

THE FEMALE DETECTIVE IN THE
LONG NINETEENTH-CENTURY NOVEL

By

Marisa Mercurio

A DISSERTATION

Submitted to
Michigan State University
in partial fulfillment of the requirements
for the degree of

English – Doctor of Philosophy

2023

ABSTRACT

The female detective in British literature has roots as early as the 1790s. Attending to this figure's trajectory across the long nineteenth century brings to light a hundred years during which authors used the female detective to examine gender and, specifically, womanhood. Over this time, I argue, a shift in the figure's application occurs from the early attempts to elude the category of womanhood to embracing the binary through reformed notions of womanhood. The queer sensibility that characterizes the female detective in the Gothic and many midcentury novels diminishes as gender dissidence becomes more about modernizing womanhood within a gender binary. The female detective therefore becomes more conservative over time. I argue that the female detective negotiates her gender *through* her investigations. Rather than the happenstance of her narrative, her engagement in mystery-solving is the vehicle through which she eludes and reforms womanhood. Negotiations, including refutations, of womanhood have always been central to the detective figure: Prior to the consolidation of the detective genre in the first half of the twentieth century, the history of the female detective is laden with the side-stepping and reformation of what it means to be a woman. Female detective literature consciously mines the conventions and constraints that make "woman" and offers alternatives.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION.....	1
WORKS CITED.....	19
CHAPTER ONE: THE GOTHIC ORIGINS OF THE FEMALE DETECTIVE.....	21
WORKS CITED.....	71
CHAPTER TWO: PROFESSIONAL DETECTIVES IN THE MIDCENTURY.....	74
WORKS CITED.....	110
CHAPTER THREE: WILKIE COLLINS’S AMATEUR DETECTIVES.....	113
WORKS CITED.....	149
CHAPTER FOUR: THE <i>FIN-DE-SIÈCLE</i> FEMALE DETECTIVE.....	151
WORKS CITED.....	218
CONCLUSION.....	221
WORKS CITED.....	229

INTRODUCTION

“We must really clear up this mystery, in some way. . . . As for myself, I am all aflame with curiosity, and I devote my whole energies to the business of discovery from this moment.”

—Wilkie Collins, *The Woman in White* (1860)

Rain sloshes down the verandah pipes as Marian Halcombe creeps along the roof. She has removed her silk gown for this purpose. She does not want to be heard. Behind the verandah’s French windows are two men. Marian’s investigations in the boathouse and library have led her here. To save her sister, she must spy on the men who plot against them. She must unravel the mystery.

When Marian declares that she is “aflame with curiosity” in the early chapters of *The Woman in White* (1860), she has only encountered the smallest threads of the mystery that she will investigate. Wilkie Collins’s novel has never been out of print since its initial publication and much of its tremendous popularity can be attributed to his innovative portrayal of Marian as an amateur female detective whose devotion to her sister leads her to spy atop a roof during a rainstorm, organize an escape from an asylum, and hide undercover from villains in London. Marian features heavily in scholarship on Wilkie Collins and emerges in broader conversations on nineteenth-century British literature as one of the first female detectives. That credit, however, is often diminished by her status as an amateur—that is, not a policewoman. As such, scholars rarely consider Marian the *actual* first female detective in Victorian literature. That distinction is usually awarded to the casebooks *The Female Detective* by Andrew Forrester and *The Revelations of a Lady Detective* by William Hayward, published within months of each other in 1864. But why should professional status hold so much value? After all, Sherlock Holmes, the

paragon of Victorian detectives, is famously amateur in his career as a private consulting detective. In Arthur Conan Doyle's 56 short stories, the police feature significantly in fewer than half. While characters like Collins's Sergeant Cuff (*The Moonstone* [1868]) and Dickens's Inspector Bucket (*Bleak House* [1853]) are representatives of the official police force and serve as early examples as the recognizable literary detective figure, nineteenth-century literature offers an expansive arsenal of investigators. To only consider police—or, otherwise, only the most famous of amateurs—clouds the figure's trajectory and unfairly privileges male detectives.

