: “*it has been decided that the Inquisition shall be revived when England shall be once more under their yoke*” (italics in original, 185). It was presumably this piece which allegedly caused a deputation to wait on William Francis and threaten him, *à la* Guy Fawkes, “with the blowing up of the Houses of Parliament”—but Ainsworth protected his author’s identity (“Mrs. Henry Wood” 348).

Polemic apart, her early work shows a writer trying different literary forms. Wynne states she “contributed sketches rather than stories” (63), but fiction does predominate. She wrote in the historical mode (“The Lady’s Well”, *NMM* 1853) and the Gothic (“A Dark Deed of the Days Gone By”, *NMM* 1851). “An Imperial Visit” (*NMM* 1853) concerning Napoleon

III's visit to Dunkirk, is an attractive piece of journalism. Yet, amidst this search for direction crime appears, and becomes increasingly confident in its expression.

It was a predilection of the author herself, even without the possible influence of W.

H. Ainsworth:

She took the keenest interest in all great trials. She followed out the threads and points of an intricate case with the greatest clearness and insight. In all important trials where mystery and complications were involved, she quickly made up her mind at an early stage, saw the strong and weak points, and was scarcely ever wrong in the opinion she formed. She often said that had she been a man she would have made a first-rate lawyer, with a passionate love for her work. ("Mrs. Henry Wood" 438).

This interest and vicarious participation in newspaper crime was typical of Victorian murder-mania. Yet though Ellen Wood was attracted by sensational murders and dramatic courtroom scenes, it was the clue-puzzle elements of crime reportage, their whodunnits, that would seem to be her real interest. She had been educated conventionally and considerably beneath her capabilities, but like Agatha Christie she brought an analytic intelligence to murder. It is here that we can see the origins of her later intricate crime plots.

A mysterious (though to us obvious) murder, for instance, appeared in her anti-papist "Maria Ernach's Last Pilgrimage" (*NMM* May 1851). A far more assured example was "The Self-Convicted", published in the *NMM* of August 1853, although it had been written nearly two years previously and offered to Bentley (15 October 1851, L3, UI). It was a fictionalisation, she stated in a footnote, of a murder case which: "took place many years ago in Worcestershire. An author's license has been taken with the details [...] the chief facts are perfectly authentic" (449). In the story, two men are rivals for a girl, who becomes a witness

to the murder of her family's preferred suitor; the accused is her true love. However, as all she heard of the incident was an argument (through a hedge) she cannot make a visual identification of the killer. Subsequently, though, she is able to prove her lover's innocence and identify the real murderer from his voice.

The real-life origins of "The Self-Convicted" supplied the plot. When inventing a crime storyline, however, Ellen was initially still learning the mystery structure. "The Diamond Bracelet" and its sequels ("Going Into Exile" and "Coming Out of Exile"), a novelette serialised over three issues of *BM* from June–August 1858 and later reprinted in the *Argosy* in 1874, even featured a police detective, of "gentlemanly appearance" (24). The story successfully presents numerous possible suspects and motives for the theft of the eponymous bracelet. A modern reader may, however, note that it breaks Ronald Knox's first rule of the detective story (194), in that the culprit proves to be not previously introduced into the narrative. He is a window cleaner, although Wood does make ample reference to open windows. However, at the time of writing the crime genre was still in the process of development, and some seventy years from Knox's 1929 codification—Poe's "The Murders in the Rue Morgue" also breaks this "rule".

Articles and short stories may have kept the Wood family, but the real money was in novels, which it took nearly a decade for Ellen to achieve. This delay would appear to be partly W. H. Ainsworth's fault: Charles claimed that he tried to restrict her to short stories ("Mrs. Henry Wood" 338). Tinsley recalled that he "objected to long serials" (130), although an examination of his magazines during the 1850s tends to suggest that he had no objection provided he (or R. S. Surtees) wrote them. Wynne believes that Ainsworth "clearly devalued" Ellen's fiction, with its "middle class female concerns" (64). However, as Ellen's first

publisher Ainsworth recognised her talent, and he printed her short fiction work in quantity.

Ainsworth's restriction forced Ellen to compromise, writing what would, in the twentieth century, become a common stepping stone between popular magazine and book publication: narratives formed from a series of short stories with settings and characters in common. In the science fiction field such texts are termed "fix-ups". The episodic nature of the form, however, did not allow her later powerful narrative drive to develop.

Some of these works, such as *The House of Halliwell*, were offered to Bentley and other publishers (6 October and 26 November, L6–7, UI), unsuccessfully—they only appeared after her fame, or posthumously. Others were judiciously recycled. Tinsley published various Wood novels he termed "partly reprints" of her early magazine work, "but so well linked together that the most expert reader could hardly imagine such was the case" (130, 131).

One example will suffice, *Mildred Arkell*. Its framework is that of the family saga, a device of which she was fond, often polemically comparing two families, one good and one bad. The novel also seamlessly incorporates two *NMM* serialised novellas. The first, "The Tour of David Dundyke" (August 1854), began as a comic tale of an Englishman abroad in France, and ended as a murder mystery with "What Became of Him?" (September 1854). The second appeared in three parts: "Mildred Arkell", "A City's Desolation", and "The Aunt and Niece" (October–December 1854). This work was essentially a tragic romance, but also depicted the misery caused by Huskisson in a fictionalised Worcester. To these basic ingredients and frameworks, Wood added a dash of school story (the adventures of boys at the Worcester choir school being a recurrent theme) and an inheritance and marriage-register mystery that borrows from (and transmutes) Collins's *Woman in White*. The major revision

made is to give “The Aunt and Niece” a happy ending, accomplished effortlessly. Indeed her fix-up is a triumph of invisible mending—it is possible to read *Mildred Arkell* and be unaware of the text’s patchwork origins.

Like other contemporary women writers, the temperance issue proved a means to print, whereby Ellen finally achieved novel publication. The Scottish Temperance League offered a novel prize; Charles Wood claims she wrote the non-crime polemic *Danesbury House* within a month. She won the £100 prize, sold the novel, and in her inexperience also the copyright. The book subsequently had an “immense sale”, she told Bentley (8 August 1861, L12), but from which she did not benefit.

Her next work, *East Lynne*, was serialised in the *NMM* from January 1860–September 1861, apparently the result of an ultimatum from Ellen to W. H. Ainsworth (C. Wood, *Memorials* 255). The novel was written in the periods of respite from a serious illness, unspecified by Charles. Most likely it was gallstones accompanied by an infection, given that Charles states she suffered from fever, pains in the liver area and what sounds like jaundice, she having “the complexion of an orange” (*Memorials* 185). She became “weak and thin; she never went out without wearing a thick veil, and a very short walk exhausted her” (*Memorials* 185). If she was really so ill, then keeping up her installments of the serial, the book being “sent to press as it was written”, indicates iron discipline and a sense of utter necessity, perhaps psychological—she thought she was dying (*Memorials* 224, 189).

However, Ellen survived the writing of *East Lynne*—and its publication in book form. The *NMM* and *BM*’s publishers, Chapman and Hall, were offered the novel, but it was famously declined (twice) by George Meredith, their reader. Meredith thought the book “in the worst style of the present taste”, as he subsequently wrote to Samuel Lucas, editor of

Once a Week, whose favourable review in the *Times* was a significant factor in the novel's reception (qtd. in Ellis, *William Harrison Ainsworth*, n. 238). A consideration of Meredith's circumstances, though, suggests the book would have also been highly distasteful to him for personal reasons. In a series of eerie parallels with *East Lynne*'s Lady Isabel, his wife Mary Ellen had eloped with another man, bore an illegitimate child, then died—only a month (October 1861) after *East Lynne* finished its serialisation in the *NMM*.

A second publisher declined the manuscript before Richard Bentley, on the advice of his reader, novelist Geraldine Jewsbury, accepted the book. Jewsbury had no hesitations, though she did suggest changes, not all of which were made ("Reader's Report" 698–9). It was just over ten years since Wood's first letter to the Bentley firm. If this literary courtship was long, then its novelistic consummation proved an immediate and enormous success.

The narrative of *East Lynne* is well-known, and it is not the intent of this chapter to examine the melodramatic and sentimental aspects of the book, on which most critical attention has been focussed. Rather, its much less discussed mystery content will be examined. The plot of the novel is double-stranded, with two interlinked domestic and crime narratives, which meet at the end: the story of Lady Isabel, an English and titled Madame Bovary, who marries the lawyer Archibald Carlyle and is led by villain Francis Levison to desert him and family, with dire moralistic consequences; and that of Richard Hare, falsely accused of murdering George Hallijohn, Carlyle's clerk and the father of Hare's sweetheart Afy. Moreover, the novel features two amateur detectives, Carlyle and Barbara Hare, sister of Richard, who function as an early detective couple, a Victorian version of Tommy and Tuppence Beresford.

Some reviewers and critics, such as Sergeant, have considered this crime underplot

“superfluous” (179); but it is inextricable from Lady Isabel’s story. Richard Hare returns incognito to East Lynne and enlists Barbara to prove his innocence. He believes the killer was a secret lover of Afy’s, a rich and flashily dressed gentleman known as “Thorn”. Afy has disappeared, but her sister Joyce witnesses that the man exists. Barbara turns to Carlyle, a family friend, and the pair investigate Richard’s story in a covert operation, with the help of Carlyle’s clerk Dill. The exercise is not without risks, chiefly to Barbara’s maidenly reputation, particularly after the real murderer becomes aware of their activities. Although their inquiry has Gothic/supernatural elements, in the foreboding dreams of Barbara’s mother, Mrs Hare, which usefully contain clues, it is conducted with legal and intellectual rigour. When a Captain Thorn comes to East Lynne, and it would seem is the culprit, they set up a meeting at which Richard Hare can see him: but the positive identification is not made.

The melodrama strand of the plot intervenes here, a direct and agonising consequence of Carlyle and Barbara’s detecting, for Lady Isabel has been led to believe their secrecy conceals an affair. True, it has brought them together; and after Isabel’s desertion of Carlyle and presumed death, the two detectives marry. Their investigation lies dormant in domesticity for some years, until the murderer returns to East Lynne, and for the first time is positively identified. A new inquest is convened, then a dramatic trial for murder—and the two plot-strands meet, for the killer of George Hallijohn proves to be none other than Francis Levison.

An interesting distinction between Wood and her fellow Sensation writers is evident in *East Lynne*. The novel ends with the climactic device of a criminal trial, a device common in early (and modern) detective writing, though curiously sometimes evaded in the Sensational novel. Trials tend not to occur in work by Collins and Braddon if the villain has a

title or superior status. The guilty parties die conveniently or are murdered in vigilante actions by foreigners (*The Woman in White*, *The Moonstone*); go mad or get committed to the madhouse (*The Law and the Lady*, *Lady Audley's Secret*); or are forgiven (*Eleanor's Victory*).

These plot devices avoid the due process of law, which would involve the problematic because proletarian police. It is worth noting that Braddon's *Aurora Floyd* is an exception, but then the murderer is a servant. The *status quo* is thus unchallenged, with gentry not appearing in the dock. Braddon and Collins are, because of their personal lives, read as subversive, but in these novels they conform. It is Wood, usually typified as a conservative writer, who shows no fear of this potential class conflict. Her titled villain has sinned against the laws of god and man, and at the end of the novel she gleefully farewells him, if not to the scaffold then to the far more demeaning fate of a chain-gang, penal servitude for life.

Another interesting, but seldom noted feature of *East Lynne* is its use of the woman sleuth. Wood acknowledges their existence, without judgment, as in "The Silent Chimes", where a character remarks that a woman (although no "lady") watching a house could be taken "for a female detective" (361). Quite possibly she was aware of Forrester's *The Female Detective* or *The Revelations of a Lady Detective*. Moreover, again unlike Braddon, she avoided the "thwarted female detective" trope; her female sleuths tend to escape both humiliation or debilitating injury. A case in point is Barbara Hare, who tended to be disliked by nineteenth-century critics. They termed her "intolerable" (Sergeant 181), flippant and "vulgar" ("Our Female Sensation Novelists" 717). Yet she is a credible detective, making important deductions even (as an examination of the novel's internal dating shows) while pregnant. The partnership in sleuthing with Carlyle is equitable, as is their marriage.

Female detectives appear elsewhere in Wood. Several are found in *The Master of Greylands* (1873), these being a wife disguised as a French governess in the house of the man she suspects of her husband's murder, and in an exquisitely Gothic *hommage*, an Anglican lay nun, who discovers the truth of the haunted "Friar's Keep" to be a smuggling operation.

Within the Maze (1872) features an interfering spinster, Theresa Blake, whose frustration expresses itself in High Anglican rite and snooping, she very nearly unearthing the guilty secret of an aristocratic family. She is not a sympathetic character, but as Wood observes:

That Miss Blake had a peculiar faculty for searching out information, was indisputable: never a better one for the task than she: and when an individual is gifted with this quality in a remarkable degree, it has to be more or less exercised. Miss Blake might have been a successful police detective: attached to a private enquiry office she would have made its fortune. (101)

In *East Lynne*, Wood successfully married the melodrama, the domestic mode of fiction, the didactic novel and the mystery plot. The book became a Victorian blockbuster, with such fans as Edward, Prince of Wales (Cruse 325–6) and the babyfarming murderess Mrs Amelia Dyer, who requested the book from prison and reportedly cried over it (qtd. in Knelman, 177). After its success Ellen Wood was in demand both from book publishers and from magazine editors in need of serials: in 1862–3, besides Harrison Ainsworth, she supplied John Cassell's *Quiver* with *The Channings* and *Mrs Halliburton's Troubles*, and Samuel Lucas' *Once a Week* with *Verner's Pride*. *East Lynne* was followed by two three-volume novels in 1862, three in 1863, and four the following year, often revisions of her earlier magazine work. She was almost as prolific as Mary Braddon. Even the demise of Henry Wood did not affect her productivity. A letter she sent Bentley spends several aggrieved

pages on the stage piracy of *East Lynne*, before describing her husband's final illness, "a most severe shock to me" (16 January 1866, L50, UI). By the end of 1870, she had published over twenty novels.

Though she had dealings with other publishers such as Tinsley, and switched between them for different editions of her works, she maintained her professional (and friendly) relationship with Bentley. The firm were appreciative of her, even while noting that Wilkie Collins sold "about 750–1000" copies more per novel than she did (Note by George Bentley on letter by Ellen Wood, 24 July 1863, L44, UI).

In the letter to Richard Bentley quoted at the beginning of the chapter, she showed awareness of Braddon as a rival, and challenged her again when she bought the magazine *Argosy*, which had been modelled on Braddon's *Belgravia*. The *Argosy* had been founded by the evangelical Alexander Strahan, a man embarrassed when the opening serial, Reade's *Griffith Gaunt*, proved more sensational than expected. In selling the magazine to Ellen Wood, as editor and proprietor, in 1867, Strahan placed it in sound moral and business hands. Charles Wood's name appeared on the title-page as the proprietor, but clearly it was his mother, named as editor, who wore the pants. With the Woods at the helm, the *Argosy* quickly lost its Sensational taint, becoming a family magazine, with "an average monthly circulation of 20,000, far in excess" of *Belgravia* (Maunder, "Ellen Wood" 29). Though the *Argosy* was sold to Bentley in 1871, Ellen Wood remained editor to her death.

The *Argosy* provided her with control over her serialisations, with her novels first appearing in the magazine, as well as the pseudonymous Johnny Ludlow series of stories, often crime in content and form. In addition, she also reprinted much of her early magazine work in the *Argosy*. She ran the magazine from her home, with Charles as her devoted

assistant. The magazine ran his travel writing, including the “Gastein Papers”, which Elwin wrongly attributes to his mother (242; “Gastein” was printed from January–August 1873, but later stated to be by “C. W. W.”, in the September issue of 1873, 190). The sea stories of another son, a “sailor”, also appeared (2 August 1875, L94, UI). The *Argosy* was thus a Wood family business, other contributors usually being anonymous, although work by Edith Nesbit did appear.

In comparison with her closest Sensation rivals, she wrote fewer purely detective and crime works than Braddon or Collins, but nonetheless mysteries and murder feature in a majority of her novels. In these texts crime, social observation and the didactic co-exist on equal terms, being powered by intricate and relentless narrative structures. Viktor Shklovsky’s words on Dickens’ crime novels are applicable here, for the mystery form allowed her “to interpolate into the work large chunks of everyday life, which, while serving the purpose of impeding the action, feel the pressures of the plot and are therefore perceived as a part of the artistic whole” (145).

One of her favourite ingredients was Christian morality, with a rival writer, Charlotte (Mrs J. H.) Riddell, commenting that Wood was “simply a brute, she throws in bits of religion to slip her fodder down the public’s throat!” (qtd. in Ellis, *Wilkie Collins* 282). However, it is worth noting that she varied her morality according to audience, and not all of the preaching was her own words. She told Bentley that John Cassell had added “a good bit of religion” to the early chapters of *The Channings*’ serialisation, “more than in my opinion will be suitable for the readers in the 3 vol form” (19 March 1862, L27, UI). The conventional critical viewpoint on Wilkie Collins, as expressed by the poet Swinburne, is: “What brought good Wilkie’s genius nigh perdition?/ Some demon whispered—‘Wilkie!

Have a mission” (qtd. in Peterson 68). Thus Collins got into artistic dire straits when he decided to crusade rather than sensationally entertain. Ellen Wood, however, could happily preach, romance and commit bloody murder in the same novel.

This narrative method is exemplified in the two novels immediately following *East Lynne*, *Mrs Halliburton's Troubles* and *The Channings* (both set in the fictional cathedral town of Helstonleigh, based on her native Worcester). The pair are family sagas, telling of exemplary Christians who, despite trials, triumph through protestant ethics and hard work. *Mrs Halliburton's* problems are primarily financial, but fourteen chapters into the novel, mysteries appear, as well as a detective, one Sergeant Delves. A theme of the novel is snobbishness, and Delves is depicted respectfully and without quaint lower-class characteristics: he has an apparent fratricide to solve and acquits himself well. *The Channings'* detective Butterby is more of an incidental figure, as the novel is partly a school story, driven by such mundane mysteries as who spilt ink on a choirboy's surplice, and who abstracted a £20 note from a lawyer's office. They might seem storms in a provincial teacup, but Wood still makes them engrossing.

The reason why is her storytelling ability, primarily expressed in rigorously worked out plots resembling a series of spring traps that snare and hold the reader. These elaborate mechanisms are best displayed at novel length. Predating the rediscovery of *East Lynne* by feminist critics in the 1970s, the usual critical response to Wood was to favour the short story series of “Johnny Ludlow” over her longer works. Elwin commented, somewhat unfairly, that “there is no end to the critical strictures to be levelled against Mrs. Henry Wood as a novelist” (253). However, he was unable to fault her storytelling skills; as was Sergeant (253; 174). Her *DNB* entry declared that as “As a skilful weaver of plots she was not inferior to

Wilkie Collins” (Seccomb 827). Dorothy L. Sayers, in her Introduction to *Great Short Stories of Detection, Mystery and Horror* (1928), also extolled Wood as “a most admirable spinner of plots”, while commenting that she was “a little too fond of calling in Providence to cut the knot of intrigue with the sword of coincidence” (22). Interestingly, Wood’s “The Ebony Box” is the only nineteenth-century story by a woman reprinted in this collection, Sayers seemingly unaware of Braddon’s crime writing.

Her narrative constructions were worked out in great detail before she wrote a word, as Charles attests:

Having decided upon the main idea, she would next divide it into the requisite number of chapters [which] was then elaborated. Every incident was [...] thought out and recorded [...] She never changed her plots or incidents. Once thought out, her purpose became fixed, and was never turned aside for any fresh departure or emergency that might arise in the development of the story [...] The plot of each novel occupied a good many pages [...] It would take her, generally speaking, about three weeks to think it out from beginning to end.

The process sent her into a kind of imaginative trance:

During those times she could not bear the slightest interruption [...] She would be at all times in a reclining chair, her paper upon her knees; and the expression upon her eyes, large, wide-opened, was so intense and absorbed, so far away, it seemed as if the spirit had wandered into some distant realm [...]

It could take some time to gain her attention while she was in this creative state; and once disturbed: “the thread of her ideas once broken could very seldom be resumed the same day [...]” (“Mrs. Henry Wood” 343).

A supreme example of her clockwork plot machinery is the sequel to *The Channings*, *Roland Yorke* (1869). The novel is in part the story of its happy-go-lucky protagonist, his path from rags to riches. It is also the tale of a feud, in which an author literally dies of a bad review (a theme perhaps dear to Ellen Wood, whose work did not always enjoy good reception). However, the narrative from the outset is dominated by a classic detective puzzle, the mysterious shooting of the young lawyer Ollivera, though whether he was murdered or suicided is unclear. To solve this mystery, Wood re-introduces her *Channings* detective Butterby, this time a far more developed character, appearing in the novel from the beginning, and sustaining his investigation throughout. He achieves his end and discovers the truth.

What Wood does is set up the murder scene as carefully as if arranging a dollhouse, although she does not, as was typical of later Golden Age mysteries, include a plan of the premises. As the narrative progresses she introduces new and contradictory information so that the events of the fateful night are repeatedly re-evaluated. A lodger left the house at a later time than believed; an explanation is provided for the apparent suicide letter. In this motif of a holograph text in the victim's handwriting providing a found-object suicide note for the murderer, Wood anticipates and possibly influences a later crime author. “[W]hat the text [the suicide note] appears to say is not necessarily what its author intended”, notes Joel Black, in a recent analysis of G. K. Chesterton's Father Brown story “The Wrong Shape”. His comment is equally applicable to *Roland Yorke*. Black terms Chesterton “The first writer to work a significant variation on the theme of the problem-text introduced by Poe”, although his words are more appropriate with regard to Wood (81).

The novel also provides diversions in the form of other plot strands, including a second mystery, a missing banknote. Butterby investigates both crimes, which prove to be

linked. As the plot thickens, Wood presents a variety of possible suspects, with different reasons to hide or impede the truth. She first implicates, then clears the possible guilty parties, in a rigorous process of elimination. The novel ends with a posthumous confession by the murderer, his narrative turning the original murder scenario on its head.

Roland Yorke and others among Wood's novels represent elaborate constructs in which information is tightly controlled, with the suspense maintained by withholding then releasing vital scraps of information. Another instance of her skill is in *Within the Maze* (1872), where police repeatedly search a house for an escaped criminal, failing each time—though the man is clearly present. The reader does not learn until three chapters from novel's end the means by which he has avoided detection.

The best of her clue-puzzles are precursive of Agatha Christie. Indeed, the two have much in common, in their celebration of English bourgeois values, the countryside, and feminine domesticity. Both have been conventionally regarded as conservative, but prove rather more complex than they initially appear. Christie's texts have repaid Marxist and feminist readings (see Knight, *Form and Ideology*; Rowland); and although re-evaluation of Wood's writing has mostly focussed upon *East Lynne*, critics such as Dinah Birch have noted that the novel is "anxious and layered", and also the "sharp satirical intelligence underlying Wood's conservatism" (22, 23).

Some of this complexity was arguably intuited by Oliphant. She categorized Wood as a typical Victorian matron of the middle-class, encountered unexceptionally in the female social rounds: "She is Mrs John Smith, Mrs William Brown, Mrs David Jones" (645). Nonetheless Oliphant, an acute critic, expressed a certain unease, possibly based on personal acquaintance, if we read the following as autobiographical: "We have been intimately

acquainted with [Mrs Henry Wood's] outer woman as long as we remember. We know her to bow to, to call upon, to take tea with; [...]” (646).

The next word in the sentence, though is “but”, followed by a well-known French quotation: “*que diable allait-elle faire dans cette galère?*” (italics in original, 646). The line comes from Molière’s *Scapin*, and translates as “what the devil is she doing in this galley?” In the original play the words were spoken by a father informed his son had been kidnapped by Turkish pirates and spirited away to sea in their galley. It translates here as a statement of perplexity: no typical Victorian matron would have written best-selling Sensational novels. And in using this particular quotation, I would suggest that Oliphant quite deliberately refers the reader to its original context, with *Scapin*’s audience being aware that the father has been deceived.

Without salacious evidence to the contrary, Ellen Wood remains a genuinely good, and kindly Christian woman. She would appear to have zealously guarded her private life. If she had a wild imagination, it was diverted entirely into her work. It might be most fruitful to read Wood as exquisitely contradictory—perhaps as contradictory as Queen Victoria, the emblematic figure of her era’s femininity. Consider these facts. Wood was a frequent invalid, and yet she was one of the most productive women in Victorian letters, responsible for 300–400 short stories (C. Wood, *Memorials* 250) and forty books. In her focus on small-scale domestic crime and mystery she might be regarded as the inventor of the cosy, or with her amateur choirboy detectives in *The Channings* and other works anticipating Nancy Drew. On the other hand she can display a genuinely gothic and gory sensibility: “The Self-Convicted”, in its first and anonymous version, explicitly describes a murder weapon: “a thick, knotted stick, covered with brains and hair” (453). In its *Argosy* reprint (February 1872, 143–60),

which acknowledged her authorship, she amended it to the less disturbing “blood and hair” (148).

She was depicted by her son as a diffident housebound angel: as Wynne comments, “he works to present his mother as perfectly passive at all times” (65). Her letters to Bentley reveal a formidable businesswoman, however, alert to publicity opportunities for her work. Their correspondence displays her keen interest in sales-figures and book production. While seldom venturing outside the domestic sphere, she was a professional writer and later magazine editor for over thirty years. She created and maintained “distinct barriers between the writing and domestic areas of her house”, which Onslow terms an “unusual” feat (126). She was probably able to insist on the privacy due to her invalidism. Perhaps more than any woman writer of her era she ended in a position of complete control over her career, running a small business empire from her reclining chair.

She was conservative, intolerant of trade unions, as in the 1867 *A Life's Secret*, yet included many straight and sympathetic depictions of the working-class in her writing. She was a guardian of Victorian morality, who brutally punished Lady Isabel. Yet other women in her fiction, significantly from the lower-class, such as Afy Hallijohn in *East Lynne* and Emma Geach in *Dene Hollow*, fall without serious consequences: Emma bears an illegitimate child, yet at the end of the novel is married, respected and with the lease of a profitable inn. As a widow, Ellen Wood dressed conventionally in black, yet wore rich silk, “specially made for her in Lyons” and trimmed with “old laces” (C. Wood, *Memorials* 229).

Individuals with thoracic spinal curvature are liable to suffer problems with breathing. In her case, the spinal deformity also affected her heart. Several months before she died she wrote to Bentley: “How I wish I could be as I used to be! And especially in regard to never

being tired of work. I am not tired of the work itself now, never that, but I have not the strength to do it" (22 December 1886, L138, UI). She died in February 1887, the year of Conan Doyle's first success with Sherlock Holmes. Her monument, in Highgate cemetery, took an unusual form: red Aberdeen granite, a copy of Scipio Africanus' tomb in Rome, bearing words from Ecclesiastices, "The Lord Giveth Wisdom". For a convinced Christian woman to copy the memorial of a Pagan general seems in curious taste, although Charles Wood helpfully explains that both "were earnestly and unceasingly devoted to good purposes and [...] had the welfare of mankind at heart" (*Memorials* 320). Not only the modern reader finds the tomb vainglorious. Charlotte Riddell read a description of the memorial in the Anglican paper the *Rock* and wondered if it was a joke. "[I]t can't be", she concluded, for the *Rock* "never was guilty of such a thing" (qtd. in Ellis, *Wilkie Collins* 282). It is unclear who was responsible for the design, but given Charles' idealisation of his mother, he seems the likely culprit. If so, the memorial is his *Memorials* in stone, a red rather than whited sepulchre, enclosing the mortal remains of a woman less of a saint and far more interesting that Charles Wood would ever admit.

CHAPTER EIGHT

THE CASE OF THE MISSING SISTER-IN-LAW: ELLEN DAVITT

“There are some fools who will ridicule this noble creature, and call her a strong-minded woman.”

Ellen Davitt, *Force and Fraud* 58.

In the course of this thesis, the main focus of discussion has been the origins of crime and its writers in England and Europe. In the remaining chapters, however, it is proposed to participate in the greater diaspora of crime fiction, moving to the Australian colonies, and then to America. It will begin with a novelist, who, while she may have dressed like Queen Victoria, was not, like Braddon, a “Queen of the Circulating Libraries”. Ellen Heseltine, later Davitt, never published in book form during her lifetime. Only one of her serialised works, *Force and Fraud* (1865), was generic crime. Yet it was a skilful and accomplished murder mystery novel, the first published in Australia.

For many creative women of the nineteenth century, literature functioned as an employment option that offered money without compromising domesticity, for it could be performed within the home. To open the pages of contemporary magazines is to encounter a host of forgotten women authors. How many tried and failed at the enterprise is impossible to estimate. Ellen Davitt perhaps wrote for only three years, and is therefore a bit player in what Maio terms “a rich heritage of women’s mystery fiction” (“A Strange and Fierce Delight” 94), though her work shows that she could have been a major contender.

Like countless other crime-writing women of the nineteenth century, who might be termed “mute inglorious Christies”, Ellen Davitt disappeared from the history of detective fiction. Indeed, her vanishing act was threefold, for although her writing comprised a

significant early contribution to the literature of the country to which she emigrated, Australia, it was quickly forgotten there; and she is also absent from the biographies of a famous writer, a relation by marriage. In the latter case it is possible to speculate at a deliberate effacement, given that the author concerned, Anthony Trollope, Fanny Trollope's son, was a well-documented eminent Victorian. Fanny Trollope may have been overshadowed by the career of Anthony; but Ellen Davitt, a sister of Anthony's wife Rose, has been totally occluded.

The fact that Rose Trollope had a novelist elder sister escaped even the scholars documenting the visits of Anthony to Australia, where his son Frederick also settled. Had this information not been noted in the pages of a regional newspaper, the *Kyneton Observer* (9 January 1864, 2), which was subsequently indexed, the connection between Trollope and this intriguing, contentious woman might never have been known. Why, one wonders, did she vanish from Trollope's history? Writing was a trait or trade for the Trollope extended family. Fanny and her children were authors, as were in-laws, with even Rose Trollope trying her hand at fiction. Yet Ellen Davitt, who produced at least five magazine serials, was only rediscovered as an author in the 1990s.

The ability she showed as a mystery novelist is intriguing, given Anthony's low opinion of the genre (and possibly also of his mother's crime work). To its methods he was technically in opposition, firstly because his own work was character, rather than plot-driven. He claimed he never knew, when he began a novel, how it was going to end, unlike his good friend Wilkie Collins, whom he described as plotting his works forwards and backwards before writing a word. They gave Trollope "no pleasure", because "I can never lose the taste of the construction" (*An Autobiography* 160, 159). He also had no interest in creating a puzzle: "I abhor a mystery," he claimed in *The Bertrams*, adding that he had "no ambition to

surprise my reader" (146).

We can thus guess his attitude to *Force and Fraud*; he may even have disliked his sister-in-law as well. She had a knack of making enemies, even after her death. Among them was J. Alex Allan, historian of the Melbourne Model School, where Ellen and her husband Arthur were from 1854–9 respectively founding Principal and Superintendent (of females). This institution was the centre of secular schooling, both teaching and teacher training, in the colony of Victoria, and consequently their positions were powerful. Allan is scathing about Ellen Davitt, categorizing her as “the power behind the throne”, with a “faculty of fault-finding” and “a certain harshness, priggishness, and overbearing self-esteem” (*The Old Model School* 64, 21). The last withering phrase has been repeated; it appears in the *Australian Dictionary of Biography*, which notes her as an educationalist only (Eunson 35). Victor Crittenden, whose Mulini press reprinted *Force and Fraud* in 1993, commented: “Just imagine a woman in the 1850s daring to have a high opinion of herself and her capabilities” (*Australian Nineteenth Century Literature in Print, Broadsheet* 2).

Thanks to the archives of the Victorian Education Department, far more is known about Ellen Davitt than her sister Rose. Letters reveal a woman confident in her abilities, possessed of great determination and initiative. In her skirmishes with the Education authorities she fought like a terrier. What might have given her such strength of personality is unknown. Certainly the facts of her biography—her father apart—seem unexceptional. She was born in Hull, Yorkshire to Edward and Martha Heseltine, a couple who were first cousins, and was apparently their eldest child. Her exact birthdate is unknown but she was baptised on 4 March 1812 (Groundes-Peace 1). The family were at that time Anglican, although by 1821, when their fourth daughter Rose was baptised, they had become members of the dissenting Unitarian sect. Rose conformed to the Church of England upon marriage to

Trollope. Ellen went further, becoming a Roman Catholic—something which may explain her virtual absence from the Trollope family records.

Little is known of Martha Heseltine, but Edward was a bank clerk, rising to manager of the Sheffield and Rotherham Joint Stock Bank in 1836. He seems an extraordinary character, self-made yet with the (assumed) eccentricities of an aristocrat. His dress was dandified, and he collected art, with a dealer's eye for good work. He also had a puckish sense of humour. The following sounds a joke, yet it appeared in his obituary:

During the panic in 1825 an old woman in the crowd of applicants for gold at the bank counter became very noisy. Mr Heseltine looked pleasantly at her, and said, "Hold your tongue, my good woman, we are preparing sovereigns as quickly as possible." He had ordered a quantity to be made extremely hot. These he shot from a shovel in the old woman's hands: down they fell on the floor. He then desired others to step forward for change; but the fever was abated by this application of heat, on the principle of homeopathy, "Like cures like." A little time was gained by this expedient, and more substantial aid was procured. (*Sheffield Times* 24 November 1855)

Martha Heseltine died in 1841, and Edward remarried in 1842 to Charlotte Platts, daughter of the Unitarian divine and author John Platts. Charlotte was younger than Ellen, and within a year of the marriage she had produced a son, Edward's first male child. The five children of his previous marriage had all been female.

It can only be surmised that Ellen, as the clever daughter of a family without sons, one which furthermore belonged to a sect with a high regard for intellectual ability, received a better education than most girls of her era. She described herself as "a lady both by birth and education" (Victorian Public Record Series [hereafter VPRS] 892, Unit 32, Special Case 525,

74/31997). In another document she stated that she had:

Studied under Masters in England, spent some time in fashionable schools in Paris. The Sacre Coeur was one of them. Might have taken out a Diploma but for circumstances that prevented a longer stay in Paris [...] have [illegible] honours in History, Modern Languages, Composition, and Elocution. (Special Case 525, 74/9448)

The above certainly indicates a “ladylike” education. However, her statement that she was a “lady” by birth is arguable, as she was 24 when Edward Heseltine became a bank manager, thus acquiring “gentlemanly” status, and the “Esquire” suffix. “It always does take three generations to make a ‘gentleman’”, notes a character in Anthony Trollope’s 1882 story “The Two Heroines of Plumplington”, referring to the town’s bank manager (909). Heseltine, as the son of a clerk, lacked “background” and a public school education. A Rotherham contemporary called him a “chevalier of the old school” (qtd. in Glendinning 131), but he was not a knight, gentlemanly by inheritance, nor his daughter—strictly speaking—a lady.

Ellen’s “ladyhood” would therefore appear to be an elaboration, similar to the Frenchified version of her name that appears on her husband’s death certificate: “Marie Hélène”. Allan gives her name as “Marie Antoinette Hélène Léontine” (21), although she was simply baptised Ellen. Like her father, as she rose socially, she reinvented herself. Allan wrote that she came from an “old St Heliers family”, but on what basis is unknown (“Victoria’s Educational Pioneers” 6).

She may have been working in education even before she met Arthur Davitt, from Drogheda in Ireland. They married in Jersey in 1845, when Ellen was in her thirties, a late age for a woman to wed in Victorian England. Davitt was at the time a Professor of Modern Languages at the Sorbonne in Paris. Little is known about his background, and like Edward

Heseltine he may have been a self-made man, rather than one of inherited fortune—records show him to have been touchy about his status.

It seems the Davitts spent the first years of their married life in France. By 1847 they were back in Ireland, where Arthur Davitt was appointed an Inspector of Schools. Ellen taught drawing in the Model School for Girls in Dublin from 1851–4. This modern employment pattern, with husband and wife both working outside the home, was probably due to the marriage being childless.

The Davitts' lack of children was a factor in their next career move, to Australia. In 1853 the Commissioners of National Education in Victoria wrote to the Irish National Schools Board, requesting they recommend a Principal and Superintendent for the new Model School in Melbourne, preferably a married couple without family. The Irish authorities recommended the Davitts.

For various reasons a trip to the Antipodes would have been attractive, the first being family troubles. Edward Heseltine had retired from his Yorkshire bank in 1852 at the age of 72, for reasons of ill-health, and after his departure it was discovered that he had embezzled thousands of pounds. For much of 1853–4 Heseltine and his second family played cat and mouse with the bank authorities, flitting around England. He was well enough to travel, yet when cornered by two of the directors, showed physical prostration and “such pressure on the brain as to impair his faculties so that attention to the Rotherham books at present was impossible” (qtd. in Glendinning 224). The Heseltines finally decamped to France, most likely to avoid arrest, and Edward died at Le Havre in 1855. His will named his second wife as sole benefactor, though she was left penniless, the bank understandably declining to pay Edward's pension. Yet his legacy to his eldest daughter is undeniable—he was the source of her interest in art—and also her awareness that crime could involve not only force, but also

fraud.

Another probable reason for the Australian move was that Arthur Davitt had tuberculosis. The disease was imperfectly understood at the time, but sea air and a warmer climate were thought to be efficacious. Indeed, in the 1850s a trip to the antipodes was an established treatment (Thomas and Gandevia 3). Davitt would not have believed he faced a death sentence, though the disease had already killed three of the Trollope family.

It was an eventful journey. The Davitts had to change vessels, since the steamship *Great Britain* soon developed engine trouble (VPRS 880/44/54/427). They took the clipper *Lightning* instead, whose captain was James Nicoll Forbes, a man intent on breaking sailing speed records (Clark 266, 275, 281). During the Davitts' voyage he nearly lost the *Lightning* on the desolate Kerguelen Isles. The incident is recorded in the surviving journals of the passengers and also *Force and Fraud*, Davitt's account being so detailed that it suggests she too kept a ship's diary.

If she had, it would have been interesting to read her version of a dispute noted by the diarist John Warren Whittings:

This evening we had by way of amusement to some of the passengers as they must have something to pass a way the time a fight between two men cabin passengers, I call them men because I cannot call them Gentlemen with any truth and justice to that title, Mr. Davitt and a Mr. Robinson Mr. D. called Mr. R. a liar and pulled his ears also promised him a good kicking a Mr. Swift wanted very much Mr. R. to fight Mr. D. at 12 paces with pistols I offered the loan of a case but Mr. R. said he could not think of risking his valuable person in a fight with such a man as Mr. D. it lasted about an hour and caused great fun to some of us. (Whittings, 25 June 1854)

The Davitts' tenure at the Model School was to be even more fraught than the voyage. To

begin with, the political background of the establishment was complex and unpleasant. Two bitterly opposed systems of education existed in the colony of Victoria, the religious schools, controlled by the Denominational Board, and the National Board of Education, which was in charge of secular schooling. The Model School was intended as an exemplar of the secular system, its superiority shown by the building being an architectural landmark. Certainly the School was imposing in appearance, yet despite great expense the building was jerrybuilt. Leaks and faults were evident even before completion.

In addition, the place was an administrative nightmare. Arthur Davitt was expected to run an Infant School, separate schools for boys and girls and a Teacher's training college in the one building. In order to conform to Victorian notions of propriety, the male and female students, whether teenage or adult, as in the case of the teacher trainees, had to be kept strictly segregated. Moreover, the National Board of Education was under the same roof and was the real power in the establishment. Any disputes among the school staff, and some of them were over matters as petty as 4lbs of butter (which Ellen Davitt was alleged to have appropriated), had to be referred to the Board, in writing.

In the Victorian world-view, the male dominated the public sphere, the woman the private and domestic. Ellen Davitt transgressed these boundaries. She was a woman prominent in public life; as Superintendent she was in control of all female pupils in the school. The position was subordinate to her husband the Principal, but the Davitts were a team— Arthur's letters to the Board frequently included the phrase "Mrs Davitt and myself." Thus, while Ellen was a loyal wife, she was not in the background: she had opinions and was ready to express them, for instance suggesting changes to the architectural plans of the School (Burchell 41–2).

The Education bureaucrats with whom she dealt, used to a female ideal of submissive

modesty, would have found her challenging, and threatening. Certainly J. Alex Allan thought her insufferable. His antipathy towards Ellen would appear to have its source in the Model School records preserved in the Public Record Office of Victoria. Yet a re-examination of these many documents does not show Ellen Davitt as a termagant, and one wonders whether Allan was overly influenced by a former Model school pupil, who recalled that she “copied Queen Victoria in her style of dressing and deportment, wearing a shawl, folded cornerwise, around her shoulders [...]” (*The Old Model School* 21).

Did Allan construct from this anecdote a woman, like Victoria, who was not amused? His phrasing while recounting a (typical) breach of the School’s fraternisation rules, is significant: “One can fancy the shocked prostration of Mrs. Davitt when the Matron, Mrs Berkeley—who also acted as duenna to the lady trainees—flew to her with the news” (*The Old Model School* 40). This comment is fanciful indeed, for there is no surviving evidence of what Ellen Davitt thought and did on the occasion. Her husband, though, felt that the Matron was “giving this matter more importance than it deserves” (VPRS 880 57/2320). It can be deduced that Ellen agreed with him, for the archival record shows the Davitts supported each other unconditionally.

The students, in return, complained of the Matron, one stating she had described Mrs Davitt as “fit only for an actress” (VPRS 880 56/1497). Ellen Davitt could be theatrical—it is recalled that when “she appeared at the door of one of the girls’ class-rooms, all work ceased and the class rose and stood in awed silence till she had ‘sailed’ majestically through the farther door” (Allan, *The Old Model School* 21). Yet the regal Mrs Davitt could be also be friendly—a group of female trainees spent three evenings in her apartment, on the final night exiting in such high spirits that the Matron indignantly reported their “complete insubordination” to the Board (VPRS 880 57/826).

Nobody else in Allan's history is described with the odium of Ellen Davitt. Moreover his evidence is nowhere near as strong as that regarding her temperamental husband. Arthur Davitt complained, for instance, that his deputy, Patrick Whyte, had grossly insulted him by leaving the "Esquire" off Davitt's name on an envelope—thus implying that the Principal was no gentleman. Whyte retorted: "in all my experience I have never been associated with a man with whom it is so difficult to act harmoniously" (VPRS 880 57/429, 57/478).

Even without Davitt's illness, the Model School would have been enough to drive a healthy man to distraction. Relations with the Board, and with staff, steadily deteriorated throughout the late 1850s, until the school was a model of nothing but bad temper and administrative muddle. It was at this point that the political climate of Victoria changed, with the goldfields boomtime declining to a recession. The supporters of the denominational system saw their opportunity, and in the name of cost-cutting, slashed the budget of the National Board of Education.

There were thus insufficient funds to run the Model School in the style to which it had been accustomed. The Board abolished the teacher training program and also the positions of the Davitts. They were given the option of continuing at the school for one final year, at reduced salary, or being discharged with the sum of five hundred pounds, a half-year's salary. The couple chose the latter, although they felt the compensation was inadequate. Ellen typically signed the discharge form under protest, asserting her "right of appeal to another and a higher tribunal" (Victorian Parliamentary Papers 1859–60, *Mr. and Mrs. Davitt*, 5–6). Subsequently, with the support of the politician James Grant, she appealed to the Victorian Parliament for further compensation, which was refused (*Argus* 28 September 1860, 5).

Several months after the dismissal she opened the grandly titled "Ladies' Institute of Victoria". This school was advertised as being open to boarders and day pupils and offering

evening classes “for ladies qualifying for governesses” (*Argus* 30 April 1859, 8). It appears to have been very much along the lines of the Model School, and the venture was to prove equally ill-fated for Ellen. The education market was overstocked, with “[n]early 700” women advertising girls’ private schools in the Melbourne *Argus* from 1850–75 (Theobald 34). Most of these establishments quickly failed, as did Ellen’s Institute, apparently taking with it the Davitts’ severance pay.

Arthur had gone to Geelong, for the sea air, where he died on 24 January 1860. He was buried in the Eastern Cemetery, Geelong, in a handsome monument whose design is attributed to his wife (Allan, *The Old Model School* 67). Fifteen years later, the memory still enraged Ellen—she referred to Arthur’s death as “murder” (VPRS 892, 75/38834). She also alleged: “I will boldly say that from the moment that notorious bigot, Sir James Palmer, knew that my husband was a Catholic, he made every attempt to deprive him of his office [...] and being unable to find a fault—the office was abolished” (VPRS 892, 75/38607).

The politician Sir James Palmer was President of the Victorian Legislative Council (1856–70), the Chairman of the National Board of Education, and a prominent Anglican layman. That he was anti-Catholic is not elsewhere stated and would seem to be disproved by the fact that Patrick Whyte, who like Davitt was a Catholic, became headmaster of the Model School in 1863. However, Whyte’s practice of his religion was pragmatic. The fervency or otherwise of Arthur Davitt’s beliefs is unknown, but they are not particularly noted in the Model School’s archives.

Ellen Davitt was controversial in the colony of Victoria’s education system; her brief involvement with its art was similarly unhappy. In 1857 she was hung in the Victorian Society of Fine Arts’ first exhibition, with a painting of Saint Cecilia (now lost) for which several girls at the Model School posed (Allan, *The Old Model School* 21). It was clearly

large but also over-ambitious. The critic “Christopher Sly”, alias Dr James Neild, declared it “a tremendous thing for a lady to do, but it had much better have been undone [...] please, Mrs. Davitt, don’t do it any more” (8). He was kinder to the two other women exhibiting, although it should be noted that their work, being a copy and miniatures respectively, would have more suited the conventional view of women’s abilities.

Undeterred Ellen continued her artistic interests with a public lecture at the Melbourne Mechanics Institute in April 1861, the topic being “The Rise and Progress of the Fine Arts in Spain”. It was the first of an occasional series over the following year, the *Examiner* describing her as “a lady whose name will doubtless be familiar to many of our readers” (“Weekly Miscellany”, 20 April 1861, 7), which indicates she was a public figure. The lecture was well-received, a vote of thanks being proposed by the writer Richard Hengist Horne. Nowhere was it commented that her speaking in public ill-accorded the prevailing ideal of feminine modesty. Anthony Trollope described the conventional objections against female lecturing in an 1877 letter to his friend Kate Field (herself a lecturer): “oratory is connected chiefly with forensic, parliamentary and pulpit pursuits for which women are unfitted [...]” (*Letters* 709).

In Australia she had precursors with Caroline Harper Dexter and Cora Ann Weekes lecturing at the Sydney School of Arts in 1855 and 1859 respectively. Indeed, Harper Dexter is believed to have been the first woman public speaker in Australia (Morgan 64). All three apparently felt the need to justify their public display, choosing to talk on women’s role, particularly heroines—as if acknowledging the courage needed for public-speaking. Harper Dexter spoke on “Woman’s Sphere and Woman’s Mission” (Morgan 64); Davitt on “Woman and her Mission”; and Weekes on “Female Heroism in the Nineteenth Century”. An anonymous journalist described Davitt’s lecture as an “essay in female heroism, which would

probably be the most appropriate title for it [...]” (*Hamilton Spectator* 2 October 1863, 2).

Differences were apparent in how each woman situated themselves with regard to the nascent “Women’s Rights” movement. Harper Dexter wore a modest Bloomer outfit (in 1851 she had lectured on and in this radical costume in Britain, and sparked outrage). She argued for better female education and a role beyond the domestic sphere (“Mrs. Dexter’s Lecture” 4). Weekes also appealed for better female education *and* employment. However, her “species of “Woman’s Rights”” (321), excluded such male pursuits as law or the armed forces (321, 323). Davitt was reported as similarly denying “all sympathy” for “woman’s rights” activists seeking female participation in “the pulpit, the bar, and the healing art [...] such matters might well be left to man” (*Argus* 13 May 1862, 5).

She may have been the most cautious or conservative of the three, if correctly reported by the *Argus* as asserting that “the domestic circle was women’s legitimate sphere”. However, the opposition newspaper, the *Age*, described her lecture as an: “exposition of the capabilities of the sex not only to perform their domestic and lowly works, but also, when called upon, to play a conspicuous part in the world’s history, as shown by the high position they had taken in literary, artistic, and even political life” (13 May 1862, 5). And a devout believer in women’s inherent domesticity would not have lectured professionally. It was something she could do well, as this report on “Women and Her Mission” showed:

Mrs. Davitt’s lecture [...] is a literary work of great ability, displaying a large acquaintance with history and both English and foreign literature. The style of composition too is both easy and pleasing, and the extracts remarkably well chosen. The lecturer whose delivery is effective and pleasing was repeatedly applauded in the course of the evening and, as far as we could gather, the audience were generally well pleased, both with the subject and the manner in which it was treated.

(*Hamilton Spectator* 2 October 1863, 2)

The texts of her lectures have not survived, but from their titles—“The Influence of Art”, “Colonisation v. Convictism” “The Vixens of Shakespeare”—it would seem she was positioning herself as a “public intellectual”. Such was extraordinary, given her gender, the contemporary bias against women orators, and the frontier society of colonial Australia. Moreover, she did not stop within the confines of the Melbourne Mechanics’ Institute. After a spell teaching in the town of Portland under the National School System, in 1863 she ventured on a lecture tour of country Victoria. No other contemporary woman in Australia is known to have attempted the feat. It was during her tour that she revealed the Trollope connection to a newspaper journalist, something which was *not* “frequently noted”, as the *Dictionary of Australian Artists* states (Kerr 200). Fortunately Anthony Trollope had yet to publish *He Knew He Was Right* (1868), which included a highly unflattering portrait of a female lecturer. The comparisons could have been embarrassing, particularly if Ellen had carried out her plan to return to Europe in the role of lecturer to prospective emigrants (*Creswick and Clunes Advertiser* 23 October 1863, 2).