To be sure, Marian is *not* the first female detective. When we allow ourselves to consider beyond the traditional police detective, however, a surprising literary history is revealed. As this dissertation demonstrates, the female detective in British literature has roots as early as the 1790s. Attending to this figure's trajectory across the long nineteenth century brings to light a hundred years during which authors used the female detective to examine gender and, specifically, womanhood. Over this time, I argue, a shift in the figure's application occurs from the early attempts to elude the category of womanhood to embracing the binary through reformed notions of womanhood. The queer sensibility that characterizes the female detective in the Gothic and many midcentury novels, such as *The Woman in White*, diminishes as gender dissidence becomes more about modernizing womanhood within a gender binary. Perhaps unexpectedly, the female detective therefore becomes more conservative over time.

In this dissertation, I argue that the female detective negotiates her gender *through* her investigations. Rather than the happenstance of her narrative, her engagement in mystery-solving is the vehicle through which she eludes and reforms womanhood. Negotiations, including refutations, of womanhood have always been central to the detective figure: Prior to the consolidation of the detective genre in the first half of the twentieth century, the history of the

female detective, as we will see, is laden with the side-stepping and reformation of what it means to be a woman. Female detective literature consciously mines the conventions and constraints that make “woman” and offers alternatives.

When I began this dissertation project, my initial assumption was that my argument would remain ideologically static. That is, I expected to read the female detective as holistically subversive whose texts “constituted a profound fantasy of female empowerment” (Kestner 122), or otherwise resisted the conservative readings of detective fiction traditionally offered by scholars. In that way, I saw my research as an extension of the scholarship already in place on the female detective. Scholars such as Patricia Craig and Mary Cadogan, Adrienne E. Gavin, Craig, Joseph Kestner, and Kathleen Klein have all laid groundwork for research on the Victorian female detective, which remains an understudied topic. I hoped to find that the female detective novel resists cases that are “neatly solved and [with] moral order restored” and instead “certainties may be re-established but gender role expectations are broken down” (Gavin 261). This, of course, was faulty; detectives (police certainly) can rarely be considered truly radical. Nevertheless, because these characters flout the conventions formulated by ideal Victorian womanhood, I expected this dissertation to contend that the female detective was an invention to resist a gender binary albeit in a limited manner. However, the more time I spent with the century-long trajectory of the figure, culminating in her consolidation at the end of the nineteenth century, the more stringent I realized the novels’ relationship to a binary was. By the *fin-de-siècle*, the female detective celebrates a gender binary rather than disrupts it. Although I would like to read these novels as subversive, the truth is that most hold up a binary by degrees. Furthermore, of all these scholars, only Gavin considers texts prior to the 1864 casebooks as legitimate precursors to the consolidated detective. Whereas Craig and Cadogan, and Klein’s

explorations begin with the casebooks, Kestner largely attends to the late nineteenth-century female detective. As such, rather than proffer a blanket thesis whose chapters are illustrations of that argument, I view this dissertation as an attempt to track an ideological evolution of a particular figure around the nexus of gender.

The novels I've chosen in this chapter reflect this decision. My first chapter, "The Gothic Origins of the Female Detective," proposes that two novels—*The Mysteries of Udolpho* (1794) by Ann Radcliffe and *The Orphan of the Rhine* (1798) by Eleanor Sleath—contain early examples of the female detective. In this chapter, I theorize the characteristics, such as curiosity, that define the detective to demonstrate the figure's intrinsic engagement with gender. Chapter two, "Professional Detectives in the Midcentury," examines the emergence of the professional female detective in either a for-hire capacity or as a member of the police in *Ruth the Betrayer* (1863) by Edward Ellis and the yellowback casebooks *The Female Detective* (1864) by Andrew Forrester and *Revelations of a Lady Detective* by William Hayward (1864). I contend these female detectives' careers allow them to realize gender satisfaction yet abdicate institutional change. My third chapter, "Wilkie Collins's Amateur Detectives," considers Collins's contributions to the female detective from the subversive Marian Halcombe in *The Woman in White* (1860) to Valeria Brinton in *The Law and the Lady* (1875) who investigates a death to maintain her status as a legitimate wife. Chapter four, "*The Fin-de-Siècle* Female Detective," considers four examples (*The Experiences of Loveday Brooke* [1894] by Catherine Louisa Pirkis, *Thou Art the Man* [1894] by Mary Elizabeth Braddon, *Miss Cayley's Adventures* [1899] by Grant Allen, and *Dracula* [1897] by Bram Stoker) of whiteness as tools the female detective uses to police national identity and reform the category of woman to suit the modern age. Arranged