The tour, though receiving favourable press, was not a financial success, for Ellen Davitt was never again to perform as a lecturer. That avenue of employment closed, she turned to literature, no doubt with the Trollope family example in mind. Her brother-in-law wrote of women authors in his 1870 short story “Mrs Brumby” that “With the pen they hold their own, and certainly run a better race against men on that course than on any other” (640). The story though, concerns a female writer without discernible talent—unlike his sister-in-law. However, the description of Mrs Brumby as “indignant, defiant, and self-confident” does fit Ellen at her most contentious.

Her first known work, “Edith Travers”, has not been located, but “Force and Fraud”

was the lead serial in the first issue (2 September 1865) of the *Australian Journal: a Weekly Record of Amusing and Instructive Literature, Science and the Arts*. The archives of this magazine (hereafter *AJ*), which ran until the 1960s, have been lost; all that is known of Ellen Davitt's work comes from the magazine itself. She was clearly a staff and star writer: "Force and Fraud" was followed by two more novel-length serials, "Black Sheep", "Uncle Vincent", and a novella, "Past and Future". All appeared in the first year of the journal.

Ellen Davitt apparently published only in Australian magazines, although a fellow-writer at the *AJ*, James Skipp Borlase, did make the leap to English magazine, and then book publishing. Given her abilities, and the Trollope connection, Ellen Davitt should have reached a wider market. As evidence on Trollope's relations with his sister-in-law is lacking, it is unknown whether he assisted her. The only time she seems to have advertised their connexion was in the *Kyneton Observer*. The possibility exists that for personal reasons the Trollope literary gateway was closed to her.

Force and Fraud, as stated before, is the first known Australian murder mystery novel. Because of its origins as a penal colony, crime content was found in Australian literature from the beginnings; generic crime fiction form, though, as demonstrated in *Force and Fraud*, came later. Content and form did not begin to coalesce until the 1850s, the era of the—sometimes lawless—goldrushes, when interest in Australia was intense, an auctorial selling point. Expatriate John Lang (1816–1864), the first Australian-born writer, combined crime matter with the detective in his novel *The Forger's Wife* (1855), set in convict-era Sydney. The novel was vigorous and realistic, most notably in the (secondary) character of the thief-taker George Flower, an Antipodean Vidocq, based on a real-life Sydney identity, Israel Chapman (Keesing 86). However, the work was more of a picaresque adventure than a formally structured detective mystery, Flower getting his results by guile and violence rather

than deduction. Yet its precursive nature was recognised, albeit unofficially, when the novel was excerpted uncredited as part of a detective serial in the *AJ* (see Chapter Nine) in 1865.

Another example of early Australian crime writing, the 1857 novel *Les Voleurs d'Or*, was written by Céleste de Chabrillan, wife of the French consul to the colony of Victoria. She had personal experience of crime, having as a teenager experienced jail for being in “moral danger” (Clancy and Allen 4). She subsequently became a prostitute, courtesan, circus performer and dancer, featuring in a Thackeray sketch (see Sussex, “Strangers on a Train”), and eventually marrying into the French aristocracy. Her sensational memoirs (*Adieux au Monde*, 1854) proved a best-seller, and she followed them with a first novel in *Les Voleurs d'Or*.

The novel tells of an English family and their adventures in the goldfields; it is melodramatic and violent, with crime content, but lacking the mystery plot structure. It was successful in France, with Alexandre Dumas a fan and enthusiastic reviewer (qtd. in de Chabrillan, 182), and also was adapted for the stage. However it was not translated into English, and in Australia, despite the local content, it would have only been known by Francophones. It took over a century for the work to appear in an English-language, and Antipodean edition, in 1970, as *The Gold Robbers*. The novel was described in its cover blurb as “Australia’s weirdest literary curiosity”.

On 26 January 1865 the first known Australian example of the detective story appeared, published in the supplement to the provincial *Hamilton Spectator*. “Wonderful! When You Come to Think of It!” was a sprightly parody informed by Poe and the casebook genre, with a detective fiction fan becoming an amateur sleuth. The author was named as “M. C.,” whom Nan Bowman Albinski (1) has identified as almost certainly the young Marcus Clarke, later to become famous with *His Natural Life*. In that novel’s original serial version

(in the *AJ* 1870–2, Clarke editing the magazine 1870–1) it partook of the murder mystery structure. “Wonderful” was followed by “Experiences of a Detective” by “E. C. M.” (*Australasian* 11, 18 March 1865, 2–3, 2) equally generically casebook crime and narrated by a police detective, though less lively than “Wonderful”.

More detective stories and even full-length crime narratives would appear a few months later, in the *Australian Journal*. The magazine was modelled, both in design and content, on the *London Journal*, a popular periodical specializing in romance and melodrama serials. Yet the *AJ* differed from this formula, in that someone on the staff had a strong interest in the emergent genre of crime fiction—possibly its founding editor, George Arthur Walstab, later a translator of Gaboriau (Campbell, *The First Ninety Years* 51).

More significantly perhaps, Walstab was a former cadet policeman. During the years 1852–4 the colony of Victoria had deliberately recruited upper-class young men as mounted cadets, the idea being the creation of an elite force, future officer material. Walstab’s experience may have led him to see the potential of fictionalising the police of Victoria, for the problem of police class so apparent with English writers thus could be avoided. Though the notion of a ‘gentlemanly’ police more or less came unstuck though lack of promotional opportunities for these former “military officers, lawyers, bankers and students” (Haldane 25), it did represent a goldmine for crime writers.

The *AJ* opened with installments of both the first Australian detective series, comprising short stories (see Chapter Nine), and of Ellen Davitt’s serial *Force and Fraud*. The second issue introduced another serialised novel of crime, Robert Whitworth’s *Mary Summers: a Romance of the Australian Bush*, featuring David Turner, “the best, sharpest, and most wary officer in the detective force” (47).

The origins of *Force and Fraud* are unknown, but some guesses can be made. Ellen

drew upon the experience of her near-shipwreck en route to Australia, and the novel's background (much of the action taking place in an outback hotel) most likely derives from her lecture tour. As regards literary influences, the "sensation" novel surely informed her work and her time in France would have exposed her to writers of crime fact and fiction. However, the novel's crime romance is most reminiscent of Fanny Trollope's *Hargrave*, though Davitt is a tighter plotter. Yet, these possible influences apart, *Force and Fraud* can be viewed as a genuine original, well ahead of its time and literary context, as a plot summary demonstrates.

The novel begins with an artist, Herbert Lindsey, who has been courting Flora McAlpin, heiress of the wealthy Mount Alpin station. Her father Angus is opposed, and in chapter three he is found murdered in the bush. Nearby are clues: a scrap of Lindsey's handkerchief and his knife, both bloody. Lindsey claims the blood came from an injured bushman and he used his knife to cut the handkerchief into a bandage. As *Force and Fraud* predates forensic testing of blood, his story cannot be proved. The corroborating witness is also elusive, and Lindsey recalls only that he was a Gaelic-speaker and had a large dog.

This narrative is interspersed with another plot thread concerning Pierce Silverton, Angus McAlpin's agent. Silverton is a highly-respected young man, seemingly supportive of the lovers—but Davitt subtly shows him in a very different light. While in town, Pierce resides with the Garlick family, whose daughter Bessie purloins small objects and obliges the owners to purchase them back at charity bazaars. She thus regards an old-fashioned Scotch snuff-box in Pierce's room as fair game; Pierce reacts with alarm. At the bazaar, the snuff-box is bought by Mount Alpin employee Andrew Ross, who recognises it as "the laird's". Thus follows a richly comic scene between Pierce and Bessie:

Violently lively young ladies are sometimes too fatiguing for the nerves of delicately organized young gentlemen; therefore it is no wonder that Pierce did start a little, but

the next moment he recovered sufficiently to take the damsel's hand in his own, and to say, "My dear Bessie." She thought the offer was coming at last, and therefore bent down her head in the most becoming manner. But in vain did her eyes seek the dusty floor—the offer did not *yet* come, although, "My dear Bessie" was repeated. Thinking this a prelude, she remained silent; and at length Pierce said in a faltering tone, "I have something to ask of you, my dear girl."

If silence means consent, consent should imply something definite, and Bessie Garlick, being a practical young lady, at last thought the gentleman, having forgotten his own part, was acting hers, namely, silence; so to give him his cue, she said, "Well?"

To which he replied, "Bessie, you and I have been friends for a long time."

"Yes—yes," murmured Bessie.

"I have a favour to ask of you—a great favour."

"Well—what is it?"

"That—you will not talk about that snuff-box."

"Hang your trumpery snuff-box." (76)

Here Davitt is playing a game of clues and red herrings, for Pierce has an alibi for the murder. However, concerning Herbert his motives are murky. McAlpin's will disinherits Flora if she marries Herbert, and she only receives half of his property unless she weds Pierce, who adores her unrequitedly. The obstacle is Herbert; and so Pierce does everything possible to get him hanged. Yet, as the accused man is popular, Pierce is obliged to be subtle in his villainy, and thus not fully effective.

In her trial scene Davitt shows a sense of courtroom dramatics "worthy of Perry Mason", as lawyer and crime writer Kerry Greenwood has commented in her back cover

endorsement of Mulini's reprint.

[...] although the learned barrister [for the defence] was talking most eloquently, he was talking *in vain*. Presently a piece of twisted paper, stuck on a pole, was handed to him over the heads of the crowd; he read it, whispered to the judge; and at that moment a great clamour was heard without. There was a rush towards the building—a shout. Mr Roberts re-entered, accompanied by Andrew Ross, and followed by a stranger, holding a large dog by the collar. The animal seemed more accustomed to the lonely forest than to a crowded court, for he barked rather savagely, looked around him, and then, with one bound, leapt into the dock, and licked the hands of the prisoner. Two or three people were upset, and so was a considerable amount of legal etiquette, as the stranger addressed the judge, jury, counsel and crowd promiscuously, and to little purpose it was supposed, for he spoke in a tongue unknown to any of those learned gentlemen, versed as they might be in the classics; but Andrew Ross, interpreting his native Gaelic, exclaimed, "It's Evan Gillespie, the bushman, an' he'll take his Bible oath that he crossed the bit o' plain wi' the puir lad, an hour or mair afore the laird had left Mount Alpin!" (91)

Herbert is acquitted, but a shadow still hangs over him. The lovers decide to wed after a year, and as Flora will be penniless, Herbert seeks painting commissions in another colony. While he is absent, Pierce tricks Flora into believing that Herbert has been unfaithful; out of spite she agrees to marry Pierce. He is only thwarted by the reappearance of McAlpin's real murderer, when Pierce's net of treachery is finally revealed. The novel ends with, as Davitt comments: "the power of the man of *force* having been destroyed—the arts of the man of *fraud* rendered unavailing" (139).

A comparison with Whitworth's *Mary Summers*, which immediately followed *Force*

and Fraud in the *AJ*, is useful here. Whitworth's novel is of a similar length, has crime content, and even an efficient detective in the shape of Turner (which Davitt's novel lacks, falling back on a series of amateur sleuths *à la* Crowe). Turner is introduced as if the reader is already familiar with him, which suggests that he may have been a continuing character from a previous Whitworth serial, or that *Mary Summers* comprises merely the Australian section of a longer work. Yet, as editor Victor Crittenden notes of the book: "It is not as successful a murder mystery as *Force and Fraud* [...] as it does not focus on or have dropped into the story in a regular fashion the clues to the murderer" (Introduction). The significant difference is in form, *Mary Summers* utilising an episodic two-stranded narrative in which colonial low-life eventually collides with the heroine's romance plot. The mystery structure does not dominate the novel; indeed is hardly used.

Force and Fraud amounted to less than 70,000 words, being thus between novella and novel in length. Its brevity would have militated against it being published in book form, the contemporary trend being for three-volume works. Because the text is so concise, hardly a word is wasted—an unusual feature in a writing age where fictional digressions and bombast were popular. It is as if Davitt has discarded anything not necessary to keep her plot moving; in this respect she is a forerunner of the crime novelists from the 1890s and early 1900s, when the three-decker's reign had ended, and shorter, one-volume works were published.

Ousby has commented that *The Moonstone* abandoned "the multiple plotting dear to the Victorian novelist's heart [...] the reader encounters for the first time in English fiction that world, now so familiar in modern detective novels, where all the apparently incidental details of the narrative are made to contribute to the final elucidation of the problem" (117). These words are also applicable to *Force and Fraud*. In *The Woman in White* and *Lady Audley's Secret* the villain was obvious, the suspense arising from how and why they

committed their crimes. *The Moonstone* has been hailed as innovative in its whodunnit novel plot—but Ellen Davitt preceded it by three years. She does lead the reader to believe the murderer is Pierce, a similar red herring being used in Seeley Regester's *The Dead Letter*, which was published in America only a few months later. Yet the true murderer periodically reappears in the text, each time under a different name—a device possibly deriving from Bulwer Lytton's *Eugene Aram*, and here used with considerable sophistication. Indeed, the killer makes a cameo appearance in chapter one.

Her other serials in the *AJ* are inferior to *Force and Fraud*, largely it seems because of time constraints. She was worked hard by the magazine, and *Force and Fraud* may be the only *AJ* serial that she had the time to craft and even revise (“Black Sheep” was so hastily written that the main character has two different names). They also tend towards melodrama rather than crime, although her last serial “The Wreck of the Atalanta” (serialized 6 April–20 July 1867) had mystery elements. The *AJ*'s editor described it as “certainly the happiest effort of Mrs. DAVITT'S pen, and we promise our readers a rich treat in its perusal” (23 March 1867, 479). To a modern reader, though, “The Wreck of the Atalanta” is interesting largely for its sympathetic portrayal of a battered wife. It is otherwise flawed, its mystery plot lacking the finesse of *Force and Fraud*.

After “The Atalanta”, something curious happened. Ellen had always proudly signed her works “Mrs. Arthur Davitt”, but now she became near-anonymous. “The Highlander's Revenge” (*AJ*, 31 August 1867) was the best of her short stories and a significant early fictionalization of European atrocities against Aborigines. It was attributed to “the author of Edith Travers, etc.” Shortly afterwards even this identifying tag-line disappeared from the *AJ*.

After 1868 it is impossible to trace Ellen's publications, although in September 1869 her name appeared in a list of contributors to the magazine (62). Yet she seemingly continued

writing or editing, for on an 1874 application form she coyly stated her profession as “Connected with literature” (VPRS Special Case 525, 74/9448).

There are several reasons why Ellen might have sought anonymity, one being the common Victorian popular fictional problem of authors writing in such quantity that they were responsible for whole issues of magazines. The usual solution was to assume a variety of pseudonyms to deceive the reading public: her *AJ* contemporary Mary Fortune, for instance, published under two pseudonyms *and* her initials in some issues of the magazine. Alternately, Ellen could have been receiving income from some source that necessitated concealing her writing, as appears to be the case with another contemporary *AJ* writer, “Robin Goodfellow” alias Thomas Harrison, whose day job was at the Victorian Patent Office (Sussex, “From Faery Sprite to Trilobite” 6–7).

Presumably for the next few years Ellen Davitt supported herself by journalism, until in 1874 she applied to rejoin the State Education system. Her object was to earn money for a return to England, where she would care for the children of a deceased sister in Edinburgh. (VPRS 892, Special Case 525, 75/35003). Ellen was sent to a school at Kangaroo Flat, near Bendigo, only to have her story repeat itself, becoming again a tale of bureaucracy, intransigence, and jerrybuilding.

The school consisted of two buildings, one brick, for the use of the male teachers and students, and for the females a weatherboard “lean-to”, as Ellen described it, “wet, ill-ventilated and dilapidated”. Conditions were so bad, she claimed, that “pools of water stood on the floor, and the chalk was literally washed off the black-boards” (VPRS 892, 476/26022, 1; 75/38834; 76/26022, 2).

The leaky classroom was not the only cause of stress. The Head Teacher, John Burston, had a bias against female teachers, and had wanted Ellen’s position, of first assistant,

for his brother Harry. Furthermore Ellen had not been given a teaching certificate, despite her previous experience and was being paid at the lowest rate of salary for her position. It seemed she would soon be dismissed, as both Burston and the school Inspector found her teaching unsatisfactory (VPRS 892, 74/27733; 74/31997; 74/24825; 74/30068).

However, events took a dramatic turn. A dispute with some parents in April 1875 led to an inquiry into Burston's conduct, which ended when Robert Farman, the Inquiry's Chairman, called Burston a liar. He got punched, both men grappling on the ground before being separated. Ellen supported Burston, commenting that her father Edward Heseltine would have "sent a bullet" through anyone doubting his veracity (VPRS 892, 981, 75/14078).

The hot-tempered headmaster was immediately suspended, and Ellen, as first assistant, was placed in charge. She was soon removed, due to the regulation that women were not to control schools of over 70 pupils, and Harry Burston, who had also behaved violently during the inquiry, given the position. Subsequently, to quote Ellen, there "was a vulgar affair at the Court-house" in Bendigo, with Farman suing for assault. Burston was fined 20s, ordered to pay costs, and subsequently transferred to Taradale State School, as its Head Teacher (VPRS 892, Special Case 525, 76/9591, 2; *Bendigo Advertiser* 4 May 1875, 2; VPRS 892, Unit 32, Special Case 529).

In early May 1875 Anthony Trollope, then visiting Australia, saw Ellen at the school. Ellen noted that "Mr. Trollope called on me", for an hour only (VPRS 892, Special Case 525, 75/20722). His account of his trip, published as *The Tireless Traveller*, describes a visit to the quartz mines of Bendigo, but does not mention Ellen. She neither appears in his fragmentary diary of his earlier Australian visit in 1871, nor indeed in any of his other writing.

Interestingly Trollope's closest Australian friend, George Rusden, knew Ellen from the

Model School, having then been on the National Board of Education.

Ellen's health gave way from the combined physical and emotional stress of Kangaroo Flat, and she was in a few months unfit to work again. As feisty as ever, she applied for compensation, arguing her case in phrases recalling the best of her fiction: "there is not a scullery maid in the Colony who would have stood to do her work in such a wretched place" (Special Case 525, 76/9591, 2). Certainly she had a case, which now would have been regarded as convincing. Her request was refused, though, on the grounds of the 1859 compensation.

Her situation was desperate, and she faced destitution. "I am a widow and stand alone", she wrote (Special Case 525, 75/38607). She kept determinedly applying for compensation, supporting herself by privately teaching "Drawing and languages" (Special Case 525, 77/43611). In November 1878, the Minister for Education declined to re-open her case. Thirteen months later, on 6 January 1879, she died of cancer and exhaustion, in Melbourne, within walking distance of the Old Model School.

There was probably just enough money to transport her body to Geelong, where she was buried beside her husband, but not enough to inscribe her name on the vacant side of the joint memorial. The omission was not rectified until 1993, when the Association for the Study of Australian Literature and the Melbourne Branch of Sisters in Crime jointly funded a plaque for the tomb. Crime writers, educational historians, and representatives of the Trollope family all attended the ceremony of dedication. Subsequently Sisters in Crime inaugurated an award for Australian women's crime writing: the Davitt award.

This chapter was called "The Case of the Missing Sister-in-Law", the allusion being to Anthony Trollope, a man whose life has been exhaustively examined by various biographers, none of whom discovered his connection with Ellen Davitt. Indeed, the sole

trace of Ellen preserved by the Trollope family was a sketch of Rose and Isabella as girls, ascribed on the verso: "This was drawn by an older sister, Ellen Heseltine". It was reproduced on the cover of Mulini's reprint of *Force and Fraud* (and also in Teresa Ransom's 1995 biography, *Fanny Trollope*). The sketch is the only surviving image of Rose Trollope as a young woman; as noted before, little is known of her. Much more can be gleaned about Ellen, but not from the Trollope archives. Her near total disappearance from the family history suggests an editing out of a certainly difficult, probably embarrassing but nonetheless notable relative.

Ellen Davitt fell down a crack in the Trollope family history; her small but noteworthy contributions to colonial art history were only recently rediscovered; and the undisputed fact of her work at the Model School was coloured by the bias of J. Alex Allen. As regards her literary heritage, her work was at times hurried and hack. Yet, with *Force and Fraud* she leaves a novel that was not only the first known murder mystery published in Australia, but an accomplished early "whodunnit", still readable and enjoyable today.

CHAPTER NINE

THE (FEMININE) EYE OF THE LAW: MARY HELENA FORTUNE

In the shade of a heavy bush at the opposite side of this still, deep waterhole, there was the faint outline of a crouching human figure, an outline so faint and so shrouded in the obscurity of the faulty plate, that very likely no eye but that of a detective would have observed it [...]

Mary Fortune, "The Dead Witness" 7.

By the mid-1860s women had written of detectives, female and amateur; some had even, like Braddon and Spofford, written about police detectives, with the latter privileging her Mr Furbush. Yet fiction narrated by the police detective, as with *Richmond* and the Casebook stories, was not a feminine accomplishment. Snobbery was one issue; and another was the difficulty of writing a voice so beyond the conventional womanly experience. However, in late 1865, it happened, in Australia, as part of a collaborative Casebook series by two writers, male and female. This chapter will examine the collaboration, which produced the first Australian detective series, and the mysteries behind its composition, appropriately—given the series' content—a whodunnit.

So, how came the first fiction, written by a woman, but with the detective centre stage, the privileged hero and narrator, to be written? An educated guess can be made. The date was September 1865, the setting the remote gold-reefing township of Jericho (now Wehla) in outback Victoria. A woman sat reading behind the counter of a general store, or at home, either likely to be a simple slab and bark hut, in her ears probably the sound of the crushing machines, as they pulverized quartz rocks to extract gold. Before her was more gold, opportunity: the first issue of a weekly popular magazine, the *Australian Journal*.

This reader was Mary Helena Fortune, a Canadian expatriate who had spent ten years

on the Australian goldfields, not an ideal setting for a woman with literary ambitions. However, she had achieved some publications in newspapers, including politically radical poetry. On the strength of her 1855 contributions—under her initials—to the poet's corner of the *Mount Alexander Mail*, "M. H. F." had been offered a job on the paper, something quickly withdrawn upon revelation of her gender. She recalled the incident in her memoirs, "Twenty-Six Years Ago", with amusement. When she arrived at the paper's offices with small child in tow, a journalist commented: "I can hardly credit it" (52). In goldrush Australia women journalists were so rare as to be anomalous.

The *AJ* would soon carry poems by "M. H. F." and "Waif Wander" (a new pseudonym, and one she was to use for the rest of her writing career). However, the fiction of the first issues provoked another response from *Fortune*. The magazine opened with the initial installment of Ellen Davitt's murder mystery *Force and Fraud*, as already noted in Chapter Eight; the first issue also included the anonymous "The Shepherd's Hut; Or 'Tis Thirteen Years Since", described as the memoirs of an "Australian Police Officer".

"The Shepherd's Hut" would inaugurate the first known Australian detective series. As such it deserves a synopsis. The story begins in Melbourne, 1852, with an unnamed detective intent on apprehending the bushranger "Dick the Devil" at the aforementioned shepherd's hut. He drives a gig, having an injury that prevents him from "crossing a saddle or walking very far", a plot device enabling him to give a lift to an old woman he meets on the road. When the moon emerges from cloud he notices that his passenger is a man in disguise, with a pistol in his pocket: "the deep wrinkles in the cheeks were skilfully put on with burnt cork and [...] the straggling locks of grey hair were the fascinations of a wig" (5). He arrests the miscreant; the horse bolts; lost, the pair wander through the bush. When they find habitation it proves to be a thieves' den, in fact accomplices of Dick the Devil, who just

happens to be the transvestite ...

By nineteenth-century commercial and literary standards, “The Shepherd’s Hut” was a successful story. It was reprinted under the name of its author, the *AJ* staff writer James Skipp Borlase, firstly in the popular English fiction magazine *Reynolds’s Miscellany* (27 January 1866, 92), then as part of his collection, *The Night Fossickers and other Australian Tales of Peril and Adventure* (London: Warne, 1867). The book was well-reviewed and had a number of editions pre-1900. Yet to a modern reader, the story seems coincidental and even silly; although featuring a detective it is essentially an action melodrama, with none of the deductive reasoning of Poe’s Dupin stories. While effectively written, in terms of style, it strains credibility that the narrator, despite his injured leg, can ride, climb, and run a quarter of a mile in “about five minutes” when escaping. The story ends with the providential arrival of the cavalry, literally, two mounted police troopers, and the promise of a sequel: “Thus ended my first adventure with the bushrangers of Victoria” (7).