chronologically,¹ these chapters examine the literary female detective from her nascence through the turn of the twentieth century, the period just prior to the figure's consolidation in the Golden Age of Detective Fiction under writers like Agatha Christie and Dorothy L. Sayers. The conclusion to this dissertation considers the modern female detective as a descendent of the nineteenth century.

Due to the prevailing depiction of the fictional detective as a man with an aquiline nose and pipe—or later as a hardboiled alcoholic, his hands heavy in the pockets of his trench coat—the female detective is largely understood to be a coda to her male peer. She is considered an afterthought and a gimmick. I seek to expand the notion of the detective through this definition rather than narrow it, as much scholarship has done, by such occupational parameters.

Throughout this dissertation I employ the term “detective” not exclusively as an indicator of a professional police detective but as one who works to “discover, find out, ascertain the presence, existence, or fact of (something apt to elude observation)” (“detect”).² Though the term “detective” did not emerge until the 1840s—the earliest use of the term was in 1843 in conjunction with the police—neither the genre of detective fiction nor the detective novel was categorized until the 1920s (“detective”). Its connection to a particular form of literature, therefore, was constructed in retrospect and does not represent a fundamental type. As

¹ Due to significant contributions to the figure, Wilkie Collins' novels, *The Woman in White* (1860) and *The Law and the Lady* (1875), are explored in their own chapter and are thus outliers in an otherwise largely chronological approach. *Dracula*'s placement is another instance of a conscious change. In light of the thematic coherency of the other three texts and the return to the Gothic with which I begin my project, *Dracula* has been placed at the end of the chapter.

² The OED identifies the earliest uses of “detect” mean to “uncover, lay bare, expose, display (something covered up or hidden),” and “expose (a person) by divulging his secrets or making known his guilt or crime; to inform against, accuse” and “divulge, reveal, give information of (a thing).” The verb's modern usage entails to “find out, discover (a person) in the secret possession of some quality, or performance of some act; to find out the real character of”—a definition in use since the sixteenth century. Likewise, its definition “To discover, find out, ascertain the presence, existence, or fact of (something apt to elude observation)” has been in use since the mid-eighteenth century.

alternatives like “sleuth,” “gumshoe,” and “private eye” (all American slang) suggest a particular time, place, or professional capacity, I do not believe these terms adequately contain the breadth of the figure’s investments. In this dissertation, a “detective” denotes the figure who, put simply, detects. I consciously apply this (sometimes) anachronistic term to characters throughout the long nineteenth century to emphasize the methodology of their actions and the literary history to which I contend they belong. I consider all the central literary figures in this dissertation as what they are, regardless of profession, genre, or period: detectives. Clare Clarke similarly advocates for a comprehensive analysis of detective fiction, which she argues cannot be understood by only studying “those already-canonised stories which shore up dominant yet limited and perspective views of the genre at that time, as cosy and conservative, obsessed with masculine and scientific authority and formal resolution” (7). Rather, she contends, through the exploration of novels that do not conform to the rules of consolidated detective fiction, which were “later-decided” in the twentieth century, and “hence disappeared into the dustbin of history” we may better appreciate such novels’ ideological and narrative diversity (Clarke 7–8). While I am indebted to scholarship on the fictional female detective (e.g., Craig and Cadogan, Kestner, Klein), most is sequestered to the police detective and therefore inaccurately locates the female detective’s genesis in the 1864 casebooks. Adherence to such a narrow definition has precluded investigation into the figure’s extensive history and its nuances of gender.

A century before Sherlock Holmes expressed disinterest and distrust in women, female detectives were solving their own mysteries. Of the detective genre, according to Jenny Bourne Taylor, “both women writers and the figure of the female sleuth have always played a crucial, if not canonical role in its development” (xv). However, surprisingly little scholarship has explored the figure’s nuanced relationship to gender that does not always embrace womanhood. Canonical

readings of the genre, such D.A. Miller's Foucauldian analysis, *The Novel and the Police*, do not sufficiently explain the longer history of the detective's relationship to gender. Detective fiction is much more ideologically and politically malleable than Miller's reading represents.

Consequently, female detective novels uniquely present new forms of thinking about power and gender in which a cis-heteronormative gender binary can be contested or reformed through investigations.

Because the category of "woman" is reshaped from decade to decade, my dissertation examines this negotiation through the figure of the female detective in chronological chapters, starting in the late eighteenth century and concluding at the turn of the twentieth. I want to momentarily pause here to discuss my employment of the term "gender binary," which comes in various iterations throughout this dissertation. It is important to emphasize that while my approach to the female detective seeks to undo a gender binary, some of the scholarship in which I engage—particularly that which studies the female detective figure—invokes "the gender binary," thus constricting the parameters of their work within a binary from which I want to shake loose. Furthermore, although the dominant ideology and scientific discourses of the nineteenth century proffered a sex-based gender binary, my work examines novels that rebut it. In doing so, I hope to demonstrate that authors throughout the long nineteenth century were actively engaged in negotiating the strictures of this binary. Across my chapters, I sometimes specify a cis-heteronormative gender binary to highlight that enforced binary's investments in gender that is assigned at birth and within the constraints of heterosexual norms. Gender is not "fixed and immutable" and, likewise, masculinity and femininity are "constructs specific to historical time and place" whose categories are "continually being forged, contested, reworked and reaffirmed in social institutions and practices as well as a range of ideologies" (Davidoff and

Hall 29). It therefore necessary to understand the shifts in womanhood over this time. According to Mary Poovey, the nineteenth century turned away from eighteenth-century representations of women as sexual beings to the domestic ideal, the latter which “gradually displaced this image in the course of the century” (33). In *Desire and Domestic Fiction*, Nancy Armstrong reconsiders the position of the woman as a site for competing ideologies in the nineteenth century. She argues, “the rise of the novel hinged upon a struggle to say what made a woman desirable” (12). To make this argument, she examines the history of sexuality as a cultural construct and that “written representations of the self allowed the modern individual to become an economic and psychological reality,” and, finally, “that the modern individual was first and foremost a woman” (16). Indeed, domesticity largely defines ideological notions of womanhood in the long nineteenth century. Poovey moreover reminds us that the belief in “women’s moral superiority was inextricably bound to their economic dependency” (53) so that “as long as women remained in the home and did not claim a sexuality more aggressive or other than maternal love” the “illusion” that there were separate gendered spheres could persist and that, therefore, “men *were* fundamentally different from women” (78). This emphasis on a sex-based gender binary throughout the nineteenth century is paramount:

“identity is gendered and that the organization of sexual difference is central to the social world. Distinctions between men and women are ever present, shaping experience, influencing behaviour, structuring expectations . . . every individual’s relation to the world is filtered through gendered subjectivity. That sexual identity is organized through a complex system of social relations, structured by the institutions not only of family and kinship but at every level of the legal, political, economic and social formation. (Davidoff and Hall 29)

Important to this dissertation is not only the binary identities that the dominant Victorian ideology proffers but also the institutions it upholds. In particular, the late nineteenth-century category of woman bolsters English national identity. As we will see in chapter four, the role of women in representing Britain and enforcing its empire is completed through their role *as* women and detectives. Ann Stoler contends:

Bourgeois women in colony and metropole were cast as the custodians of morality, of their vulnerable men, and of national character. . . . In short, the cultivations of bourgeois sensibilities were inextricable from the nationalist and racial underpinnings of them.

(135)

The female detectives I examine in this dissertation, particularly in the latter half of the century, are often wives and enforcers of a gender binary. Their womanhood is central to their efforts to police national identity and, in one case, the colonized nations.