It is difficult to tell whether readers of the *AJ* would have regarded “The Shepherd’s Hut” as fact or fiction. Certainly the *Athenaeum*’s reviewer neatly sidestepped the issue of authenticity: “Whether Mr. Borlase ever held in reality as well as in imagination a prominent place in the Melbourne police force, or whether [...] he merely makes bold use of one of the licenses permitted to writers of fiction, we do not care to enquire” (Jeaffreson 114). In his bibliography *Australian Literature*, E. Morris Miller listed *The Night Fossickers* in the fiction section, while stating it narrated genuine “experiences with criminals” (607)—which suggests he did not read the book closely. Modern crime readers perceive the text’s fictionality, but then they are informed by the subsequent and more sophisticated fare.

Mary Fortune was not fooled. Within a month she had sent the *AJ* a fictional response to the story. Although a woman, and thus excluded from the then exclusively masculine

world of the police, she had inside knowledge. Her second husband, Percy Brett, had been a mounted police trooper. Furthermore she had lived on the rough and sometimes dangerous goldfields, being acquainted, by her own account, with at least one murderer (“How I Spent Christmas” 185). Therefore she had authority, the edge to make her a writer in the fledgling crime genre.

It seems likely that as part of a game of literary role-playing, and to test the authenticity of her work, she submitted her fiction in police guise, for in the fifth issue (30 September) of the *AJ* the following notice appeared in the “Answers to Correspondents” column: “AUSTRALIAN POLICE OFFICER.—Your tale received many thanks; it will appear in an early number” (79). Fortune had already contributed to the magazine under two pseudonyms; now she added a third, cheekily borrowing the by-line used for “The Shepherd’s Hut”. However as her police narrator was not a city detective but, like Brett, a goldfields trooper, her “The Stolen Specimens” was printed as the work of “An Australian Mounted Trooper”.

In issue ten (4 November) the *AJ* announced that:

In number eleven will be continued the series of tales entitled “MEMOIRS OF AN AUSTRALIAN POLICE OFFICER”, which will be published alternately with the “ADVENTURES OF A MOUNTED TROOPER;” from the respective authors of “*The Shepherd’s Hut*” and “*The Golden [sic] Specimens*”. These narratives will be of the most spirited description, and embrace the most extraordinary adventures and perils that have characterised the history of the colonies. (156)

“The Shepherd’s Hut”, “The Stolen Specimens” and their sequels comprise a collection of eleven detective tales, all published anonymously. Whodunnit, or who wrote which story can be deduced from various evidence, much of it deriving from the stories themselves, exhibit A.

An exhibit B is Borlase's *The Night Fossickers*, which contained, besides "The Shepherd's Hut", six stories from the series.

The events of Fortune's life will be described in the following chapter, but the story of the man who was her literary partner in crime shall be briefly detailed here. Borlase was born in Cornwall in 1839, a descendant of "Dr Borlase, the celebrated Cornish antiquarian and historian". He claimed in an 1887 interview to have been first published at the age of nineteen, contributing to popular fiction papers while studying law ("Some Interesting Notes"). Borlase emigrated to Australia in 1864, and practised briefly as a solicitor in Melbourne.

He became familiar with the subject of colonial crime from a legal perspective—but saw another side of the law entirely when he was arrested for deserting his wife Rosanna in January 1865. Desertion was common in nineteenth-century Australia, being referred to as "Poor Man's Divorce", but unusually Rosanna soon had her errant husband back. An intercolonial police operation resulted in Borlase being arrested in Tasmania and ignominiously shipped back to Melbourne. He may well have done some fast talking, for the couple were reconciled before the case was heard, despite their stated "incompatibility of temperament", thus causing the charges to be dropped (*Argus* 25 January 1865, Supplement, 3). However, Borlase's reputation and consequently his legal career had been destroyed. He found new work at the *AJ*, writing prolifically in a number of hack genres.

The first issue of the magazine was produced by staff writers, notably Davitt and Borlase. Fortune soon joined them, with a crucial difference being that she was not an in-house writer. As a freelance contributor, geographically distant from the literary world of colonial Melbourne, she could not be rejected, accepted or edited in person. The medium the *AJ* favoured in their dealings with her was the "Answers to Correspondents" Column. A

typical communication rejected her poem "Excelsior" because it had been "previously published in the colony", but called it "very meritorious" (14 October 1865, 111). These notices provide a means by which Fortune's submissions to the magazine can be dated and traced—though its listings are not complete.

Borlase, Davitt, George Walstab and Robert Whitworth were all in varying degrees responsible for the unusually high amount of crime writing in the *AJ*. Yet they had no hand in "The Stolen Specimens" and its immediate sequel "Traces of Crime". The acceptances of these two stories were recorded in the "Letters to Correspondents", indicating that their anonymous author was a freelancer, such as Fortune. That she was the author is further indicated by similar fact evidence: the 500 crime stories she subsequently published in the *AJ*, mostly under the series title "The Detective's Album". The resemblance between these later texts and the two 1865 stories is marked. "Traces" and "The Stolen Specimens" initiate names, themes and motifs that were to recur throughout Fortune's over forty years of detective writing, such as sly-grogging, and the attraction between a young police trooper and a disreputable woman.

"The Stolen Specimens" consists of four interlinked narratives. The first strand tells of the unnamed narrator's attempt to prosecute sellers of illicit liquor; the second introduces Larry, one of the sly-groggers; the third his lover Ellen, a young mother sinking into alcoholism; the fourth the trooper's romance with Miss Mac, a shantykeeper. The trooper pays an informer to testify to the unlicensed sale of liquor, but he absconds before his court appearance. Later, the trooper's horse is stolen one night while he visits Miss Mac. It is returned with mysterious scratches on the saddle, from being used in a theft of gold-bearing quartz (the "specimens" of the title).

Suspicious of Larry, the trooper notices a scrap of ti-tree caught in his jacket; only one

patch of that scrub is found locally, and there the missing gold is found. Larry is arrested, but in the course of his trial, Miss Mac disappears with the money she has extracted from her “green downy-faced trap” (108) during the course of the affair. Almost as an afterthought, the narrative concludes with the humiliated narrator recounting the fate of Ellen: left alone, she goes insane, and hangs her baby.

This blend of ironic romance, police procedural, ratiocination and finally horror reads as beginner’s work—undeniably authentic but hesitant in execution. Its greatest success is the persona of the narrator, a man pragmatic and cynical, fond of self-deprecating humour. He addresses the reader directly and colloquially:

We, members of the police force of Victoria, are, I think, a little—a very little—less despised in this year of grace, eighteen hundred and sixty-five, then we were when I first donned the uniform twelve years ago.

I was a “Cadet” then, and now I’m a—; but I dare say you don’t care what I am, so I may go on with my adventures.

Well, then, although we may be, on the whole, a little more thought of than we were, I don’t know that we are any better off as a body.

No one can deny that we get less pay at any rate, and just as little thanks for our trouble; witness the names they called us about those bushranging affairs, but I suspect they will let us alone about *that* now.

Strange scenes during the licence hunting, eh? but it was nasty work that; work that I don’t like to speak of, nor is it necessary that I should.

There are many incidents connected with the force, quite amusing and interesting enough to relate without going back to the despicable days of the “traps.”

Poor devils, the name has stuck to them yet, and a sore point it is, I can assure you. (106)

Awkward though these initial cadences are, their staccato rhythms showing an author slowly writing herself into the trooper persona, they have conviction—the character is fully realised.

“The Stolen Specimens” soon gains momentum, the narration becoming more confident, even zestful:

This *other* shanty then, was kept with an air of respectability that did not belong to the calling, by a brother and sister; the brother digging during the day, the sister minding the house. The sister was—; bah! I needn't describe her. I thought her perfection in every way; and to make a long story short, fell over head and heels in love with her, making of myself the veriest spooney that ever disgraced the silver striped arm of her Majesty's blue police jacket. I saw the foolery of the course I was pursuing, but at last we settled it all comfortably thus. After a little time I was to resign, marry my inamorata, and keep a shanty myself for all I knew; nothing of that sort troubled me; only let me become the happy possessor of my angel, and everything else might go to old Nick, Her Majesty's police in the bargain! (107)

The arrival of this manuscript in the *AJ* offices would have been welcome. Borlase had been busy with a serial, the *Ivanhoe* pastiche “Galfried of Arlington”, and probably had not the time to write a sequel to “The Shepherd's Hut”. Now another author had supplied the deficiency. At this point the plan for two crime short story serials, “Memoirs of an Australian Police Officer” and “Adventures of an Australian Mounted Trooper”, was probably devised.

However, it was not a plan to which either writer particularly adhered. Borlase wrote, for the “Memoirs of an Australian Police Officer”, “The Shepherd's Hut”, “The Missing Fingers” and “The Madman's Tale”, but also in this series were “Traces of Crime” and

Fortune's "The Dead Witness", subsequently ascribed to her pseudonym "Waif Wander". And while the "Adventures of an Australian Mounted Trooper" began with "The Stolen Specimens", Borlase wrote two stories for it, "Pursuing and Pursued" and "Cambromatta Station". It would seem that the authors moved between "Memoirs" and "Adventures" at will.

Indeed, "Traces of Crime" was fourth in the "Memoirs" series, despite the fact that the detective was a goldfields mounted trooper, as was the narrator of "The Stolen Specimens". It is a fully developed detective story, beginning with a rape by a masked man. The victim is near-killed, but manages to describe the attacker to police. The appearance of the rapist—"had no whiskers, fair hair, was low in stature and stoutly built", with a tattoo on his arm—is sufficient for the narrator to trace a possible suspect (220). Disguised in the protective camouflage of a digger, he befriends "Bill", his quarry, to establish whether Bill is tattooed or not. The pair go mates, which in the context of the goldfields meant simply sharing a claim.

Reading this story in the full awareness of the author's gender, something unknown to the *AJ*'s audience, is to notice a number of ironies. Firstly, sexual assault was an unmentionable topic for a Victorian woman, and certainly censurable/censorable if she wrote, given the prevailing ideal of feminine purity. For Fortune, like George Sand, wandering the streets of Paris at night, male drag, literary or actual, permitted freedoms normally forbidden the female sphere. Secondly, the persona adopted by Fortune in narrating this story is itself a mask, disguise, as is worn fictionally in the story by the attacker and also by the detective—woman writer mimics detective mimicking miner. Thirdly, in writing from the viewpoint of the law, she appropriates male gaze: notably when the narrator turns Peeping Tom, cutting a hole in Bill's tent.

What he witnesses is Bill cutting a muddy boot into pieces. When Bill throws the leather scraps into the campfire, the detective retrieves them. He waits, like the elders in the

Biblical story of Susanna, for his prey to take a bath on Sunday—but Bill disappoints him.

Briefly emerging from undercover, the detective visits nearby police, to hear that the body of a man has been found by a flooded claim. The corpse is identified as the missing husband of a “young and decidedly good-looking Englishwoman of the lower class”. When asked if her husband had enemies, she recalls he had threatened to shoot a man who had been sexually harassing her (221).

The police drain the water from the claim, then “wash” the mud in it, the tools of goldmining applied to detection, with the goal nuggets of clues. They find two—a muddy boot, and a fragment of button. The first is the twin of the boot Bill shredded and burnt, and the latter can also be traced to him. This evidence is damning even without the tattoo, which would appear to have functioned as something of a red herring in the story, and Bill is arrested. He makes a full confession of both rape and murder.

The narrator comments: “Well, this does indeed and most truly look like the working of Providence” (221). That both boot and button should be Bill’s is a little too neat, and divine intervention becomes the explanation, the deity coming to the aid of his agent, the detective. The implication that the supernatural has solved the case is why Bill confesses. The detective calls him “superstitious”, but this description is ambivalent, given that there is no explanation how the body which Bill concealed *in* a waterhole was discovered *out* of it, other than that “God himself had permitted the dead to leave his hiding place for the purpose of bringing the murderer to justice” (222). In this story, Fortune, as she was to do in many later fictions; blends ghost and detective modes.

One further comment on this story. It is highly unusual for its era in featuring a serial sex killer as villain, for Bill confesses to “many other crimes of a similar nature [...]” (222). Though Jack the Ripper was to become famous in 1888, no other detective story of the

Victorian age contains such a character. Contemporary fictional prudery glossed over the fact that the nineteenth century was as full of bizarre sex crimes as our own, something very evident from even a cursory perusal of the popular press. In this, as in other matters, Mary Fortune was considerably in advance of her time.

Space has been given to discussing “Traces” and “The Stolen Specimens” because they began a long and significant career in crime fiction for Mary Fortune. She was, indeed, the first woman to specialize in the genre. However, these two stories were anonymous, not even being attributed subsequently to Fortune, as was her “The Dead Witness”, although the circumstantial evidence that they were her work is strong.

If we consider these fictions of felonies, as if summing-up for a jury, then we can note:

1. That the author of both stories was a freelancer (as was Fortune).
2. That she definitely contributed to the crime series only a few months later.
3. The similarities between these stories and her subsequent work.
4. That if Borlase, the other main suspect, was the author, he would have surely have reprinted the stories in *The Night Fossickers*.

However, to make absolutely sure, it was decided to submit the stories to forensic testing, specifically, forensic linguistics. Language is like a fingerprint or DNA, a unique marker of identity. Forensic phonetics, for instance, can identify an anonymous phonecaller through speech patterns that remain constant despite attempts to disguise a voice. Literary style is similarly quantifiable, at the level of grammar and word frequency. With the aid of Professor John Burrows of the University of Newcastle, Australia, both the “Memoirs” and “Adventures” series were put into machine-readable form, and compared to *The Night Fossickers* and subsequent crime stories definitely by Fortune (See Sussex and Burrows).

This testing was expected to prove that all the *AJ*'s crime series stories not by Borlase were Fortune's work. But the computer had some surprises in store.

The first was that while "The Stolen Specimens", "Traces" and the other stories suspected of being by Fortune did in fact strongly resemble her later crime fiction, they also had slight but unmistakable similarities to Borlase's texts. When all the stories were charted on a graph, the 1865–6 tales formed a group between Borlase and Fortune's subsequent fiction. Burrows suggested that Borlase might have been editing Fortune, something that would account for the grouping. Certainly Walstab was the first editor of the *AJ*, but it is not known how long he occupied that position. Indeed, Borlase would claim in 1870 to have been "for a long period editor" of the magazine ("Melbourne" 233), something the *AJ* disputed ("Our Whatnot" 219). However the evidence of Borlase's work on Fortune's early stories would suggest he was at least a sub-editor.

By March 1866 Walstab was editing his own magazine, the rival *Australasian Monthly Review*. That he left the *AJ* in late 1865 is supported by the text of the third in the "Adventures of an Australian Mounted Trooper" series, Borlase's "Pursuing and Pursued". When Stephen Knight read this story, he was struck by a sense of déjà vu. He turned to a text he had just put aside, "William Burrows" pseudonymous *Adventures of a Mounted Trooper in the Australian Constabulary* (London: Routledge, Warne and Routledge, 1859). The title of this book of colonial reminiscences, which includes some police experience, would appear to be the source for the *AJ* series title "Adventures of an Australian Mounted Trooper". Furthermore the similarities are more than title-deep. Here Burrows is describing the Mounted Trooper Headquarters in Melbourne:

On the right hand side of this gate are the quarters of the serjeant-major and the lieutenant in charge; on the left is the office of the inspector, and his residence; in

front, right across the square, are the stables for the troop-horses; and on the extreme right, the officers and commissioners' stable. At the rear of the stable the tents in which the men live are fixed; and on the left is a long wooden building, one end of which is the mess-room of the cadets, and the other is their sleeping room. The cadets are distinguished from the troopers by wearing a silver-lace band on their caps, instead of the ordinary white cloth band. (23–4)

Compare this text with the second paragraph of "Pursuing and Pursued":

Inside the outer gates, and, as well as I recollect, on the right hand side thereof, were the sergeant-major's quarters, together with those of the lieutenant in charge, while opposite them stood the residence and office of the inspector. Of the square itself, the extreme right was the officers' and commissioners' stables, and opposite were the stables for the troop horses, in the rear whereof were pitched the tents for the troopers, while close by stood a long, unsightly building which was divided into a mess-room and dormitory for the cadets. These said cadets rejoiced in a silver-lace band around their caps instead of the ordinary white one which distinguished the troopers. (235)

From the above, it is obvious Borlase wrote "Pursuing and Pursued" with a copy of Burrows' work open on his desk. Indeed, shortly afterwards two (credited) extracts from the book appeared as natural history fillers in the *AJ* (251, 310). The plagiarism is not a cut and paste job, as Knight comments: "Borlase has amplified Burrows' bare account with asides and qualifications [...] Things are made a little more vivid to match a first person narration [...] he has followed his source seriatim, merely amplifying it as he went [...]" ("Mounted Trooper" 4–5). Thus a colonial reminiscence that happens to include details of police life has been recycled into a fictional thriller.

What is odd about this plagiarism is that if Borlase sought authenticity for “Pursuing and Pursued”, he could have simply have mined the first-hand experience of Walstab, the former police cadet. By consulting the editor he would furthermore not have got the location of the police barracks wrong, in fact confusing it with the headquarters of the British military presence in colonial Melbourne. That Borlase put into print his inability to distinguish between the two forces does not say much for the *AJ*'s sub/editing.

Walstab, in his novel *Looking Back* (1864; serialised as “Harcourt Darrell” in the *AJ*) which draws upon his cadet experiences, footnoted a deviation from fact, considering: “This explanation [...] due to his old comrades” in the police (*AJ* 21 December 1867, 261). He clearly had some concern for accuracy. That Walstab did not correct Borlase’s error suggests that he had already left for the *Australasian Monthly Review*. Was Borlase temporarily left in charge of the *AJ*? And as such, did he edit Mary Fortune’s first crime stories? The fact that computer analysis positions these tales between Borlase’s own work and the later Fortune fictions cannot be explained otherwise.

The relationship between Fortune and Borlase can be seen as intimate and complex. They were both writing in the persona of fictional police, as if swapping masks. An instance of how closely they were working is the fifth in the “Memoirs” series, “The Dead Witness; Or, The Bush Waterhole” (20 January 1866). Fortune wrote this story, but her detective was James Brooke—the name Borlase had belatedly given his police protagonist in the second “Memoir” story, “The Missing Fingers”. It is possible that Borlase gave Fortune an editorial commission to write the story, using his detective. If so it could be another example of his borrowing, albeit by proxy: the central idea of the photographic blow-up had appeared in Harriet Prescott Spofford’s “Mr. Furbush” (April 1865), as discussed in Chapter Four. However, Fortune’s treatment of the blow-up motif contains rather more detection and less

coincidence than “Mr Furbush”; it is arguably superior.

The narrative begins with Brooke travelling to solve the case of a missing photographer, his surroundings described with a keen appreciation of the Australian bush. He examines the missing man’s photographic plates, left in his hotel room and discovers a suspicious image, which he enlarges until the subject is recognizable: Dick the Devil, the bushranger of “The Shepherd’s Hut”, but in this incarnation a surly shepherd. Disguising himself, Brooke becomes Dick’s hut-keeper and notes two suspicious things: that the shepherd’s dog is missing and that he also avoids a particular waterhole. Brooke surmises that the reason for the latter is guilt, correctly, as Dick had tethered the body of the missing man to a rock at the bottom of the waterhole.

Again, as in “Traces of Crime”, a hidden corpse arises from the deeps, but with far more melodramatic horror, and an attempt at a rational explanation: the underwater rope gives way and gases in the decomposing corpse bring it to the surface. At the sight Dick faints, and on recovery confesses that he killed the dog in a fit of temper, for which the photographer upbraided him. Dick swore vengeance, and it was while stalking his victim that he was accidentally photographed, without which there would have been little clue to his guilt.

The problem with this story in the context of the *AJ*’s series was that Dick had already been done to death in “The Shepherd’s Hut”. The mistake was not corrected—perhaps a deadline loomed. Geography would have complicated the writing relationship of Borlase and Fortune, with one author in Melbourne, another a hundred miles upcountry. Their project depended upon the mail entirely, and it is hardly surprising that errors occurred.

Another hitch is indicated by the second text (11 November 1865) of the “Adventures” series being “The Duel in the Bush”, an extract from John Lang’s *The Forger’s*

Wife (1855). The narrative was uncredited, badly edited, and furthermore printed with a spurious introduction implying it was true crime, not fiction: “In the story of ‘Life in Australia’, we find the following incident of George Flower, a famous mounted policeman, who was sent out to hunt up a notorious bushranger named Millighan” (172). Lang was in no position to complain—he had died the previous year.

Quite probably the mail from Jericho was late, or Borlase not ready, so Lang’s text was used instead. If Borlase was responsible for pressing Lang into the fictional service of the mounted trooper series, then this appropriation is a second illustration of his somewhat cavalier attitude to other people’s prose. This trait would eventually get him into trouble, with the *AJ* at least: the magazine would claim his contributions had “more than a mere ‘family likeness’ to ‘Ivanhoe’, and other obscure productions of an *unknown* Scottish baronet.” For the crime of plagiarising Sir Walter Scott, “the straightforward commercial men” of the *AJ* gave “*Mr. Skiplace* his congé” (“Our Whatnot” 219). It would appear that Borlase did not learn from his sacking, for he reprinted the Burrows theft in *The Night Fossickers*. Moreover, the collection’s title story contained a paragraph of goldfields detail lifted from Ellen Clacy’s 1853 *A Lady’s Visit to the Gold Diggings* (Ackland xxi). There are—at least—two other instances of literary theft in the book.

Plagiarism is like paranoia: a proven instance in the work of an author has the tendency to make all their other writing the object of suspicion, possible stolen goods. Borlase tended to borrow when he wanted specific knowledge—the 1850s mounted constabulary in “Pursuing and Pursued” and the goldfields as in “The Night Fossickers”. Yet he was not a simple cut-and-paster, sometimes incorporating his source material so thoroughly that only hints remain, such as the convict era Sydney described in “The Madman’s Tale”, which would appear to derive from *The Forger’s Wife*. In his own write, he

was a skilful, if hack, author of his era; yet he arguably learnt from Fortune in the area of deductive mystery. The stories he wrote for the *AJ* were adventure thrillers, depending on coincidence for their resolution, but in “The Night Fossickers” he makes use of clues—a lost, distinctive button, as in “The Stolen Specimens”, and Fortune’s goldfields settings. Literary influence can be noted here, rather than theft.

The relationship between editor and writer involves much give and take. However the take, in Borlase’s case, could involve helping himself to slices of his authors’ texts. Burrows and Clacy he had no dealings with, except as reader of their works. However, with two writers for the *AJ*, whose prose he apparently accepted, edited, then printed, he *did*—and in plagiarising their work, a breach of trust was involved.

The two (known) additional plagiarisms in *The Night Fossickers* occurred when Borlase was shaping his *AJ* crime material for book publication. The stories he had written for the magazine were not sufficient to fill a monograph, and he was obliged to write ten more. Cleverly, he shaped the narrative so that it formed both a series of crime fictions, and a colonial travelogue, his model clearly being Burrows’ *Adventures of a Mounted Trooper*. Thus, he appealed to several markets, crime readers, and those desirous of emigration information to Australia.

Like Burrows and Borlase himself, in *The Night Fossickers* Brooke conducts a leisurely tour of the Australian colonies, before returning to England, as Borlase was to do in 1869 (“Some Interesting Notes”). In imitation of Burrows’ last chapter, in which he describes his voyage home, Borlase wrote “Homeward Bound via Panama”. By coincidence, in January 1866 the *AJ* had printed an anonymous two part article, “From Sydney to England *Via* Panama”, describing a sea voyage during the 1850s. It was perfect source material for “Homeward Bound”, and Borlase used it as he had Burrows’ police recollections. He rewrote

the text slightly to suit his purposes, not fully incorporating it within his own writing, for extracts from “From Sydney to England” are clearly recognizable within “Homeward Bound”.

One further instance of plagiarism remains to be discussed. During the computer analysis of the stories, an anomaly appeared. The plagiarisms already noted did not show up within the context of Borlase’s larger work, because they were too small—a paragraph here, a paragraph there—to be statistically significant. But a more substantial plagiarism did. “Mystery and Murder” appeared in the *AJ* (10 February 1866) as the last of the “Memoirs” series and also in *The Night Fossickers*. However, when put through the computer, testing for features such as grammatical patterns and word frequency, it proved to be aligned not with the Borlase texts, but with Fortune’s stories. Borlase’s fingerprints appeared on the story, for he had clearly edited or revised it, as he had Fortune’s other narratives in the Casebook series. However its literary DNA was, very definitely, not his, though he had published it under his name, as if claiming paternity.

“Mystery and Murder” is set in Hobart, Tasmania, where an unnamed detective is visited by Mr Longmore, a wealthy merchant. Longmore has been plagued by what would seem to be a hoax ghost, and the detective decides on a stakeout of the merchant’s house. While they await the visitation, Longmore confesses the “ghost” resembles his wife, who had eloped with Cuvier, a sea captain, many years previously. The ghost appears; they follow it out into the grounds, which border the Derwent river, but near the shore it throws up its arms, falls on the ground and vanishes. The detective, seeing the spot of this dramatic exit has been disturbed, orders an excavation. Unearthed is a deal box, with inside it the body of Mrs Longmore, not skeletal, but recently dead.