In addition to the forementioned scholars, my work relies on gender studies scholars whose contributions offer a way to consider masculinity not confined to the white cis male body and, furthermore, a continuum between femininity and masculinity unfixed to a gender category. Pulling from foundational scholars like Judith Butler, whose queer methodologies began in feminist studies but examine the flimsiness of the binary, and Jack Halberstam, who notes that “the very flexibility and elasticity of the terms ‘man’ and ‘woman’ ensures their longevity” (27), I contend that in her most radical iterations, the early female detective offers a queer subjectivity that does not try to reformulate stabilized gender categories. Nevertheless, the trajectory I examine furthermore supports Halberstam’s claim that dominant culture “contain[s] the threat that the mannish woman represent[s] to hegemonic masculinity” by “absorb[ing] female masculinity into the dominant structures” (49). Over the course of the nineteenth century, the

female detective literature's engagement shifts from an investment in refuting gender categories to revising them, often at the expense of queerness and through its adoption of reformed womanhood that allows for slightly more masculinity, but which maintains the binary.

Likewise, trans studies scholars like Jolene Zigarovich provide crucial groundwork for my dissertation. In *TransGothic in Literature and Culture*, Susan Stryker writes that trans- “is a prefixial attachment that requires being connected to something, a something that is ruptured and transformed in an act of drawing in across some limit or boundary, a something that becomes a something else” (xii). Zigarovich likewise writes that Gothic literature, which my first chapter explores, “offers a female subjectivity that moves toward the masculine without offering any opportunity for reversal or permanent integration; [in *Zofloya*] Victoria's transition creates a new subjective space” (10). While I do not directly (or solely) frame my argument as part of trans studies, their work crucially supports my argument that the female detective offers a glimpse into gender dissidence and mobility. My dissertation, moreover, does not intrinsically focus on reading the female detective's sexuality, though, as with Marian Halcombe, queer desire can be central to gender dissidence.

Affective Investigation

The ideological diversity that I identify manifests, in part, through the detectives' approach to investigation. In the early novels—including the late-eighteenth-century Gothic novels and several of the sensational novels of the mid-nineteenth century—their investigative methods depict a curiosity-terror response that I call affective investigation. When engaged in sleuthing—spying, the gathering of clues, the making of some discovery, tangible or not—the female detective experiences an affective response. This method shatters the self, then rebuilds an

alternative subjecthood that is resistant to ideological norms. Investigation is not simply incidental to the female detective's gender dissidence. Affect describes sensations before they are categorized into emotion, disrupting disciplinary knowledge as it emphasizes "the relation between feeling and concept" (Cohn) and often evokes bodily responses. Elisha Cohn summarizes, "Critics use the term, broadly, to mark a minimal subjectivity that evades standard procedures for knowing the self and the social." Like the sublime, it extends the individual outward, de-subjectifying the self, and absorbs the exterior or else analyzes the collectivity. It thus has potential to harness social change.

I contend that the female detective figure, through her relationship to other modes of experience and thinking that are represented by her affective response to her investigations, undergoes an alternative development to the traditional gendered individuating process depicted in novels like *Jane Eyre* (1847). The potential for affect to not feminize but instead unmoor traditional notions of gender and reconstruct alternative gendered subjecthood develops throughout the female detective oeuvre. Affective investigation allows novels to explore the desire to transgress.

Detection enables moments of gender dissidence to occur. In *The Law and the Lady*, affect takes charge through a sentiment so strong and encompassing, it de-subjectifies the self, absorbing and empathizing with the exterior—in this case, the criminal. In one passage, the detective Valeria Brinton considers a crowd at a criminal trial; she imagines a situation in which one is placed in the crowd, connecting to the "monster" on the gallows: "Is there a common fund of wickedness in us all?". Her self's boundaries are loosened, curious about the other so much that it becomes the self. Likewise, this darker presentation of affect can only be tempered by training and constraint, recalling *The Mysteries of Udolpho* in which M. St. Aubert instructs to

his daughter, the fledgling detective Emily, to resist passions and rule with an individuating cool logic. The experience of affect moves the self outward, bodily and psychologically. The significance for characters like Valeria is that they are able, through affective investigation, to perceive the world in ways that others ignore, making them more capable of solving a mystery or escaping the violence of patriarchy—often both simultaneously. The female detective’s awareness of the world comes through the exploration of gender. Such characters are alive to clues and are both more attentive to and knowledgeable of society *because* the world has wronged them. That is, their marginalization cultivates insight into the world their (male) peers do not have. Valeria, rather, gathers information and allows in—she, like other female detectives, allows herself to be transformed in order to perceive clues.

When in *Ruth the Betrayer* the eponymous detective makes a discovery, the moment is framed through her affective response:

What was there in the thought which flashed upon her now, that turned her suddenly faint, and sick with terror—that caused her limbs to shake under her—the cold perspiration to break out upon her forehead, and her very blood to curdle in her veins?
(Ellis 29–30)

Not only does Ruth’s response draw a lineage between herself and her Gothic heroine predecessors, as well as her contemporaries like *Revelations of a Lady Detective*’s Mrs. Paschal, it shakes the very foundations of her subjectivity. *The Female Detective* likewise contends that no detective can “endure” a mystery (Forrester 6), especially when her curiosity is “thoroughly roused” (Forrester 10). Likewise, *Revelations of a Lady Detective* figures in a similar vein to Emily’s experience:

I had been in many perplexities and exciting situations before, and I had taken a prominent part in more than one extremely perilous adventure, but I do not think that I was ever, during the whole course of my life, actuated by so strong a curiosity, or animated with so firm a desire to know what the end would be, as I was on the present occasion. In moment such as those which were flitting with the proverbial velocity of time, but which seemed to me very slow and sluggish, the blood flows more quickly through your veins, your heart beats with a more rapid motion, and the tension of the nerves becomes positively painful. (Hayward 10)

Although affect is generally more tempered throughout the 1864 casebooks than sensation and Gothic novels, the affective response induced here by investigation harks back to *The Mysteries of Udolpho*'s feminine sublime in which the female detective's faculties expand and, concurrently, experiences a physical—a sensational—reaction to the mysterious subject.

The affective response elicited during the experience of detection dissolves the subject, then reconstitutes it. Interiority moves outward to dangerous degrees. The self-subject becomes not only the body, but is also what is apprehended (e.g., a dead body). Although part of the Victorian ideological project of womanhood constitutes a degree of permeability, affect's ability to dissolve the self can become dangerous and radical. The ideological individual is limited. Deep feeling, that is, has a limit on its acceptable threshold: Women should not be *so* open to feeling that they are shattered and undone. What is considered the threshold is furthermore gendered by nineteenth-century ideology; there are different modes and limits of deep feeling for men and women. "Genre" novels (e.g., the Gothic, sensation fiction) induce an openness that goes too far and undoes the gendered self; the experience becomes *too* embodies (that is, too affective, too shattering). Affective curiosity-terror, crucially, deconstructs the modern female

subject as a gendered individual: Her curiosity removes her from the ideological construction of nineteenth-century womanhood based on her character, actions, and position.

As the trajectory of the female detective extends, however, affective investigation fades, returning notably only in Gothic revival *Dracula*. During this time, particularly in the 1890s, another kind of investigation is privileged: the masculine method in which rationality is supreme. Commented on being uniquely rational for their gender, the eponymous heroines of *The Experiences of Loveday Brooke* and *Miss Cayley's Adventures* feature female detectives whose investigations help them reform the category of woman rather than elude it.

The Anti-Detective

As this dissertation attends to those characters attuned to the possibilities of detection, it is helpful to briefly consider those who refuse those possibilities—particularly as there are no canonical texts I examine between *Northanger Abbey* and *The Woman in White*. Heather Worthington argues the traditional scholarly conception of detective fiction's development is insufficient and oversimplified. Rather, she contends that it draws from the patterns and themes of periodicals, broadsides, ephemera, and other short-form narratives circulated in the early nineteenth-century. Concurring with Foucault that the detective is a disciplinary figure with likewise ideologies, Worthington, however, focuses on male detectives in criminological and police detective fiction. To better understand the bridge between the fledgling female detective in eighteenth-century Gothic and midcentury novels, I turn to Charlotte Brontë. Her work offers an alternative perspective on women's professionalization and gender identity within a mystery framework. Yet, both *Jane Eyre* (1847) and her *Villette* (1853), despite their emphasis on

curiosity, consciously resist investigation. The resistance to detection ensures the subjectification of the individual woman, stabilizing liberal notions of individuality based on sexual difference.