An inquest results in an open verdict, and bills are posted for a reward, though no

information results for months. Then, the detective is approached by a young sailor, former crew from Cuvier's ship. He recalls rowing Mrs Longmore from the harbour to her husband's garden the previous year, she having determined to leave Cuvier and return home: "the captain told us to shove off again, and wait for him up at a tavern he pointed out along shore, saying he had a few words to say to the missus before he went, and then he gave us the price of a drink or two, and we went off, leaving him and herself sitting on the box that he said had the woman's clothes in" (378). The sailor had jumped ship that night, and never heard of Cuvier again. Neither does the detective, who is left wondering whether he *did* see a ghost: "it has remained a mystery to this day—a mystery into which I carried the closest investigation, without being any wiser by the inquiry" (378).

"Mystery and Murder" was distinctive among the *AJ* crime series for being the only story set in Tasmania, where Borlase had fled from his marriage. As the story featured a runaway wife, it could have been interpreted as an instance of authorial reversal, the not uncommon process of inverting real-life material when transforming it into fiction. But, when cast adrift from its putative author, "Mystery and Murder"'s elements—gory bodies, supernature vs rationality, the ambiguous power of feminine sexuality—are far more Fortune's preoccupations than Borlase's.

It remains unknown why Borlase appropriated this story. His editor at Warne may have demanded extra material in a hurry, to bring *The Night Fossickers* up to length. Borlase had, as previously noted, no aversion to helping himself to others' prose. "Mystery and Murder" was the most substantial of his thefts, and also the least disguised, with not even a change of title, locale, or plot. But then, who outside the *AJ* would have known that "Mystery and Murder", published anonymously like the rest of the crime series, was not Borlase's work?

The story of "Mystery and Murder" is a mystery that on one level forensic testing solved: whodunnit was Fortune. But any other evidence concerning the snatching of this body (of words) is not forthcoming. What happened is conjectural. It is possible that some transaction occurred between Fortune and Borlase. Stephen Knight has suggested to me that as Fortune had written stories for Borlase, presumably under his direction, and using his characters, he may have regarded her as his ghostwriter. John Burrows wondered if she never knew; or knew, but could see no means of redress; or whether she regarded it as "recompense for his editorial labours on her apprentice work" (Sussex and Burrows 91). Moreover evidence has recently emerged that Borlase may have been acting in 1868 as a packager and agent for other writers, including Fortune, which suggests the pair were on good business terms (Sussex, "Bobbing Around").

One further irony regarding the story. In 1986, Cecil Hadgraft published an anthology, *The Australian Short Story Before Lawson*. During his research he read both *The Night Fossickers* and Fortune's one book, *The Detective's Album* (1871). He comments in his introduction on both Borlase and Fortune, appreciating the former for his "sheer readability" (18), but not thinking much of the latter. Yet the story he chose to reprint was "Mystery and Murder".

CHAPTER TEN

“AND BIGAMY, SIR, IS A CRIME”: MARY FORTUNE

You must have led an unhappy and roving life, to know how hard it is to be still, and to go quietly through the world like the people—the tame nothingness people around you.

Mary Fortune, “The Bushranger’s Autobiography” 34

The previous chapter examined the collaboration between James Skipp Borlase and Mary Fortune. They created the first Australian detective series, but the partnership lasted only a few months, ending in 1866 with Borlase’s departure from the *AJ*. He would return to England and a career writing for popular fiction magazines, ranging from children’s publications to thrillers. Fortune would remain in Australia, and with the *AJ*, for over forty years. Her subsequent career will be the subject of this chapter.

Mary Fortune would write over five hundred detective stories, not only the most extensive Casebook series known, but the longest-running crime series of the nineteenth (and early twentieth) century, from 1867–1908. Yet until recently she was a complete unknown. The following is certain, but other facts in her life remain obscure: Mary Helena Wilson, c.1833–1910, born in Belfast, Ireland. She emigrated to Quebec, Canada, where in 1851 she married Joseph Fortune. In 1855 she emigrated again, to Australia, where she married policeman Percy Brett in 1858. She had two sons.

Fortune was an enigma because she published under the pseudonyms of “Waif Wander” and “W. W.”. She shunned publicity and even in her lifetime it was noted that: “her very name is shrouded in mystery [...] no one knows who she is or where she lives [...]” (487). These comments were made in an 1880 article by journalist Henry W. Mitchell. Yet,

perhaps deliberately, his subject's real name appears within his text, as if encoded: "[I congratulate the proprietors of the AUSTRALIAN JOURNAL on their good *fortune* in having so gifted a writer on their staff" (487, emphasis mine). Mitchell may have been punning; but his silence is typical of Fortune's contemporaries. If people knew her, they did not say so, at least in print.

"I am sorry that I am not in a position to place before my readers full details of the life and work of this popular author", Mitchell wrote, adding "I do not think that I ought to bring her forth from her obscurity [...]" (487). This phrasing is curious, hinting at constraint. Mitchell refrains from an opportunity for investigative journalism, bringing his subject into the public gaze. The question arises: why?

It was conventional for nineteenth-century women writers to use pseudonyms, at least until the popularity of the work thrust the author into the spotlight: the Brontë sisters were "Currer, Ellis and Acton Bell" and the American feminist journalist Sara Parton "Fanny Fern". However, none of these authors wore such a thick veil of secrecy as did Mary Fortune. She lived and died totally unknown to her readers, with not even an obituary in the *AJ*, in which most of her work appeared, to mark the end of her prolific career.

As a consequence, Fortune was very nearly lost to his/herstory. Like "Andrew Forrester Jr", she would be a complete cipher, with even her gender uncertain. Were it not for book collector John Kinmont Moir (1893–1958), her real name would remain a mystery. Moir became interested in "Waif Wander" during the 1950s, within forty years of her probable death date, when people who knew her were still living. Yet he had considerable difficulties finding her, as is evidenced by the "Waif Wander" file he compiled, now housed with his collection at the State Library of Victoria.

Moir appears to have begun by acquiring one of the rarest items in Australian

bibliography, *The Detective's Album*, a collection of stories reprinted from the *AJ*. It was credited to "W. W.", the abbreviation of "Waif Wander" used for her crime fiction. Although both pseudonyms were gender-neutral, the author had published some autobiographical writing in the *AJ*, which revealed that she was female. These texts consisted of lively journalism from the 1860s–70s (which include early examples of the flaneuse, or female flaneur) and the 1882–3 memoir: "Twenty-Six Years Ago; or, the Diggings from '55", which covered the years 1855–7. In the latter she gave her initials as "M. H. F."

Moir donned the deerstalker of literary detective and set out to discover who "Waif Wander" really was. At issue was a question of literary primacy: *The Detective's Album* was published in 1871, predating Anna Katharine Green's 1878 *The Leavenworth Case*, then thought to be the first detective fiction by a woman. Moir wrote to the *AJ*, but drew a blank. Older members of staff recalled the contributor, but chiefly as a drunk. Ron Campbell, the magazine's editor and historian, wrote Moir a letter which contained some intriguing details of the writer's last years, but no name.

Moir then apparently tried another tack. In the early 1900s some poems by "Waif Wander" had been printed in pamphlet form, and one, "In Memory of a White Dove", was dedicated to "Mrs. W. R. Furlong/ Hon. Sec. The Australian Literature Society", an organisation to which Moir belonged. He was able to obtain some holograph poetry manuscripts and also a letter to Mrs Furlong c. 1909, signed M. H. Fortune. However, though the pseudonym had been penetrated, the writer herself continued to elude Moir. He apparently gave up the chase after failing to locate her death record. Curiously, when and how Fortune died still remains a mystery.

In the 1950s crime writing was barely respectable, feminist study of literature non-existent, and Australian popular fiction quite beyond the pale. Perhaps nobody but Moir

would have bothered with “Waif Wander”; and certainly his discovery was not given the publicity it deserved. It was noted in bibliographies, such as Frederick Macartney’s extension of E. Morris Miller’s *Australian Literature* (1956) and the various editions of Hubin. The former states that *The Detective’s Album*, by “Mrs Fortune”, was the “first book of detective stories to appear in Australia by the first woman writer of such tales” (477), as if hesitant to claim pioneer status for Fortune worldwide.

Otherwise the attribution seems to have attracted little attention, with Fortune effectively being forgotten, not once, but twice. Cecil Hadgraft in *The Australian Short Story Before Lawson* (1986) queried the connection between “Mrs Fortune” and her pseudonyms, even her gender (24). H. M. Green, in his authoritative *A History of Australian Literature* (1961), even suggested that a “Waif Wander” story might be the work of Marcus Clarke (1: 293). Yet, though Moir’s detective work might have been overlooked, its significance was undeniable: he had cracked the pseudonym, the crucial piece in the “Waif Wander” jigsaw.

By 1987, some thirty years later, when I was assigned “Waif Wander” as a research puzzle, women’s crime writing had become a subject of serious study. In addition, records not available to Moir were now accessible: the boom in family history had meant that newspapers and other documents from colonial Australia had been microfilmed and indexed. Therefore, when reading “Waif Wander’s” memoirs and journalism, if something checkable was mentioned, it was possible to follow a hunch through a maze of microfilm.

Fragmentary as the autobiographical writing was, it could be read as a detective story, the object being to “chercher” the unknown woman writer. And this was a process which, to a certain extent, she herself initiated. “Waif Wander” seemed perfectly aware of the curiosity she provoked, hence her self-reflexive practice of throwing the reader the occasional tantalizing crust, or clue, such as her initials. Even when writing out of her usual crime mode

she made the subject—herself—a mystery.

That said, the memoirs and journalism were not an open book. Considerable discursive constraints operated within the texts: firstly that they were pseudonymous, by an author who would not or could not reveal her identity; and secondly, the confining notions of Victorian feminine decorum. The generic rules of nineteenth-century journalism might be thought to be equally restrictive, Dickens and Sala, for instance, being far removed from the confessional self-indulgence of a Hunter S. Thompson. There were, however, alternate models available, such as Fanny Fern, whose world-wide popularity included being reprinted in the *AJ*. Fern addressed her readers directly, in a relaxed conversational style—as did Fortune in her journalism. She was also initially as enigmatic as Fortune, using the cover of her pen-name to satirise members of her family, settling some bitter scores. For her the mask of a pseudonym was liberating, a license to speak freely, be emotional and opinionated—something not normally permitted Victorian women in the public sphere.

Fortune seems to have noted and profited from Fern's example, being in her article "How I Spent Christmas", informal and chatty in style, hidden yet self-revealing, personal and intense:

And the next was Christmas morning; a promising morning too, with no indications of hot wind in it, and I rose with about as rebellious a heart as it was possible to encourage in a human breast. *I* didn't want to go out holiday-making, and I had no idea where *to* go and holiday-make if I had the inclination; nevertheless, out I *must* go, for I am simply flesh and blood, you see, and ordinary flesh and blood could not be expected to endure the vicinity of a regular family Christmas gathering without feeling its own loneliness a hundred times more.

(171)

The memoir is a complex document, intended originally as travelogue rather than autobiography. “Waif Wander” stated it was based on notes taken for the English magazine the *Ladies’ Companion*, which had commissioned her to write about the Australian goldfields, then of intense public interest. Therefore its focus is on the writer’s surroundings rather than being self-revealing. It is also quite obviously and fictionalized, with a considerable admixture of crime melodrama.

By the time “Waif Wander” wrote up her notes, she had been an author of detective fiction for nearly twenty years. Perhaps for this reason crime and its solutions figure largely in the memoir; the impression is created that life on the goldfields was as full of bloody incident as a television police drama. But then, so were contemporary newspapers such as the *Maryborough and Dunolly Advertiser*, which covered the Avoca goldfields area where Fortune lived, and indeed devoted an editorial to her future husband’s exceeding of his police duties. To read the *Advertiser* is to see Fortune’s memoirs and fictions of the rough rush life verified: crime, whether petty (theft or sly-grogging), or major (murder, sexual assault), appears frequently, as does sudden, violent death, through mining accidents, suicide, or childbirth.

“Twenty-Six Years Ago” is a problematic document, its fiction and fact being not easily distinguishable. However, despite the memoir’s inherent unreliability, some genuine leads emerged. “Waif Wander” stated that she and her “first-born” son arrived in Melbourne in late 1855—shipping records noted that a Mrs Fortune and her son George, aged two, had indeed disembarked in October 1855. She mentioned that she had then advertised for her “uncle”, one “James Grieve” (not the eponymous apple) in the *Argus* newspaper. As she subsequently referred to “Grieve”, a goldfields storekeeper, as “Uncle Barry” and her child calls this aged man “dear old Daddy”, we may suspect a/ deliberate obfuscation and b/ the

memoir was written at a speed permitting no revision of mistakes (5, 17, 46, 29). It was certainly true that she advertised in the *Argus*, but the message was addressed to a George Wilson (5 October, 1). There is no mention anywhere in the memoir of the child's father, nor anything about her marital status. Such a stance was highly unusual in the Victorian era, given its obsession with feminine virtue. Travelogues by contemporary women writers, such as Anna Jameson's 1838 *Winter Studies and Summer Rambles* and Ellen Clacy's *A Lady's Visit to the Gold Diggings of Australia, in 1852–3* (to name two works which Fortune is likely to have read) situated them, on the title page, as Mrs Jameson and Mrs Clacy, respectively. Even an author publishing anonymously, such as "A Lady", author of *Life in the Australian Bush in 1841*, repeatedly mentions her husband.

Waif Wander's omission renders her uncategorizable; a floating signifier. It also creates an inevitable anxiety or prurient curiosity as to what sort of woman—wife, widow, surely not fallen?—was concealed behind the veil of the memoir. Occasionally she offers a sop of formidable respectability, as when she attends the Free Presbyterian church. Though she mentions "the old happy Canadian life" (19), the comment is throwaway, with no indication as to why she travelled to Australia. A young woman and toddler journeying thousands of miles to join an elderly male relative implies some catastrophe, such as the death of her husband. But nothing in the memoirs indicates Waif Wander *was* a widow, except that it was the most conventional explanation as to why she came from Canada to Australia.

However, she was not a conventional Victorian woman, being already, though young, a lady of letters. Within a short time of her arrival, she was published, not in the *Ladies' Companion* (their rates were too low, she considered, given goldfields expenses), but in the *Mount Alexander Mail*. Another newspaper she mentions writing for, the *Buninyong*

Advertiser, is now a ghost; indeed the further she went upcountry, the more difficult it became to link real events with the memoir. She describes at least one genuine murder, at Kangaroo Flat in late 1855, but a comparison of her account with the report in the *Mount Alexander Mail* reveals she fictionalized the incident considerably. In fact as the memoir progresses the text degenerates into melodrama, giving no further information about the author. Rather than having a formal closure, such as a marriage, or a return home, it stops abruptly, a worked out fictional claim.

Yet, when read in conjunction with the journalism, a nugget of information emerges, in the shape of a discrepancy between memoir and the article “How I Spent Christmas”. This piece tells how Waif Wander and a companion, whom a close reading shows to be her son, spent Christmas Day 1868. The boy was described as never having seen a ship before, therefore he could not be young George Fortune, a seasoned world traveller. In that case, where was the “first-born”? Did his absence from the Fortune family Christmas mean that he had died?

A search through the death indexes for colonial Victoria revealed that Joseph George Fortune, aged five, had indeed died of convulsions (meningitis) in early 1858. He was buried at the remote goldfield of Kingower, a rush mentioned in the memoirs, although the narrative breaks off before this destination is reached. The death record supplied valuable information, for it stated the child had been born in Sherbrooke, Quebec, his parents being Joseph Fortune, a surveyor, and Mary Helena Fortune. For the first time Waif Wander’s full name was revealed.

One son had been found, but the other proved more elusive. As he was not mentioned in the memoirs, it seemed a reasonable supposition he was born subsequently; but consulting the 1858–65 birth indexes for Victoria under the name Fortune did not uncover the child.

The possibility arose that Fortune had remarried. The marriage indexes were therefore examined, to reveal an October 1858 wedding between Mary Helena Fortune and Percy Rollo Brett, a mounted policeman stationed at Kingower. Such a union had seemed likely, given “W. W.”’s knowledge of police procedures—and now it was proved.

The certificate of Mary Fortune’s second marriage was a curious document, revealing much, yet hinting at further mysteries. It did provide information as to her relationship with the mysterious George Wilson, who was named as her father. She gave her birthplace as Belfast, Ireland, though “How I Spent Christmas” also noted she had Scottish ancestry (183). In it she stated she was a widow, but did not give the date of her first husband’s decease, nor list any children, living or dead—although the form specifically left space for such information to be disclosed.

Moreover, her signature differed from that used on George Fortune’s death certificate, baptismal certificate and the Moir letter: being backwards instead of forwards slanting. These anomalies aroused the suspicion that she was attempting to disguise her handwriting and concealing her marital history. There was at least one definite lie on the certificate, for examination of Percy Brett’s police record showed he had upped his age, being only 20, instead of the 24 listed. His bride was stated to be 25.

The lucky chance that Brett had an exact namesake grandson, both living and of some prominence, meant that his subsequent history could be traced: he left the police force several months after his marriage and by 1866 was a poundkeeper in the colony of New South Wales. That year he eloped with and married a Mary Leek, from whom Percy Rollo Brett II was descended. The certificate of this marriage did not mention a previous Brett union at all.

Divorce in colonial Australia was costly, rare, difficult—and it did not happen in the Brett-Fortune case. Bigamy, the not uncommon alternative, was indicated, but who was the

bigamist? If Fortune *had* emigrated to Australia as a widow, then the Kingower marriage was legal; if not, then that marriage was invalid and Brett free to marry again. The truth only emerged when relatives of Joseph Fortune were able to establish that he remained in Quebec, dying in 1861 (Porteous), three years after Mary had married Brett.

Divorce in nineteenth-Canada was dependent on the various provincial statutes, with the strictest being Quebec, where Catholic convention and the patriarchal Napoleonic Code applied prohibitively. The Fortunes, being Protestants, might have been able to end their marriage by petitioning the Quebec legislature. Alternately, it is possible that they obtained what was known as a migratory divorce, crossing the border to sue for divorce in the more legally liberal American states. However, at issue was the custody of the infant Joseph George Fortune. Canadian women in the nineteenth century tended to retain custody after marital breakdown only if they had support and shelter from male relatives (Backhouse 167, 187, 203). Mary Fortune was an only child, her father having emigrated to Australia, and she was very young. Did she leave Joseph Fortune, with him consenting to their only child being taken to the other side of the globe? Such seems unlikely: Fortune was an only son, from a family which had enjoyed some local prominence in Quebec. The most likely explanation is that she simply took her child and ran—a facilitating factor being that her husband, as a surveyor, would have been away from home for long periods. Furthermore the Fortunes lived close to the American border, where Canadian law would not apply. If so, it was a brave and very unusual step, for what would be a most unconventional Victorian female biography.

A woman separated from her husband in the Victorian era, let alone absconding with their child, was on the margins of polite society. Further marginalisation likely occurred when Fortune gave birth to a second son in Australia, November 1856. The birth occurred within the period covered by “Twenty-Six Years Ago” but the memoirs elide her pregnancy and the

new baby. The birth registration certificate named the father of the child as Joseph Fortune, something impossible. Although the baby was some eight months old at the time of registration—in Kingower, June 1857—he had neither been named nor christened. Again, the curious backwards signature appeared on the document, as it did on the Brett-Fortune marriage certificate, though not on the death certificate of little George Fortune, which occurred in between these events. This second child grew up to be Eastbourne Vaudrey Fortune, known as George, an individual very familiar to the police in Victoria between 1871–99, indeed spending much of that time firstly in Industrial, then Reform school, then in prison for crimes including robbery under arms (VPRS 515 P000, Unit 29, 279).

Such scandalous material provides an explanation as to why Waif Wander was so determinedly anonymous: she had secrets that could potentially threaten her livelihood as a female author. In England, George Eliot and Mary Braddon had been able to maintain their careers despite marital irregularities; but they had supportive menfolk, while Fortune, in her 1860s journalism, depicted herself as a solitary, and indeed, self-supporting individual. She boasted that her tea tasted all the better because “I have earned every penny of the money that bought it myself”, adding “God bless ye all, my dear friends, and grant me continued independence!”—an unusual, even eccentric wish for a Victorian woman (“How I Spent Christmas”, 187).

What’s in a name? Fortune initially published in the *AJ* as “M. H. F.”, as she had in the *Mount Alexander Mail*, before assuming the curious pseudonym of “Waif Wander”. From “How I Spent Christmas” it was clear this was a self-description:

My strange lot has almost been like that of poor “Topsy” [a character from *Uncle Tom’s Cabin*], who believed she “growed”, as I never knew either mother or sister

or brother; but I never *did* feel so utterly lonely and thoroughly a “waif”, as I did in this great city of yours on Christmas Day. [...] *I* am choking; my face is paler than its wont, I know, and my knees tremble; there are big tears in my eyes, and my heart has got the pain of long ago in it. Would you know the reason? Read it in golden letters on the stern of that stately vessel, it is but a simple word, but it is the name of “home”.

A home lost fifteen weary years ago—a home where Christmas did not find a lonely wanderer, but an envied member of a happy home, where the shadow of death had not yet fallen. (167, 172–3)

Elsewhere, in the article “Towzer & Co”, she repeatedly used the word “waif” in reference to a stray dog, a pathetic mongrel bitch, the Co. of Towzer, a terrier. The two dogs represent a paradigm of Victorian gender relations, “little Nameless” clinging to Towzer like ivy to oak, a metaphor then commonly used to describe the relationship of the sexes. “Waif Wander” feels some sympathy for her fellow “waif”, recognising “slavedom” as a feminine survival option. However, as an independent woman, she finds Nameless annoying: “But however one may try to admire the idea of a dependant and helpless femininity, one must rebel at times, for the honour of the sex, against too abject an exhibition of it, even in a dog” (215–6). She even gives this dumb animal some advice:

So fully do you now believe in Towzer, who condescends to extend his sceptre to you, and to permit you to bask in the light of his august countenance (weak little “Co.”), that you do not hesitate to follow in his wake, assured that whatever he does is right; but you must act upon “your own hook”, little Nameless, if you wish to become independent of Towzer and the dogman. (217)

The waif dog and the waif woman had more than gender in common; one was “Nameless”

and a stray, the other concealed her name, choosing a pseudonym whose two words—“Waif” and “Wander”—both had the connotation of homelessness. It was an odd choice of nom-de-plume for a woman in an era where femininity was identified with domesticity. Perhaps it was precisely this separation from the women’s place, the home, that she denoted. In another article, “Our Colonial Christmasses”, she referred to herself as a rolling stone, a term that implied a footloose, bohemian *masculinity* (256). Furthermore, Waif is a legal term, signifying among other things lack of ownership—and a woman without a legal owner in the Victorian era was single, beyond the control of husband or father. And to delve into the dictionary even further, waif also has the meaning of outcast, which for a woman in Victorian society usually meant loss of virtue.

Whatever the reason for the pseudonym, it denoted a prolific writer of multi-generic talents. Fortune began her association with the *AJ* as a poet, then contributed goldfields stories and romances. In 1866–7 she wrote three serialized novels for the magazine, starting with “Bertha’s Legacy”. These serials contained some crime elements, but tended more to the romance or the gothic. She was eclectic at this stage of her career, rather than a specialist in fictional crime.

However, a year and four novels after the end of the “Memoirs of an Australian Detective/Adventures of a Mounted Trooper” series in early 1866, Fortune returned to detective fiction. Borlase had been sacked from the *AJ*, and when the magazine announced that ““THE POLICE STORIES,” which at one time formed so attractive a feature, will be resumed [...] as the leisure of the writer permits” (23 March 1867, 479), Fortune was the sole author involved. Her new crime short stories were followed in 1868 by the “Detective’s Album” series, which she was to write for nearly fifty years. Mark Sinclair was the title character (though other detectives could be featured) his personal collection of mug-shots

comprising the “Album”. It would be an unpleasant irony that Fortune’s surviving son would subsequently feature in the prison albums of the Victorian police.

However, as with the “Memoirs/Adventures” series, the ploy of an anonymous or pseudonymous authenticity was used, for from 1867 Fortune’s crime writing appeared under the initials “W. W”. The change was seemingly an editorial decision to differentiate the police recollections from Waif Wander’s work, which without the crime writing component was gendered feminine, being romances, poetry and from 1868 journalism, in which she identified herself as a woman. The two pseudonyms were not linked until 1882–3, with the publication of “Twenty-Six Years Ago”.

In late 1868 Fortune moved from the country to Melbourne, vividly recounted in “Fourteen Days on the Roads”, the first of her journalism. She was writing about her own (women’s) experience, while on the other hand creating the fictional memoirs of a male detective, Mark Sinclair. The two first person voices were lively, irreverent, opinionated and inquisitive, with a lyrical appreciation of the Australian landscape. Stephen Knight has described Sinclair and James Brooke, the character originated by Borlase and continued by Fortune, as “two of the most simply engaging and least ideological of fictional detectives” (*Continent of Mystery*, 116)—the words are also applicable to the persona of Waif Wander presented in the memoirs and journalism.

I have been told by some that I tell horrible stories, and by others that I am not sensational enough; and I have personally come to the conclusion that I shall tell just such stories as I please, and that those who do not like them need not read them [...] (“A Woman’s Revenge; Or, Almost Lost”, by W. W., 333).

My three new friends are animals of the canine species. I might have said dogs at

once; but I am fond of fine writing, you see, and never make use of a plain expressive English word when I can introduce a five or six syllabled one, expressive of nothing but my own want of common sense. But what would you have? We must swim with the stream, and nobody would accredit me with any refinement whatever if I used ordinary words on ordinary occasions. (“Towzer & Co”, by Waif Wander, 212).

There was one aspect of Victorian ideology which both “Waif Wander” and Sinclair tended to voice, and that was misogyny. Such a bias might be expected when writing in character as a Victorian male, but it recurs when Fortune expressed herself most directly, in the autobiographical writing. Brazen bedizened girls; harridans; uncontrollable, willful females (the demonic converse to the docile angel in the house)—these were common figures of Victorian scorn, and Fortune would have been unusual if she had refrained from knocking these Aunt Sallys. She was also ambivalent about the likes of little Nameless and women who succumbed under the pressures of frontier life. It was unusual for her to write a story without female characters, yet rarely were they presented with complete approval. The exceptions were down to earth, capable and competent women; qualities which also appeared in her self-portraits. In “Towzer & Co.” she praises “honest, downright, straightforward” women and is proud *not* to be a refined and useless “lady” (212).

A typical example of her anti-feminine bias appears in the 1866 “A Struggle for Life”, where the villainess is described as a “huge, unwomanly looking virago” (361). The “virago” murders her husband, and attempts to kill her ten-year-old daughter (for informing on her) as well as the unnamed trooper narrator. He comments:

A more hideous looking specimen of the sex surely was never seen before. Her loose untidy dress, large limbs, and rough unkempt hair were but the fitting set off

to a coarse brutal face within which could not be traced a single expression soft or womanly; and even at that anxious instant I could not help thinking what a long career of vileness and vice it must have taken to have so obliterated every remnant of womanhood in the form and feeling of this horrible creature. [...] I had a horror of her and of a contact with her [...] not that I hesitated in attacking her from any pity for her sex and the weakness that should have belonged to it, but did not. No, I forgot that she was a woman, as she had done herself, and thought and felt only of her as a demon pitiless and most loathsome (363).

A more attractive feature of Fortune is her sense of irony, particularly when making self-referential jokes. In her novel "Dora Carleton", a rendition of one of her early radical ballads was followed by the comment: "Wasn't the fellow who wrote that a ninny [...]" (721).

Another of these personal asides was more complex:

[Did you, reader, ever wear a pair of steel bracelets? I, Mark Sinclair, writer of the "Detective's Album" [...] ask you the question. *I* have, and the feeling is not a pleasant one, unless you know you can easily get them off again. You know that I am rather a dainty fellow, and I thank my stars that there was not [...] a single pair in the Force that would fit me; so easy, many a time I have tried it for sport, and as many times have I taken pleasure in slipping the locked ones from off me, as easily as you would a bit of greased eel skin.]

("The Detective's Album: The Bushranger's Autobiography" 154).

At this point writer and creation intersect, as they do in their personal histories: Sinclair had Scottish origins, ("The Hart Murder" 23) as did Fortune. He joined the police force as a "cadet in '55", the year she arrived in Australia, and "applied for admission to the detective force in '58 [...]", the year she married Brett ("The Ghostly White Gate" 384). Sinclair

comments on his habit of referring to his “old Avoca experience as a “mounted man”. If I had such a thing as a heart I should fancy “Avoca” printed on it indelibly [...]” (“Tom Doyle’s Dream” 585). Fortune’s experience on the goldfields similarly seems to have imprinted powerfully upon her, being an almost obsessive theme in her writing for over half a century.

It overshadows to the point of obliteration her “home”, the Montreal so fondly recalled in “How I Spent Christmas”; despite her sheer volume of words, little reference is made to her pre-emigration years. One influential factor in her choice of settings was that the *AJ* was a nationalistic magazine, preferring “colonial” material from 1871 onwards (June 1871 475); yet even when writing for other markets, she tends to concentrate on Australian settings. Like Sinclair, who has no being except as a narrator of his police experiences, she almost seems to have come into existence in 1855, when she came to Australia and was first published.

Fortune herself blurred the boundaries between author and fictional character in her game of performative gender, so it is small wonder that, given her purdah-like secrecy, others should assume that Sinclair really existed. “Chay Jay” in the *Bulletin* declared he had been told by the *AJ*’s founder, publisher A. H. Massina, that “W. W.” was “the widow of a well-known detective, who got the details from her husband’s journals and dressed them up for publication. I fancy the detective’s name was Sinclair” (25 February 1953, 9). This claim, though wrong in details, had a fundamental truth in that Fortune’s knowledge of the police derived from her marriage to Mounted Trooper Percy Rollo Brett.

Brett was born in Wexford, Ireland (coincidentally, where Joseph Fortune’s family also originated), c.1838, the son of a Church of England minister. He became an ensign in the militia during the Crimean war before emigrating to Australia, where he arrived in late 1856.

Here he put his military experience to use by joining the police force as a mounted trooper. The teenage Brett was sent upcountry, to the goldfields. In September 1857, a minor breach of Maryborough's peace occurred when a drunken man blundered into a tent; in the ensuing confusion he punched a woman in the head. Constable Brett was called and arrested the miscreant, without a warrant or having witnessed the offence—thereby exceeding his official duties.

A certain over-zealous chivalry on Brett's part can be inferred, but Julius Vogel, proprietor of the *Maryborough and Dunolly Advertiser* (and later Premier of New Zealand) thought differently. He wrote in an editorial: "the apprehending constable, Brett, displayed gross ignorance of his duty as a police officer and committed a breach of the rules of the force [...]". Vogel considered the matter had been "hushed up" (4 September 1857, 2). Soon afterwards Brett was put in charge of the two-man station in Kingower. It was a position of considerable responsibility, as the goldfield had a population of 800 and a reputation of being "a nugget or nothing" (*Maryborough and Dunolly Advertiser*, Supplement, 10 August 1858). The ground was so patchy that a digger might see no gold for months, then unearth a nugget like the famous Blanche Barkly, roughly the shape and size of a leg of mutton. Fortune was later to claim that she was only a few feet away at the time of its discovery, by fellow Canadians, in August 1857 ("Recollections of a Digger" 68).

Gold-digging was accompanied by hard drinking: one of Fortune's most memorable images in the memoirs is of a flooded creek full of corks (35). The demand for alcohol meant that the sly-grog trade was endemic: Martha Clendinning, a doctor's wife and storekeeper, claimed that in the early 1850s only two stores on the Ballarat goldfields (hers included) refrained from supplying unlicensed liquor (Asher 54). Fortune's first crime story, "The Stolen Specimens" concerns sly-grog, and the topic recurs in her writing. When she

describes a goldfields general store in “Dora Carleton” (as she does *not* in the memoirs, despite it being Grieve/Wilson’s livelihood), she lists among the goods “gin cases”, with imbibers present at this defacto pub—they include a mounted policeman (739–40). In a story from 1904, but set in Kingower, 1856–8, Fortune includes a Mrs Bell, whose five year old son, like hers, “died of convulsions one hot summer day”. This woman “kept house [...] and, of course, sold a sly drink when she could. Almost every tent kept a bottle in those days” (“Her Death Warrant” 102).

Furthermore, in the memoirs, though Fortune depicts the goldrush women shantykeepers with typical scorn, she makes the throwaway comment that the family American cooking stove was “afterwards put to illegal use” (84). The illegal uses of a stove are limited; it most likely became part of a still. Whether Fortune and her father actually made moonshine is unknown, but she describes such activity in her fiction with her usual unwomanly authority: “The still, although of rough formation, was in complete working order. The boiler stood over the hot ashes, among which still remained red embers, and the head and worm were attached; and the worm carried its convolutions down through a large hogshead of cold water, discharging the “mountain dew” by a pipe near the bottom into a vessel for the purpose” (“Jim Dickson’s Fit of the Horrors” 333).

The sly-grog trade recurs in her writing; so do references to Percy Brett. He reappears in his wife’s fiction in name: Constable Brett, young Brett, Inspector Brett, Percy Rae, Percy Brereton, Percy Butt, Pyne Rollington, Eber Pierce and Rollo Bourke. All but one of these characters are policemen. Moreover, parts of his biography and his physical appearance are also appropriated. Eber Pierce, in Fortune’s one “Detective’s Album” novel, “The Bushranger’s Autobiography”, is from Wexford, a clergyman’s son and a former militia ensign:

Well, I was getting on for nineteen years when this daguerreotype was taken, and it pictures the face of what ladies would term a “sweetly” handsome boy. The nose is aristocratically aquiline and the nostrils as fine as a thoroughbred’s. The eyes are almost as blue as the turquoise [...] and the mouth should have been a woman’s. Heaven and earth, can that be the face of Dareall the bushranger—that face, with the white teeth showing between the soft silky moustache, and the sun-bright hair resting wavily on a white forehead almost as guileless as a child’s!

(34)

A more acerbic description appears in the novel “Dora Carleton”:

leaning upon the back of her chair was a slight, young, military-looking man, with a soft, glossy head of fair hair, and a delicate moustache and beard, inclining to be sandy. The face of this young man was very handsome; his nose was small and aquiline, his teeth white and regular, his lips full and rosy, and his forehead broad and full; but there was a look of weakness and inanity in the light blue eyes—a want of firmness in the formation of his chin, and a self-satisfied simper on his lip, that left upon the close observer an impression of weakness of character.

(741)

It is indicative of how well Mary Fortune recalled Brett that the name of this character was Annesly de Vesey, Annesley being a Brett family name. Further instance of her obsessional memory are the references to Inspector Samuel Stackpole Furnell, her husband’s police superior in Avoca. Inspector S. S. F. and Samuel Stackpole Turnhill recur in Fortune’s writing: “when Inspector “S. S. F.” cheated Government out of his very handsome pay, by driving around in his buggy—he would have made it a carriage if the roads had permitted—and seeing that our carbines and swords were properly polished, and that there was not a

single button off our jumpers” (“The Twenty-Ninth of November” 53).

In December 1858 Brett left the police force. The years 1859–65 are a blank as regards both him and Fortune, but the marriage clearly foundered, Brett going to New South Wales, Fortune remaining in the Kingower area. She never forgot her husband, mentions of him in the writing persisting as late as 1907, when Brett had been dead seven years. Without Brett, she would not have written police procedurals, for brief as their marriage apparently was, it supplied her with material—as possibly later did the crimes of her son. Her fictional representations of Brett are, moreover, rich, the three most significant of being Annesley de Vesey, Eber Pierce and Percy Butt from an 1893 story, “The Star-Spangled Banner”. The latter is an ex-militia ensign and a mounted policeman in charge of Ti-Tree diggings. He becomes intrigued by a woman shantykeeper, Kate Juniper, who is Fortune’s strongest and most complex fictional female character. “Kate has a weakness for handsome, young faces with down on ‘em instead of hair [...]” (45) serving them soft-drink (claret with sugar); she is also handy with a revolver. Percy finds her self-possession and independence threatening, but is nonetheless attracted to her. The romance, however, ends with Kate being murdered by her jealous husband, a bushranger living incognito on the goldfield.

Quite what sort of self-referential game is being played in this text is unknown. The writer asserts in a footnote that: “Kate Juniper is no creation of the imagination. There are many diggers yet living who will recognise the favourite of more than one “rush” in the early days” (44). Yet why does she link this character with a young man based on Brett to the extent that had her ex-husband read the *AJ*, he might have felt uneasy? Percy Brett’s son Henry spoke in his dotage of a woman who “would not let his father alone”, which if referring to Fortune, was certainly, in fictional terms, true (Brett 1).

Eber Pierce was the narrator of “The Bushranger’s Autobiography”, although the

“manuscript” was “edited” by Mark Sinclair. Thus Fortune was effectively writing in the fictionalized persona of her estranged husband. Although Pierce’s biography departs from Brett’s—the latter apparently a law-abiding citizen rather than a bushranger—the description goes beyond a private game, as if she half hoped her ex-husband would read the serial, recognize himself and therefore the identity of its writer. Fortune lived in anonymity; Brett achieved public position, getting his photo twice in the *Australian Town and Country Journal* in the 1890s, a magazine to which she had contributed several stories. In the depiction of Pierce perhaps a quiet revenge is achieved, a score settled in words, as is the writer’s privilege.

It is one of the abiding mysteries of Fortune’s life that she never (unlike Borlase) apparently ventured beyond colonial publication. Possibly she submitted her work to English publishers and was rejected, although her serialised (non-crime) novels such as “Bertha’s Legacy” and “Clyzia the Dwarf” were highly praised: the former was preceded by an advertisement claiming it was “by far the best and most cleverly written tale of Australian origin” (24 March 1866 479)—which at the time had some justification. Another factor may have been that her novels were always short, compared to the voluminous “three-deckers” written by her contemporaries—possibly too short for market tastes. Indeed, her usual writing length was even shorter, for she favoured the novelette, between 7500–17,500 words—as were most of Doyle’s Sherlock Holmes stories. She never quite managed to develop her crime narratives into novel form, although her one attempt at a crime novel, “The Bushranger’s Autobiography” (1872–2), was probably affected by a series of personal crises: during its composition her son was taken into care, she was homeless and apparently alcoholic (*Children’s Registers*, Old Series 3: fiche 38, 649; Old Series 5, fiche 62, 489).

Yet, as “Bertha’s Legacy” showed, she could sustain an extended plot with skill. It is tempting to speculate that had she been able to reach the middle-class audience of novel readers, she might have enjoyed Braddon’s success. Instead, she was condemned to the pages of a colonial popular fiction magazine, one which could readily put hastily finished and barely-edited material into print. Every novel Fortune wrote, “Bertha” aside, was completed in a hurry, she forgetting, for example in “The Bushranger’s Autobiography”, that Basil is Myra, suddenly calling her Julia.

Fortune could write at speed, and therein may lie the explanation of why her stories became formulaic. Far too much of her voluminous corpus was written in a tearing hurry and not re-drafted. She had, in her own words, turned her “imagination into a bread-earning machine” (“The Whispers of the Dead” (277). The result is analogous with Kingower goldfield; hours spent reading her stories in the dusty volumes of the *AJ* either unearth “a nugget or nothing”.

The Detective’s Album, her one book, was regrettably typical: the stories collected were a patchy assortment, not even re-edited for monograph publication. The circumstances of the book’s publishing are unknown, but it was printed by Clarson and Massina, who owned the *AJ*. Australian book publishing until the 1890s “almost inevitably required a subscription list or authorial payment for the production costs” (Tiffin 144). However, Fortune is unlikely to have funded it, as during 1871 she was living in a home for the destitute (*Children’s Registers*, Old Series 3: fiche 38, 649). *The Detective’s Album* would also appear to be a limited edition. Few copies have survived.

Assessing her influence is difficult. It is possible she was reprinted in overseas magazines, although her pseudonyms do not appear in the *Wellesley Index*. Without publication outside Australia, her writing would not have reached the widespread audiences

developing a hunger for crime writing, nor the new authors in the genre. The most likely influence is on Fergus Hume, whose novel *The Mystery of a Hansom Cab* (1886), would become an international best-seller. Hume claimed his model was Gaboriau, yet the successful transposition of the detective mode to the mean streets of colonial Melbourne had been achieved two decades earlier, and continued by Fortune. It is difficult to see how Hume could have been unaware of the “Detective’s Album”, then the major Australian detective publication, which was to appear as a serial for nearly another thirty years.

The fact that the *AJ* reprinted the serial until 1919 means that that Fortune’s readership (and the magazine was one of the most widely circulated in the country) potentially included some of the most celebrated of early twentieth-century Australian crime writers, who were to gain international reputations: Arthur Upfield (emigrated to Australia in 1909); A. E. Martin (b. 1885); and J. M. Walsh (b. 1897). The extent of her influence upon these authors is impossible to determine, but even as late as 1933, an *AJ* reader fondly recalled “W.W.”:

At the age of twelve years I had read a large collection of back numbers of the “A.J.” without any ill-effect other than a taste for good, clean reading matter, and a dislike for so-called detective stories that failed to reach the high standard of excellence set by “W.W.” [...] his characters are live ones and each story creates the impression that the events related really did happen as written. To him “I doffs me lid”. (A. A. C., *AJ*, July 1933 884)

The writer of this letter clearly had no idea of Fortune’s gender; far less of her life, which was hardly “fortunate”. She wrote in 1876, in the last of her journalism: “I am what my friends—ahem—! two-legged acquaintances call a ‘very eccentric person’, and a ‘rather peculiar creature’ [...] my friends and acquaintances are mostly of the canine species” (“My Friends and Acquaintances” 197). In 1871, her surviving son had been committed to the Industrial

school system as a “neglected” child (*Children’s Registers*, Old Series 3: fiche 38, 649). In 1879 he received his first sentence of hard labour, subsequently to spend over twenty years in jail for various offences, being released in 1899. He moved to Tasmania, apparently going straight and dying in 1907.

In her writing Mary Fortune is scathing about women drunkards—yet that is what she was. In 1874 the *Police Gazette* of Victoria noted:

Information is required by the Russell-street police respecting Mary Fortune, who is a reluctant witness in a case of rape. Description:—40 years of age, tall, pale complexion, thin build; wore dark jacket and skirt, black hat, and old elastic-side boots. Is much given to drink and has been locked up several times for drunkenness. Is a literary subscriber to several of the Melbourne newspapers. Stated she resided with a man named Rutherford, in Easy [Easey] Street, Collingwood. (10 February 1874, 10)

Despite the alcoholism she not only maintained a high production rate of fiction, but lived into old age. Her letter to Minaille Furlong reveals she was impoverished, wearing cast-off clothes and nearly blind. This letter can be fairly precisely dated to June 1909, yet she refers to having received a letter from her son—who had died the previous year. Unless she had a third son, the likelihood is that she was suffering from senile dementia. Indeed the letter comments, ambiguously: “there is a want in that brain somewhere nothing else can possibly account for the muddle” (2). The *AJ* granted her an annuity, as she was unable to work any more, even paying “for her burial in another person’s grave”—a chilling detail that, like much in her life, evades explanation (Moir).

Several comments perhaps best conclude this account of a remarkable writing life, and sad death. Ron Campbell wrote to Moir of Fortune’s “bibulous habits, for which, God

knows, she probably had every reason, as she wrote more, and doubtless got less for it, than any other Australian writer of the time” (Letter). Borlase claimed that the *AJ* paid less than a quarter of the English *Family Herald*’s rate and was scathing about colonial literary prospects: “Australia is, in fact, at present the last place that the professional man or the man of letters should emigrate to. Many a professional man, and many a literary man, is at present enduring semi-starvation in every Australian city” (“Melbourne in 1869” 233–4). The last word probably belongs to Henry Mitchell: “had she lived in England and America, where literary talent is properly appreciated, she would have, years ago, been regarded as a leading novelist, and have occupied the proud position that merit demands” (487).

CHAPTER ELEVEN

A JILL-OF-ALL-WRITING-TRADES: METTA VICTORIA FULLER VICTOR (“SEELEY REGESTER”)

He had a person hired to watch the premises of the nurse constantly; a person who took a room next to hers in the tenement-house where she resided, apparently employed in knitting children's fancy woolen garments, but really for the purpose of giving immediate notification should the guardian of the infant appear upon the scene. [...] Mrs. Barber, the knitting detective [...]

Metta Victor, *The Dead Letter* 96–7.

We do not know who Mrs Barber was, whether young or elderly, like Miss Jane Marple, with whom she shared a proclivity for knitting baby clothes. She occupied several pages only of an 1866 American novel, *The Dead Letter*, but enough information was given to hint at a New York equivalent of Mrs Paschal or Forrester's female detective. Otherwise the lady is shadowy; as was her creator, Metta Victor, who published the novel under the ambiguous pseudonym of Seeley Regester.

Thus was concealed a woman who was a prolific and well-known writer, here genuinely pioneering: *The Dead Letter* was the earliest American detective novel, though its significance would not be recognised for over a century. Nor would much attention be paid to its author, who like a Vidocq disguised herself under a variety of concealing pseudonyms, among them the Singing Sybil, Corinne Cushman, Eleanor Lee Edwards, Rose Kennedy, Mrs Mark Peabody, and George E. Booram. Occasionally, she published under her own name, which was originally Metta Victoria Fuller; by marriage she became doubly and “decidedly regal”, as the writer Wirt Sikes wrote: Metta Victoria Fuller Victor (2).

Victor's bibliography is vast and varied. She successfully crossed genres and

publishing categories, competing with such market leaders as Harriet Beecher Stowe, Mrs Isabella Beeton and Wilkie Collins in the diverse areas of anti-slavery polemic, household hints, and detective fiction. It is possible no other nineteenth-century woman writer was so versatile.

Sikes described her as follows:

Mrs. Victor is a lady of medium size, somewhat inclined to stoutness, and has a clear, luminous blue eye and hair of dark brown, falling in rich folds over a forehead of much fullness. Her “phrenology” is pronounced a strikingly beautiful combination of the emotional and intellectual facilities—her domestic affections being strong, and her family circle her greatest joy. She is the mother of several children. So sensitive is she to public observation that she shrinks from it to such an extent as to be quite a recluse. In conversation she is disposed to be reticent, but speaks with much beauty and decision when aroused. With less reserve, and more freedom in her intercourse with society, she would have made a famous talker. (2)

A biography of Metta and her eldest sister Frances Victor (b. 1826), also a writer, is sorely needed, as the facts of their lives can currently only be gleaned from diverse and not exhaustive sources. Metta Fuller was born near Erie, Pennsylvania, on 2 March 1831, to a family described in an 1857 profile as “not born to wealth” (“Metta Victoria Victor” 248). Her parents were Lucy A. Williams, described in the profile as “a very superior mother” (248) and Adonijah Fuller. Metta was the third of five daughters. Her name seems a deliberate rhyme with that of Frances, whose second name was Aurette; the destiny of the sisters was to involve both writing, and marriage to two brothers, by which they acquired the surname of Victor.

Frances early gave signs of literary promise. At nine she wrote verse and plays in which her schoolmates acted. Metta soon followed suit: “It was at the early age of *six* years that her taste for poetry began to betray the genius within. Moore, Scott, Byron, and Wordsworth *then* became her best, familiar friends. With a singularly tenacious memory, she acquired a mastery of quotations [...]” (“Metta Victoria Victor” 248).

In 1839 the Fullers moved to Wooster, Ohio, then the Western frontier. Though the girls had the benefit of what described as “excellent schools” (Willard and Livermore 734), their life was certainly rougher and less leisured than in the East. It was noted that Metta shared in “the duties of home” while also engaged in “study and composition so far as time would allow” (“Metta Victoria Victor” 248). In her later manuals of housewifery she writes with practical experience.

The Fuller sisters were regarded as prodigies, and soon published, despite living far from the centres of literature. They had Ohio precedents in the Cary sisters, Alice and Phoebe (b. 1820 and 1824 respectively), whose poetry took them from an impoverished background to national literary celebrity. Alice Cary was published in the Western press from her early teens; and at fourteen Frances published verses in the Cleveland *Herald*. Metta debuted even younger: her 1840 poem “The Silver Lute” was “reprinted in most of the papers of the West and South” (Willard and Livermore 734–735). She was nine years old at the time of its composition.

It was fortunate for the scribbling Fuller sisters that in their time and place precocity was practically a prerequisite for the female poet. Cheryl Walker, when examining the histories of nineteenth-century women poets in America, notes that the muse “inevitably” struck in childhood: “evidence of ‘difference’, of more advanced intellectual capabilities than expected, was necessary in order to win these girls the time and freedom necessary for

creative work” (70–71). Another factor was the type of poetry in vogue, post-Romanticism, in which simplicity and spontaneity were valued, providing an arena where untutored youth could shine, and be readily termed genius. Sex also was involved—a young poetic female (preferably pretty) was a marketable publishing commodity, as in the case of the English Letitia Landon (L. E. L).

The typical view of such prodigies was expressed by Poe in his discussion of Lucretia and Margaret Davidson, girl-poets who died in their teens:

The analogies of Nature are universal; and just as the most rapidly growing herbage is the most speedy in its decay [...] so the mind is early matured only to be early in its decadence; and when we behold in the eye of infancy the soul of the adult, it is but indulging in a day-dream to hope for any further proportionate development. Should the prodigy survive to ripe age, a mental imbecility, not far removed from idiocy, is too frequently the result. From this rule the exceptions are rare indeed; but it should be observed that when the exception does occur, the intellect is of a Titan cast [...] and acquires renown not in one but in all the wide fields of fancy and of reason. (“The Davidsons” 293)

The Fuller sisters both avoided dying young or “mental imbecility”, continuing to write throughout their lives. Metta, despite being five years the junior, set the pace: “At *thirteen* she commenced the career of authorship, which she has followed up to the present time” (“Metta Victoria Victor” 248). Perhaps following Alice Cary’s example, Metta sent her work to New York, to the *Home Journal*. It was accepted, with editor Nathaniel Parker Willis dubbing Metta “The Singing Sibyl”.

Sikes comments:

Willis had a passion for thus picking up young authors who gave signs of genius,

and, while they were yet unripe, pushing them before the public, with sounding praises, almost inevitably to their ultimate detriment. It was in this way that Willis succeeded in giving the *Home Journal* a distinctive reputation for employment of brilliant literary talent, when, in fact, its writers almost always were young and promising persons, who, proud of seeing themselves in print, charged Mr Willis no money for their effusions, and received their pay in the most titillating doses of flattery. (2)

As Willis himself pointed out to his sister Sara, later the famous novelist and journalist “Fanny Fern”, the *Home Journal* did not pay contributors (qtd. in Warren 93). What it did give was valuable exposure. Teenage writers such as the Carys and “Grace Greenwood” made their debuts in the *Home Journal* and continued with notable careers. Sikes, while claiming that Willis turned the heads of his pets with praise—he uses the strong term “injured” with regard to Metta—notes she was “not spoiled utterly” by the association (2).

Willis rated the Fuller sisters the highest of all his girl protégés:

in “Singing Sibyl”, [...] and her not less gifted sister, we discern more unquestionable marks of true genius, and a greater portion of the unmistakable inspiration of true poetic art, than in any of the lady minstrels—delightful and splendid as some of them have been—that we have heretofore ushered to the applause of the public. (qtd. in “Metta Victoria Victor”, 248)

Louisa Alcott, a contemporary of the Fuller sisters, depicts herself in *Little Women* as scribbling teenage tales of blood and thunder. So did Frances and Metta, though they achieved publication and recognition quicker than Jo March. Frances Victor’s first novel was *Anizetta the Guajira; or, The Creole of Cuba* (Boston, Star Spangled Banner Office, 1848). Metta may have been published even earlier: her novel *The Last Days of Tul: a Romance of*

the Lost Cities of the Yucatan, reportedly appeared in 1846 when she was fifteen. It was apparently in the mould of Bulwer Lytton's *The Last Days of Pompeii* (1834). *The Last Days of Tul* is said to have had a "quick and extensive sale", yet does not appear in bibliographies nor library catalogues. It was most likely a magazine publication, as was "The Tempter", a serial on the theme of the Wandering Jew, which Metta wrote for the *Home Journal*, and created "a decided sensation" in England (Johannsen 2: 278).

In 1848, the sisters moved to New York (Kern 300). Perhaps their writing was bringing them enough money to give them financial independence, as was the case with Alice Cary, whose poetry paid for her relocation to New York in 1850. Yet though Willis was not a paymaster, he had influence; through him, the sisters would have been introduced into New York literary circles. They may have met Willis' friend Poe; and also the litterateur and Baptist minister Reverend Rufus W. Griswold, who would, within the year, become Poe's literary executor.

Griswold published Frances and Metta in his *The Female Poets of America* (1849), an anthology of 95 authors, beginning with Ann Bradstreet, and the comment: "It is less easy to be assured of the genuineness of literary ability in women than in men" (7). Metta had four verses chosen, but it was Frances, with only two poems, who was ranked by Poe, in his review of the anthology, as no. 7 in his top dozen in accomplishment of the poets represented (8: 161). The following year a poem by Metta from the anthology, "The Spirit of my Song", was set to music by the composer Stephen Foster, and published as sheet music, for voice and piano (Baltimore and New Orleans: F. D. Benteen and W. D. Mayo, 1950).

In 1850 Adonijah Fuller, who had moved with his family to Michigan, died, ending the sisters' sojourn in New York. Economics, the exigencies forced by the death of a family's male breadwinner, were no doubt a factor—Adonijah had no sons, but five daughters, two of

whom were engaged in a precarious trade. It is unclear how many, if any, of the Fuller daughters were married and/or economically secure at this point, and it would have been necessary to support Lucy Fuller as well.

Within three years Frances and Metta both married, in Michigan. Frances married Jackson Barritt in 1853 and went homesteading with him on the Nebraska frontier. Metta had married at least two years previously, to a Dr. Morse. Both these unions apparently failed; but the Fuller sisters were able to remarry. Their Michigan marriages were subject to the State Law, which was unusually liberal. Under the 1846 statutes, petitions for divorce could be considered on the grounds of adultery, physical incompetence, a prison term over three years in length, desertion, habitual drunkenness, “extreme” cruelty (physical or otherwise), and when a husband failed to maintain his wife. Furthermore, if a spouse was sentenced to prison for life, the marriage was automatically and absolutely dissolved (Michigan 332–3). In New York, the sisters’ previous residence, the only ground allowed for divorce was proven adultery.

The records for Metta’s marriage have yet to be located, but it was mentioned in the press on at least three occasions, the first in 1851, and not denied (Johannsen 2: 278). Over a century later these references came to the attention of Florence Victor, then Metta’s only surviving child. She wrote that she could: “hardly credit Mother’s previous marriage never having heard it spoken of by any one. She must have been very young at the time” (F. Victor).

That the Morse marriage was unmentionable suggests that it ended in legal separation, rather than death—divorce may have been comparatively easy in America, but it was not necessarily entirely respectable. The most likely explanation is that it foundered quickly, Metta divorced and then continued with her writing life. Significantly she seems never to

have published under her married name of Morse—compare her many writings as Metta Victor. Her sister, it should be noted, did publish under her (first) married name, as Frances Fuller Barritt. But of this marriage little more is known than that Frances obtained a divorce in 1862.

1851 saw Griswold edit the Fullers' first and only book of verse, *Poems of Sentiment and Imagination*, which included Frances' verse drama "Azlea, a tragedy". Thereafter, for nearly a decade, the older sister was apparently silent, homesteading with Barritt. However, when Metta became editor of a woman's magazine in 1859, she published Frances' "Romantic Husband".

In contrast, Metta was extremely productive. In 1852 she published a collection of short fiction, *Fresh Leaves from Western Woods* (New York: Derby), titled "most inappropriately", as the contents tended to exotic melodrama (Baym 267). It went through four editions. Whatever her marital situation, the success of her writing meant she had financial independence. It should also be noted that unlike the famous case of English writer Caroline Norton, whose estranged husband claimed her copyrights, Metta would not have lost financially under the (for the time) enlightened Michigan divorce law. A divorced Michigan bride retained her property unless she had committed adultery—whereupon her husband was legally entitled "to hold her personal estate forever" (Michigan 334–5).

She had been well situated as a young poet, in terms of being publishable; and with her prose, she was again in the right place at the right time. During the 1850s, women dominated the American novel, to the dismay of male writers such as Hawthorne who famously wrote in 1855: "[...] America is now wholly given over to a d—d mob of scribbling women, and I should have no chance while the public taste is occupied with their trash and should be ashamed of myself if I did succeed" (qtd. in Freibert and White, 356).

They wrote and published melodramas, romances of frontier life, comedy or satire, religious, realist or sentimental works and novels of polemical issue. Metta would work in most of these genres.

Her prose juvenilia had tended to melodrama, but now she wrote in realist mode, though with a certain didacticism. *The Senator's Son*, her first novel of social polemic, was a commission from a Cleveland publisher, Tooker and Gatchel. The theme, as with her second novel, *Fashionable Dissipation*, was temperance, among the three favourite issues of contemporary women writers in America. The other two were women's rights and slavery, the most successful example of the latter being Harriet Beecher Stowe's *Uncle Tom's Cabin* (1852), which set the agenda for the eventual Civil War.

Metta would eventually address all three themes, which could blur, merge into one. Temperance was notably a means by which women's political and legal powerlessness could be addressed, indirectly, as opposed to the direct approach of suffrage. Women could be activists in both areas, as was Alcott. The anti-slavery novel was an even more indirect approach; its depiction of the injustices experienced by female slaves functioning as a critique of patriarchal white society. It should be noted, though, that its writers tended to eschew the ideological leap of regarding black women as their fellows and equals. Metta's third novel, *Mormon Wives*, was ostensibly an attack on Utah's polygyny, but it can also be read as an appeal for the rights of women in general.

Perhaps the experience of divorce radicalized her; perhaps she merely followed fictional fashions, as she was later to do with the nascent detective novel. Another factor was, as a woman without the support of husband, father or brother, she needed to make a living. It is probably unfair for the *Feminist Companion to Literature* to take out of context a quotation from the 1857 profile to describe her as being "devoted to 'That brand of literature

paying best”, which was followed in the source by the words “compelled labor which would gladly have been devoted to more noble themes and endeavours” (249; 1113).

The Senator’s Son, or, The Maine Law; a Last Refuge: a Story Dedicated to the Law-makers (1853) has been described as a “typical” temperance novel (Freibert and White 308). The narrative concerned a young man’s rakish progress to drunken ruin, which destroys the lives of his female relatives. The subtitle referred to prohibition laws, Metta’s solution to alcoholism. Again, it went through a number of editions. The book is said to have sold 30,000 copies in England (Willard and Livermore 735), though Metta saw none of the proceeds. The lack of a reciprocal copyright agreement between America and England meant a thriving culture of mutual literary piracy. American copyright law only covered the works of US citizens and residents, and English law only covered foreign works if they came from countries recognizing English copyright.

A second temperance novel, *Fashionable Dissipation* (New York: United States Book Co., 1853), was again a story of women vs male drunkenness, though less gloomy—it went through several editions. Thereafter she was silent for three years, cultivating “her mind by study”, claims Sikes (2). The third of her polemical novels was *Mormon Wives: a Narrative of Facts Stranger than Fiction* (1856). The book was unusual in its theme, the impetus being that Utah was seeking recognition as a State, despite being, as Metta put it in her introduction, “a moral monster”, with its practices of slavery and polygyny.

And, as citizens of this country, we owe it as a duty, not only to the Constitution, but to humanity, that we sternly oppose slavery in all its forms—intemperance and its hideous deformities, and polygamy with its train of evils which no man can truly conceive, but which surely will end in animalizing man, in corrupting the very founts of virtue and purity, and, finally, in barbarism. (viii)

Metta links the big three issues here, not by their common factor of female oppression, but in a conventional appeal to morality and even eugenics. In the appendix to the novel, however, she speaks more freely:

And to show still further the wretched and abject condition of woman, let us quote from [...] “Maxims for Mormon Wives”

1st. Occupy yourself only with household affairs; wait till your husband confides to you those of higher importance, and do not give your advice till he asks it. [...]

3d. Command his attention by being always attentive to him; never exact any thing, and you will attain much; appear always flattered by the little he does for you, which will excite him to perform more.

4th. All men are vain; never wound his vanity, not even in the most trifling instances. A wife may have more sense than her husband, but she should never seem to know it.

5th. Seem always to obtain information from him, especially before company, though you may pass for a simpleton. Never forget that a wife owes all her importance to her husband. (325–6)

By quoting these maxims, a certain devious sleight of hand is revealed—they might be quoted from a Utah newspaper, but the tone and strictures were not too far removed from contemporary guides for a woman’s successful marriage. Clearly Victor did not wish these rules to apply to her own life.

The same year as *Mormon Wives* was published, she married Orville Victor, an Ohio journalist with a legal background. He was a writer, if not possessing her impressive track record, having only contributed poems and sketches to magazines. He is remembered as “a

cold-appearing, austere man,” yet was devoted to Metta (qtd. in Johannsen 2: 286). Their careers became intertwined, despite a family of nine children, of whom seven were born in the first decade of their marriage.

Orville at the time of the wedding was associate editor of the *Sandusky Daily Register*; that same month he took an equivalent position on the *Cosmopolitan Art Journal*, produced in Ohio and New York. Metta would write for the Sandusky paper before the couple moved to New York in 1858. It was in the *Cosmopolitan* that the 1857 profile first appeared, the author quite possibly being Orville, for it displays an extensive knowledge of the subject. In addition, it hints at trials and tribulations in what otherwise would, for a woman of twenty-seven, with six books to her name, have seemed a charmed literary career:

It is both pleasurable and painful to witness the struggles of unfolding genius—pleasurable, as all beauty is; painful that it should receive so many wounds by way of mortifications and discouragements. [...] Her life has been one of haps and mishaps—of fortune various; and, it is agreeable to write, has brought the reward which merit is sure, sooner or later, to win, viz.: a loving consideration by the public, and a *paying* consideration by publishers. (“Metta Victoria Fuller Victor” 248)

The profile was reprinted in the *Home: a Monthly for the Wife, the Mother, the Sister and the Daughter*, shortly before Metta took over its editorship in January 1859. The *Home* was published by Beadle & Adams, an enterprising firm which would become a major force in American mass-market book production. They worked predominantly in what would in England have been termed the “yellowback”, paper-covered booklets, which were issued in continuous series at the price of ten cents (hence the term “Dime Novel”). Beadle & Adams tapped the market for social aspiration with their guides to etiquette, but also met the demand

for such useful ephemera as baseball rule-books. Chiefly they published cheap exciting literature: frontier and Western stories, often incorporating detection, which from the 1880s dominated the form, with sleuths such as Nick Carter (Cox 92). Generations of Americans nurtured their reading habits on the dime novel: they were read “by almost everyone except schoolma’ams, pedants, and the illiterate” (Johannsen 1: 9).

Beadle & Adams (the brothers Erastus Flavel and Irwin Pedro Beadle and their associate Robert Adams) began with the *Dime Song Book* (1859). Its success led to an instructive series of handbooks, including the *Dime Cook Book* and *Dime Recipe Book*, both by Metta, and both published in 1859. The inspiration was clearly Mrs Beeton, and indeed one section in the *Dime Recipe Book*, on poisons (245–5), is a word-for-word unacknowledged quotation from Beeton’s *Household Management* (540–1). However the latter contains “copious borrowings” from other published sources, as Humble notes (xvi). As its cookery sections show, Victor’s housewifery was American, rather than a trans-Atlantic import; and further differs from Beeton in not assuming the existence of servants. These small, highly practical books covered anything from how to complete the washing for a family of twenty before breakfast, to making carpets from cotton and wallpaper. Their intent was to save time and money in the complex operations of nineteenth-century housekeeping.

Orville was also working for Beadle & Adams, writing the *Dime Dialogues* and a guide to letter writing under a pseudonym. He became their principal editor in 1861, as well as writing more non-fiction for them, generally biography and military history. Metta, in her turn, wrote numerous dime novels for the firm, the couple integrating their professional and domestic lives to a degree unusual in their era. Had she not become associated with Dime fiction, her subsequent literary reputation might have been higher, for her poetry and polemical novels were the work of a young, undeveloped writer, however promising. Her

pen was thereafter incessantly at work producing commercial fiction, which was competent if not outstanding or unusual—with the notable exception of her crime writing.

The bent of Beadle & Adams was nationalist, initially eschewing non-American settings, unashamedly populist, and, as an 1863 advertisement claimed, “good, pure and reliable” (qtd. in Johannsen 1: 46). The stories Metta wrote for them were typical, being dramatic, plot-driven, written in simple language, and conventional in morals and conclusions. Her first Dime novel was *Alice Wilde: The Raftsman’s Daughter* (1860). Its subtitle was “A Forest Romance”—which involved a girl with two lovers, one of whom does his best to hinder/murder the other.

She followed this work with a spate of Dime novels, being so prolific some were published as the work of “Rose Kennedy”. These novels varied in content, from comedy (*Uncle Ezekiel and his Exploits on Two Continents*, 1861) to western (*The Gold Hunters*, 1863), generally with a romance central to the narrative. They also showed an awareness of crime elements, particularly with the novel *The Backwood’s Bride. A Romance of Squatter Life* (1860), which contains an example of the heroine-sleuth. Susan Carter recognises the horse of her lost lover in the possession of desperados, and turns detective: “She, usually so gentle, so forgiving, had grown as hard and unrelenting as steel” (89). Her actions include boring a hole in the wall to spy on the villains and a night ride through the woods to fetch the Sheriff. Then she becomes sick unto death, a passive, marriageable girl who gains the hero in the last chapter.

Of Metta’s dime novels, the most successful was a brief return to polemics with *Maum Guinea*, subtitled a “slave romance”. 1861, the year of its publication, saw the start of the Civil War. Indeed the novel was highly popular among the Unionist troops, and it is claimed, with Abraham Lincoln himself. It was her greatest commercial success, selling over

100,000 copies in America (Johannsen 1: 40).

Even Frances Fuller Barritt, returned from the west, wrote several Dime novels, before, in 1862, two months after divorcing her first husband, marrying Orville's brother Henry Clay Victor, a naval engineer. Frances' career as a Dime novelist was short, for Henry's work took him to the West Coast, and thereafter the literary paths of the two sisters diverged for the second time, never to meet again. Frances wrote journalism, satire and an impassioned account of the local temperance movement, *The Women's War With Whiskey* (1874). More importantly, she discovered an ability for history writing. Ultimately Frances Victor became known as an authority on early California and Oregon, and was the major contributor to Hubert Howe Bancroft's 26-volume *History of the Pacific States* (1890). From this activity she was able to support herself, even after the 1875 death of Henry Clay Victor in a shipwreck.

In 1866, after eight books with Beadle & Adams, Metta published *The Dead Letter: an American Romance*. As a detective novel it represented a major departure from her earlier work, and she published it under the new and ambiguous pseudonym, "Seeley Regester". Despite Beadle & Adams' claim in an 1863 advertisement that they eschewed the sensational (Johannsen 1: 45), the content of *The Dead Letter*—murder, theft, illegitimacy—bears comparison with Braddon and Collins, with whose work Metta was undoubtedly familiar.

Metta would also have been aware of another Beadle & Adams crime novel, the 1863 *The Mad Hunter* by Mary Denison (1826?–1911), the wife of Charles Wheeler Denison, a Baptist minister, diplomat, and emancipist activist. Both the Denisons were popular authors, and Mary would write over eighty novels. She has been described as "frail" and "diffident" (Stern 463), but *The Mad Hunter* was truly hair-raising and violent fare. "It was a frightful wound", begins the description of the one attempted murder in the book, "—through the back

part of the neck, up through the jaw, the tongue being shot clear off" (100). The book has been described as "a murder mystery" (Stern 462), but the eponymous Mad Hunter is less a detective than a crazed vigilante, a Dirty Harry with religion. He achieves justice at gunpoint, the mystery of the novel being more the complex web of relationships between the characters than the attempted murder, that is solved after three pages. It was crude stuff; Metta Victor was far subtler and technically skilled in her crime writing.

Some other likely American influences are Alcott's 1865 "V. V.", an accomplished mystery novella informed both by Poe and by Braddon, its villainess Virginie Varens being blonde, petite, and even more unscrupulous than Lady Audley. Spofford's "Mr Furbush" had also been published in 1865, as was the Casebook private eye collection *Leaves from the Notebook of a New York Detective* by J. B. (James Brampton), as edited by John B. Williams, MD. True crime, and its writings, would also have been a factor: the lurid *National Police Gazette* had been published from 1845; and in 1857 a detective unit had been established within the New York police force. It is to the latter which Victor's Burton is attached—even though his position is voluntary and unpaid, something enabling Metta to avoid the class prejudices associated with police depictions, even in the supposedly more egalitarian Americas.

The Dead Letter appeared as the lead serial in a new publication, *Beadle's Monthly Magazine*, the first installment being published during December 1865, though dated January 1866 (Johannsen 1: 421). This magazine was the first produced by Beadle & Adams since they shelved the *Home* in favour of Dime booklet production. It certainly was aimed at a wider audience than their previous magazines, for children and women respectively, being "apparently planned to compete with *Harper's Monthly* [...]", which it resembled (Johannsen 1: 421). The contributors included Alice Cary, Sikes, Spofford and the Victor couple—Metta

writing much of the content under various pseudonyms.

The fact that *Beadle's Monthly* was intended for the *Harper's* market meant that its content was necessarily more sophisticated than the usual Dime fare. *The Dead Letter* and Metta's 1869 detective novel, *The Figure Eight*, were reprinted in the Beadle Popular Fifty Cent Books series, which Nickerson says indicates a target audience of the middle and upper classes (30). Indeed, *The Dead Letter* compares well with contemporary English sensational novels, something *Beadle's Monthly* itself noted, though it typically overstated its case: "The 'Dead Letter' is equal to any thing which Wilkie Collins has yet produced, in the subtle element of mystery which overshadows it, while in its keen perception of character, its touching pathos, its elimination of good from evil, it far transcends the 'Dead Secret' or 'Woman in White'" (2: 467).

It has been claimed that *The Dead Letter* was originally published several years prior to the *Beadle's Monthly* serialisation (Johannsen 1:42). This information can be traced to an editorial in *Beadle's Monthly*: "Nor was the work written, as assumed, especially for this magazine, but was, in fact, produced two years previous to the issue of our first number" (3: 195). "Produced" does not necessarily mean published; and an appearance for *The Dead Letter* c. 1864 has not been traced. Furthermore, two factors indicate the editorial should be treated with some caution.

The first is that internal evidence suggests that *The Dead Letter* was written under time constraints, such as typically apply during serialisation. The text contains several glaring continuity errors, not corrected in later reprints, which indicates Metta was working so fast she did not have time to go back and check plot details. One example will suffice: near the close of book one, Burton interviews murder suspect Leesy Sullivan *alone*, the information he gains not being divulged until the novel's climax, and certainly not to its narrator, Richard

Redfield, another suspect in the murder. Yet in the first chapter of book two, the following exchange occurs between Burton and Redfield: “Richard, didn’t Leesy affirm she saw a man descending from the old oak tree at the right of the Argyll mansion, on the evening of the murder?” Redfield replies: “She did” (211).

Furthermore, the claim of an earlier production appears in the context of Beadle & Adams apparently defending themselves from having exploited an actual and seemingly recent crime. The passage is worth quoting at length. It begins by quoting a review of *The Dead Letter*:

“It is asserted that the author obtained the materials of his story while in a clairvoyant state, and so true were his delineations to the life, that the friends of the parties sought to suppress the work in its early stages, and further, that the criminal, on his death-bed, recently confessed his crime, the circumstances of which tally singularly enough with those set down in the narrative.”

The author writes to us to say that he is no “clairvoyant,” nor was his work written in any other than a normal condition of mind. It is pure fiction—nothing else; and save in the initial idea—the murder of young Moreland—is an invention in every respect. It is true that certain parties discovered startling coincidences between the romance and actual characters and occurrences, and for that reason tried to stay the publication; but the coincidences were “this and nothing more,” for the author had no knowledge whatever of persons or incidents connected with the real tragedy. As for the reported death of the true author of the crime and his “confession,” neither the publishers nor the author of the romance have any knowledge of such a circumstance. (3: 195)

The rumour that *The Dead Letter* had a true crime basis was persistent, Sikes noting that if

the “whole history of the book” were known “it would border on the marvelous that a woman should have so wrought out the *probable* facts of a still unsolved tragedy” (2). *Beadle’s Monthly*, though at pains to point out that *The Dead Letter* was fiction, did admit the “initial idea” for the novel was not a complete “invention”—the obvious inference being that “the murder of young Moreland” was based on a genuine crime.

Henry Moreland, dead by chapter two of the novel, is a New York banker engaged to Eleanor Argyll, the daughter of a wealthy lawyer in rural “Blankville”—where he is found stabbed dead on the roadside. What event might have informed the Moreland murder is unknown. An examination of contemporary newspaper murder reports for New York, city and state, has not revealed an obvious source. However, the basic elements of the case—upstate rural New York, young man waylaid on the road and murdered—would have been familiar to Metta’s publishers. The Beadles had lost their younger brother James in such circumstances. Moreover the dates were close: James Beadle had died in 1856, and *The Dead Letter* is set in 1857. Yet it is unlikely the Beadle brothers would have sought to suppress one of their own publications, and it seems some other party must have been aggrieved.

In addition, the “clairvoyant state of the author” was simply an extrapolation from the crime-solving psychic in *The Dead Letter*. The suggestion was laughable, but if there was amusement in the Victor household, it was private. Metta did not claim the novel as hers; and Beadle & Adams presented it as a man’s work.

To summarize the plot: *The Dead Letter* is dominated by Moreland’s murder, as related by Richard Redfield, the hero and detective’s assistant. He is intimately involved in the case, for he works in lawyer Argyll’s office and is a secret admirer of his bereaved daughter Eleanor. Another rival suitor is James Argyll, a cousin. Both young men are thus suspects, and get involved in the murder investigation, either helping or hindering.

Early investigations focus on Leesy (a near anagram of Seeley) Sullivan, an enigmatic seamstress who travelled on the same train as Moreland. Detective Burton pursues Leesy, aided by two female detectives: Mrs Barber the knitter and also his young daughter Lenore, a psychic who, when put into a mesmeric trance, provides a tracking and location service.

Leesy is eventually located hiding in the house intended for Moreland after his marriage, thus creating rumours of its haunting. She reveals she had been secretly and desperately in love with Moreland. Burton clears her, then withdraws from the case for lack of any alternate leads. But the Argyll family have come to their own conclusions, with the help of James, who has successfully insinuated Redfield is the killer. The young man is dismissed from Mr Argyll's employ.

He finds work in the Dead Letter office (hence the title), as lost as the missives that pass across his desk—until one of them providentially re-opens the case. It is one of the technical achievements of *The Dead Letter* that the novel begins with the discovery of this letter, the first half then being told in flashback, book one ending with Redfield's dismissal. In the second half, he revisits Burton, who examines the letter. In a passage reminiscent of Vidocq and Dupin and prescient of Sherlock Holmes, Burton describes the unknown letter-writer:

He is about thirty years of age, rather short and broad-shouldered, muscular; has dark complexion and black eyes; the third finger of his right hand has been injured, so as to contract the muscles and leave it useless. He has some education, which he has acquired by hard study since he grew up to be his own master. His childhood was passed in ignorance, in the midst of the worst associations; and his own nature is almost utterly depraved. (205–6)

Unlike Holmes, Burton's deductions are wholly based on an analysis of the handwriting.

From the letter, which is coded, he gleans the information that a clue has been hidden in the Argyll's oak. Burton and Redfield investigate, and find a broken surgical knife, matching a fragment found in Moreland's body. They also discover that James Argyll has transferred his attentions to Mary Argyll, Eleanor's sister—as, coincidentally, has Redfield. Mary accepts James' proposal, though declaring she has always loved Richard.

Burton questions Leesy again, this time with Redfield—and thus the reader—in attendance. This time he learns of George Thorley, an apothecary-surgeon with a grudge against Moreland. His description, as given by Leesy, fits the image Burton gleaned from the handwriting in the dead letter. Burton and Redfield track Thorley to California, then Acapulco, where Burton is able to extract a confession. He grants Thorley partial immunity in return for the name of his accomplice, the commissioner of the murder. That done, the pair return to New York, where they arrange a meeting between themselves, Leesy and the Argylls—which Ross terms the first known instance of assembling all the characters in a murder mystery together to witness the detective's dramatic denouement (294). James Argyll proves guilty, although Metta builds suspense by making Richard fear he will be accused. James is banished, lawyer Argyll wishing to avoid the publicity of a trial. Richard claims Mary and his rightful place in the family's affections. The couple eventually even adopt the psychic Lenore, Burton having been poisoned by an unknown enemy.

The book's influence is hard to gauge. Beadle & Adams produced six editions besides the initial serialisation; their print runs for the book are unknown, but probably were sizeable. An advertisement in the *Saturday Journal* claimed that sales of *The Dead Letter* exceeded that of any other novel published in America, with the exception of *Uncle Tom's Cabin* (2 July 1881: 2). The *Journal* was a Beadle & Adams publication and while exaggeration may be suspected it should be noted that, in the 1860s at least, the firm's sales

figures were genuinely phenomenal, in the millions (Johannsen 1: 49).

Beadle's Monthly repeatedly expressed editorial pride in “our *Dead Letter*”, citing it as:

an AMERICAN production, so wholly unlike the works of “popular” English writers as to form a school of its own; and proving, too, that our own writers need but the incentive of proper pay and proper consideration from publishers to become *leaders* in literature, instead of followers, as they too long have been. (3: 97)

Yet, several paragraphs later it was noted that *Cassell's Illustrated Family Paper* was currently reprinting the novel, but with background and allusions changed to suggest the work was English (3: 97–8).

The firm of Cassell, Petter & Galpin had previously ventured into the detective sensational, with serials of Ellen Wood's *The Channings* and *Mrs Halliburton's Troubles*. Now they were pirating *The Dead Letter*. The serialization, which ran from 3 November 1866–9 March 1867, changed the setting to England, with dollars for pounds, Upper New York State becoming Lancashire, and New York Liverpool. The sections set in California were unchanged as to background, necessitating further travel, an Atlantic crossing, for the detectives. However this additional journey is accomplished effortlessly in little more than a sentence.

In addition, all of the names of the characters were changed. Richard Redfield becomes Guy Harlowe; James Argyll becomes Edgar Henderson and his cousins Eleanor (Beatrice) and Mary (Marian); Burton becomes Warriston and his daughter Lenore Lucille; Leesy Sullivan becomes Bessy Donovan. The changes seem arbitrary, as in the original no character had a name ineluctably American, as were, for instance, those used by Frances

Trollope in *The Refugee in America*—but then Victor was not caricaturizing her countrymen. Indeed, the most substantial change to the novel is the short paragraph describing a gaming-house servant in chapter 9 (chapter 15 of the English serialisation) whom Victor depicts as a Negro, complete with accent. In the *Cassell's* version he is unexceptionably Caucasian. The changes are so minor it could almost be imagined that a global search engine (had such a device existed in the 1860s) made the substitutions. It is a measure of how similar English and American modes of detective fiction then were that a text's setting could be so easily changed—there is little sense of national character in *The Dead Letter*, either in locale or speech, except in the exotic Californian section.

Sikes termed the pirating “peculiarly offensive” (2), and certainly it infuriated Beadle & Adams. Lacking legal recourse, they protested where the complaint could do the most damage: the *Athenaeum*, the prime reviewing organ of the English book trade. A debate about copyright had been running in its letters column for some months, and to this Beadle & Adams added their salvo. “To have appropriated the production of an American writer, it was their legal privilege to do so, considering that no law exists to prevent such an act; but to add to the act of literary piracy that of mutilation and deception, strikes us an excess of *discourtesy* which merits censure” (15 December 1866, 796).

Cassell replied in the next issue, with icy politeness. They did not deny the charge—but as mitigating circumstances stated that American publishers were as guilty of piracy as the English. That Beadle & Adams were over-reacting was the implication, for they had never complained about alterations made by American publishers when reprinting “tales appropriated from our columns”, much less suggested such pirates were rude or censurable. In any case, the modifications of *The Dead Letter* were “few”, “slight”, and “necessary, in our opinion, to render it acceptable to English readers”—though they did not explain why an

American murder mystery was unacceptable to their readership (22 December 1866, 840)

In the same issue appeared a letter from S. R. T. (Samuel Ralph Townshend) Mayer, later an editor and magazine proprietor. He supported the need for copyright reform, noting that *The Dead Letter*'s plight was not unusual: "Three out of four of the so-called "original" tales in the penny journals are reprints of American novels, slightly, and in some cases very insufficiently altered [...] "Hastings" had been duly substituted for "Saratoga," the "Thames" for the "Hudson", "pence for cents," and so on [...]" (841).

Mayer further declared he did not believe a firm with the "high character" of Cassell would be guilty of such piracy, suggesting as a possibility that the author had simply sold the work "twice over" (841). "Hence, author as well as publisher has been wronged," retorted Beadle & Adams, in a letter the *Athenaeum* printed under the heading of "STOP THIEF!" The remainder of the letter exploded Cassell's tit-for-tat argument, and noted that the changes to the text "were copious enough, however, to change the entire *American* paternity of the work [...]" (26 January 1867, 120–1). The alterations did indeed give a different "maternity" to the novel; but it is an exaggeration to term them "copious".

The argument could have continued interminably. The *Athenaeum* apparently closed the correspondence after a missive from Cassell suggesting that America legislate for the copyright of English publications (2 February 1867, 156). The copyright debacle was not in fact resolved for decades, piracy being far too profitable for publishers from both countries to abandon. Yet in this brief skirmish Beadle & Adams successfully publicized the misappropriation of *The Dead Letter*, if not actually gaining an apology from Cassell.

It was an affray from which Metta kept her distance—yet it is tempting to speculate what might have happened had she and Orville taken the next steamship to London and confronted Cassell. The Victorian code of courtesy to ladies might have led to some form of

reparation. However, she had recently become the mother of her seventh child, also called Metta (b. 1866), and was apparently unwilling to acknowledge *The Dead Letter* as hers. Coincidentally, Orville's *History, Civil, Political and Military, of the Southern Rebellion* had recently been "appropriated in a most shameless manner by other writers", stated *Beadle's Monthly*, though it did not state where (3: 371).

The English version of *The Dead Letter*, however, was crucial to the novel's circulation. Thanks to Cassell, English crime writers had the opportunity to read, and be influenced by *The Dead Letter*. The mesmerism involved in putting Lenore Burton into trance may thus be echoed in *The Moonstone* (1868). However, more relevant to the tracing of influence could be the characterisation of Leesy Sullivan, independent, lovelorn, doomed, and matching wits with the detective; it may not be entirely coincidental that a similar figure, Rosanna Spearman, is found in Collins' novel.

Since *The Dead Letter* was rediscovered, opinion has varied as to its merits. Slung, in the Gregg Press reprint, found it "a transcendent accomplishment" (vii); Maio, in *Murderess Ink*, pronounced it "Still very readable" (47), while Dilys Wynn in the same publication termed it "mystery mishmash" (43). More recently, Panek, in *Probable Cause*, the first history of American crime writing and its contexts, reviewed the novel unfavourably, declaring: "Redfield is a dope [...]" (21).

Divorcing any novel from its context is difficult; and the first in a genre will inevitably be handicapped by comparisons to later, more sophisticated work. Certain aspects of *The Dead Letter* may seem unpalatable to modern readers, such as the coincidences, or the idealized, saintly, characterless Argyll sisters. Yet the novel should be recognised for its adroit mystery plot and technical innovations. As a first attempt at adapting the emergent American detective narrative to the novel form, it is more than creditable. It is perhaps not up

to the canonical standards set by Collins, as *Beadle's Monthly* claimed; and yet it does not fall so very short of them either.

Metta Victor followed *The Dead Letter* with *Too True: a Story of To-Day* (1868), another crime novel. It appeared, not in *Beadle's Monthly*, for that magazine had closed in 1867—Johannsen noting that consumers seemed “not willing to associate the name of Beadle with high class literature” (1: 421)—but in the rival *Putnam's Monthly Magazine*, who also published the book version. Nickerson states that *Too True* was published under Victor's own name (30), but both magazine and book versions appeared anonymously. Sikes commented that the book's “authorship was quite generally ascribed to other parties, who were careful to make no disclaimer” (2). The reasons for the anonymity and change of publisher are unknown, but they may have been an attempt at reaching a different audience.

Victor had killed off Burton, thus allowing no possibility of a sequel, and *Too True* diffuses its detection between a schoolboy and a young woman, both amateurs. It is also structured more as a Gothic-influenced psychotriller, the central figure being Louis Dassel, a sinister German. In the opening chapters Victor introduces some valuable jewels, also the information that Dassel is an alias for Count Konisberg, wanted for attempted murder. Dassel himself tells Konisberg's story, after musing:

It is strange [...] what mere spider's-webs will sometimes hang a man! It is no wonder that criminals never feel safe to enjoy the fruits of their guilt. They know not at what moment, through what unexpected chance, they may hear the click of the prison-door shutting upon them, or feel the noose about their necks. Some trifle, which no cunning could have foreseen, will betray them. (44)

It is indicative of how fast and far contemporary crime fiction could travel that the story of Konisberg would be extracted and run as a short story, “A Mysterious Affair”, in an

Australian regional newspaper, the *Queanbeyan Age* (5 September 1868), credited to Putnam's (4).

Young Robbie Cameron, who is tutored by Dassel, assumes the role of investigatory detective, with reason, for Dassel jilts his older sister for the younger, after she inherits the jewels. The other detective is Miss Bayles, a young artist who works as a photo-tinter. She lives in a tenement with as near-neighbour a man who has evidence that Dassel has been involved in a robbery; Dassel's action in framing her neighbour for the crime draws her into the case, as investigator. In a chapter titled "Tableau Vivant—by the Young Artist", Miss Bayles presents her information, quite in the manner of a Miss Marple. Within a few pages, so does Robbie, by letter from Germany, where he has been studying, and also investigating Dassel/Konisberg.

Too True shows adept manipulation of suspense, particularly in its intricate game of chess, check and mate, played by the villain and his two detectives. However, the book is finished hurriedly, with Miss Bayles being hurriedly married off, in a fairly unconvincing romance sub-plot. It is intriguing, yet ultimately not up to the level of skill displayed in *The Dead Letter*.

Metta's third mystery/crime novel, *The Figure Eight*, saw her revert to the pseudonym of Seeley Register. It appeared in 1869 as a serial in *The Illuminated Western World*, a magazine edited by Orville. Subsequently it was published in the Beadle's series of Fifty Cent Books, following the reprinted *Dead Letter*. *The Figure Eight* was less substantial work than her previous novels, both in terms of length, and content, though with an arresting opening: "I had figure eight on the brain." Meredith, a doctor in Hampton, upstate New York, is found dead in his library, poisoned with prussic acid. He leaves a scrawl: "Dying ... look ... 8" (5). The motive seems clear—Dr Meredith's fortune in Californian gold, now

missing.

Joe Meredith, the narrator and the victim's nephew, is suspected of the murder-theft. He resolves to flee, but witnesses Annie Miller, governess to Dr Meredith's daughter Lillian, sleepwalking and apparently searching for the missing gold. Suspicious, he hides in the vicinity of Hampton, playing sleuth and pining for Lillian, whom he secretly loves.

The story is told initially in flashback, a crucial bit of information not being revealed until chapter five—that the doctor has recently married a Spanish teenager, Inez. Miller had hoped to marry him herself, and with the money gone, her plan that her brother Arthur marry Lillian is also frustrated. Joe suspects the siblings: he found Annie Miller's handkerchief in the Doctor's laboratory, beneath the poison jars. Furthermore, Arthur is romancing Inez.

Meredith Place, the Doctor's house, is sold as a holiday home to a wealthy New York family, the Chateaubriands. Arthur courts their eldest daughter, and Joe discovers he has grown mysteriously rich, reportedly from the stockmarket. Joe also finds traces of smelting, the thief apparently using Doctor Meredith's laboratory to melt down the missing gold into coins. He and Miss Miller make truce, joining forces to find the murderer. Suspicion now focusses on Inez, a very merry widow now that her wealthy cousin Don Miguel has rescued her from penury. She has an interest in love-potions, which she intends to use on Arthur Miller to win him back from Miss Chateaubriand.

In summer, the Chateaubriands move to Meredith Place for the intended wedding. Annie Miller has another attack of somnambulism, returning with a handful of ingots—though where she got them, she cannot remember. Inez too acts suspiciously, being caught by investigating the bottles of poison in the laboratory.

The denouement is sudden, and unexpected—Inez summons detectives to raid the laboratory, and they catch Arthur Miller actually coining. He leaps from a window, and is

shot dead by the police. After the funeral, Annie Miller sleepwalks again, this time repeating a fragment of dialogue she heard on the night of Dr Meredith's murder, which suggests Inez poisoned her husband. Shocked, Inez confesses. As in *The Dead Letter*, a trial is averted, and Don Miguel takes Inez back to Cuba, to immure her in a convent—though she escapes and marries a sugar planter. Joe and Lillian Meredith marry, and by accident solve the mystery of the figure eight. The missing gold, despite Arthur Miller's thefts from the hoard, restores them to fortune.

There are various faults in this novel, one being that Joe Meredith the narrator disappears from the text three-quarters of the way through, hiding out in the West. The story thereafter becomes third person omniscient, being reconstructed by Joe after the event, and loses much of its immediacy. Metta Victor toys with the devices of red herrings, first Annie Miller as suspect, then Arthur, then Inez, but not with complete success. The revelation of Inez as the killer is unconvincing, with even the author seemingly confused: "We, who suffered most by her, always believed that she had no intention of killing her husband—at least not so suddenly—but was trying out these same arts upon him which she afterwards tried upon Arthur Miller—not, however, to enchant, but to disenchant him" (111).

The novel intrigues, mostly in the depiction of Annie Miller, another lovelorn, independent, strong woman, but overall it is hard to escape the impression that the work was scamped. It was an unsatisfactory follow-up to *The Dead Letter*, and certainly sold less well. Metta never wrote as Seeley Register again. Yet she remained a busy writer. In the 1870s Street and Smith's *New York Weekly* paid her the then extraordinary sum of \$25,000 for a five-year exclusive serial service (Willard and Livermore 735). In all sixteen serials of hers appeared in the magazine, some published in book form. For Beadle & Adams' various publications she wrote at least twelve more novels as "Corinne Cushman", while also

producing successful satire and humour (though now much dated) under the pseudonyms of George E. Booram, Walter T. Gray and Mrs Mark Peabody. Some of these works have crime elements, for example, *Dora Elmyr's Worst Enemy; or Guilty or Not Guilty* (Street, 1878), but crime was not for Victor, unlike Wood and Braddon, as abiding nor as persistent an interest.

Her writing only ceased some five months before her death in 1887. She had an operation for cancer, apparently successful, but with an appalling side-effect: "Mrs. Victor took cold immediately after it, and erysipelas settled in her eyes and destroyed her sight. She was removed to her home in Hohokus, where her last days were cheered by the constant attention of her husband, children, and friends" (Obituary, *New York Times*, 27 June 1885, 8).

The obituary also described her as "An authoress well known a quarter of a century ago", indicating that despite her continued activity she had gradually faded from public attention. In part, her eclipse was due to her increasing use of pseudonyms, and that she was working in a popular, and ephemeral medium. However, her aversion to personal publicity, as noted by Sikes, may also have been a factor.

Metta Victor's entry in Willard and Livermore described her as "a beautiful and lovable woman" (735). Orville certainly never forgot her. John H. Whitson, whom Orville edited, encountered him after the failure and sale of the Beadle & Adams firm, nearly two decades later. He recalled Orville as a great editor, whose bereavement, described as his "gnawing life sorrow", never affected his work: "He spoke with feeling of his wife, long dead. I recall his remark, made almost with tears in his eyes, to the effect that love was a desolating thing when you had lost the object of your affection; that even in those late years he now and then turned suddenly, almost thinking he heard her step or her voice" (qtd. Johannsen 2: 287).

Orville and Metta Victor are now largely forgotten except as “Dime” writers. If anything, as a result of her folklore and history work, Frances Victor (who died in 1902) enjoys a literary reputation higher than that of her younger sister. Despite Metta’s hard and continued literary activity, she is of interest largely because of one book, *The Dead Letter*. Yet with that work she gains a posthumous glory as an innovator, the author of the first detective novel in America.

CONCLUSION

“SHE HAS GOT A MURDERESS IN MANUSCRIPT IN HER BEDROOM”.

The young lady who is kind enough to teach one's daughters French and music looks and talks like an ordinary being, but it is very likely if we only knew all, that she has got a murderess in manuscript in her bedroom, at the elaboration of whose career she is working all her spare hours, and through the vivid delineation of whose amatory and homicidal performances she hopes herself to attain to literary fame. It is difficult to believe how anybody who is to all outward appearance so harmless, and who takes her meals with such regularity, can be engaged in the manufacture of all the frightful sentiments and harrowing plots to the production of which she retires, for anything we can tell, when the music-lessons and the French are over for the day. [...] When Marian stayed behind ostensibly to gather a wild rose in the hedge, she was in reality delayed for a minute or so in the occupation of stabbing Reginald and burying his body in a ditch. When she skips up, rose in hand, a quarter of an hour later, her laugh is just as genial as ever, and she will distribute five o'clock tea to her friends the same afternoon without a cloud on her sweet sunny brow [...] A quiet man thinks all this very terrible, and opines that the book must have been written by a she fiend. Nothing of the kind. It has been written by the wife of the curate in an adjoining parish, or by a clever governess, or an amiable blue-stocking, whose time hangs heavy on her hands, and who composes this sort of thing when she is tired of composing hymns.

“Homicidal Heroines”, *Saturday Review* 7 April 1866 403–4.

In 1866, an anonymous essayist in the *Saturday Review* presented an overview of Sensation fiction at that sub-genre's height of popularity, as quoted above. His title is “Homicidal Heroines”, and the critique is clearly informed by Lady Audley. In the course of his argument he discusses other apparently harmless-looking women, not characters in a murder narrative, but their creators. A typical governess is described, who “if we only knew all”, could be suspected of having “a murderess in manuscript in her bedroom”. Yet he notes such pursuits are not terrible, the work of fiendish shes. On the contrary the fictional murders were likely to be produced by clever, respectable women, including such paragons as curates' wives. Nor were they necessarily uncommon: his own household might well contain an aspiring Queen of Sensation.

These hypothetical examples typify the women discussed in this thesis, in considering them as normal, if not quite the norm. Mary Denison and Elizabeth Gaskell, for example, were indeed clergy wives; Mary Fortune was briefly a governess, if drunken (*Children's Registers*, Old Series 5, fiche 62, 489), and Ellen Davitt a schoolteacher; and various of the women discussed in this thesis could be described as “amiable bluestockings”. They just happened to have “a murderess in manuscript” in their bedrooms.

The *Saturday Review* author's significant error is that he imagines or portrays them as amateurs, though aspiring to literary fame. As he would have known from the example of “Miss” Braddon and “Mrs” Henry Wood, and which his bedroom scribblers also knew, women crime authors were professionals. They competed with their male counterparts in the Virtual Crime Gallery, publishing in periodical and book form, often to acclaim and success.

Crime or Sensation writing was therefore, despite its shocking “homicidal heroines”, not an unusual activity for women. It might even be acceptable, despite the apparently subversive subject matter, and the prevailing feminine ideal of the Angel in the House. That the *Saturday Review*'s comments were made in the 1860s, rather than say the 1930s, when the Queens of Crime such as Agatha Christie reigned, is indicative of the argument the thesis has made: that crime writing is inclusive of both genders, even before the formal beginnings of the genre.

Crime fiction has been consistently a space for women writers, even though they were, until the twentieth century, excluded from professional knowledge of criminal subject matter. Instead they (like many of their male counterparts) partook of the

prevalent cultural centrality of “murder-mania” in the early modern period. Some might have attended trials or executions; at the least they followed crime reportage in the newspapers. A few had male relatives who were lawyers (Fanny Trollope), malefactors (Davitt) or even a policeman (Fortune). Their experience of crime might have been largely indirect, but it was no handicap to their fiction.

Crime fiction was an option for the professional female writer prepared to undertake the experiment with form and content that crime fiction presents, and to move between literary genres in search of a market. Sometimes the venture into crime would be brief, however adept, as with Davitt. Sometimes it would be a persisting obsession, re-emerging at intervals, as with Braddon. Sometimes it would develop into a literary specialty, as with Fortune. For these women to write crime was both unexceptional and unexceptionable.

Throughout this thesis, an image has been presented of an art gallery devoted to the nineteenth century, the period when the genre of crime fiction codified and became a mass-market literary phenomenon. The popular view of crime fiction’s origins, as stated in the Introduction, is that this gallery contains only three portraits: Poe, Collins and Doyle. More informed views of the genre’s beginnings, as previously cited, still tend to a masculine bias: their gallery walls include Godwin, Gaboriau and Fergus Hume. Women’s tradition in the genre has been perceived to begin with Anna Katherine Green in 1878. Green may have been a bestselling crime author, but in fact she had a number of significant female precursors, equal in numbers to their male counterparts.

The purpose of this thesis has been to add the women writers and even female characters to the Virtual Gallery walls. Thus, the pictorial counterpart of Godwin, creator

of the first male “detective”, Caleb Williams, is Ann Radcliffe and *Udolpho*’s heroine-sleuth Emily. Comparable with Bulwer Lytton, author of firstly multi-genre works with crime elements, then novels focussed on the mystery plot, is Frances Trollope. Beside Poe’s three short story miniatures in the 1840s are the three-volume novel canvases of Catherine Crowe. And so it goes: Wilkie Collins is accompanied in a triptych by Mary Braddon and Ellen Wood; and even the Casebook tradition includes women, in the shape of Harriet Prescott Spofford and Mary Fortune, not to mention the female detectives of *The Revelations* and Andrew Forrester Jr. Some authors do, of course, have no counterparts. Ellen Davitt and Metta Victor composed the first Australian murder mystery novel and the first American detective novel respectively. These innovators were so far ahead of their time to have no male companion canvases.

In the process of the thesis, the gallery of early crime fiction has been quite rearranged, to be more equitable, and certainly more colourful, with rainbow bonnets and crinolines besides the sober dark suits and top hats. Far from women being absent from crime writing’s beginnings, they have been a continuous genre presence. In England the tradition can be traced from Radcliffe to Crowe, Braddon and Wood. In America, Harriet Prescott Spofford and Metta Victor were the innovators; and in Australia, Davitt and Fortune. And many others followed their examples.

Cherchez les femmes? Consider them found.

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