One of the most successful novelists of the mid-nineteenth century, Brontë penned two novels, *Jane Eyre* and *Villette*, that seemingly fall within the trappings of the Gothic heroine-cum-detective. In contrast to many other novels in this dissertation, Brontë's novels construct traditional and individuating modes of nineteenth-century womanhood through their explicit opposition to investigation. As such, they are useful to understand that resistance's comparative effect on modes of womanhood in nineteenth-century fiction. Tossed into a web of mystery, characters like Jane Eyre and Lucy Snowe of *Villette* loom large as anti-detectives. For Jane, the strange noises coming from the attic and the occasional life-threatening fire haunt her persistently until the truth is revealed. Mystery is central to that novel and Jane is aware that it swirls around her with intentional obfuscation: "All I gathered from it amounted to this—that there was a mystery at Thornfield; and that from participation in that mystery, I was purposely excluded" (Brontë 188). Similarly, *Villette* engages in themes of surveillance and espionage at the heart of the Gothic plot. Lucy herself comments that she was "happy, not always in admiring, but in examining, questioning, and forming conclusions" (Brontë, *Villette* 189), practices inherent to investigation. In both Jane and Lucy's cases, detection would be pertinent—or even necessary—but they specifically refuse to engage.

When compared to female detectives, these characters' purposeful ignorance highlights their distinction from typical (non-sleuthing) heroines within the same genres. Returning to foundational texts in Victorian gender studies, I would like to rethink Armstrong's analysis of *Jane Eyre* in light of contemporary conversations within studies of gender, and around processes of gendering and ways of understanding connections between nineteenth-century dissidence and

contemporary understandings. Armstrong's argument that *Jane Eyre* posits "being an individual and having a gender amount to pretty much the same thing" ("Gender Must Be Defended" 544) is routed through her rejection of detection and ultimate compliance with Rochester, as his governess and finally as his wife.

While Foucauldian readings of detective fiction rightly claim detective fiction is a method of policing in and of itself, such scholarship has overlooked the nuances of gender. Foucauldian readings fail to appreciate detection's use in order to imagine gender differently that is embedded within the narrative. Invoking Foucault, Armstrong's article, "Gender Must Be Defended," contends that *Jane Eyre* argues that gender dissidents "put at risk both the household and the individuality it protected" (536). Gender thus defines humanity and those outside a binary and "beyond its disciplinary reach and thus ineligible for the rights and protections of liberal society," and are condemned by the narrative to death, as is Jane's opposite, Bertha (Armstrong, "Gender Must Be Defended" 546). The novel concludes with Jane at the "center of well-defended communities," thus propping up the individual male rights of primogeniture" and passing "from near nonbeing to a secure position within the gender binary" (Armstrong, "Gender Must Be Defended" 544). In doing so, she secures her rights as an individual and a woman.

The governess, one of the primary professional roles a female character may fill in this period, as in *Jane Eyre*, is worth further consideration. Nineteenth-century female detectives prior to the *fin-de-siècle* largely exist in Gothic or sensation novels, though in no cases in this dissertation are governesses. This lack of engagement with the governess is intentional: Like *Jane Eyre*, the governess is concerned with *becoming* a woman, gaining female individuality and social status. The detective, rather, eludes (and retains her class status). Mary Poovey states:

Brontë's novel reveals that the figure from whom the mother had to be distinguished was not just the lower-class prostitute but the middle-class governess as well, for the governess was both what a woman who should be a mother might actually become and the woman who had to be paid for doing what the mother should want to do for free.

(146)

The governess narrative figures a woman in between her duties as a woman, both feminine for the manner of work (e.g., child rearing), but also masculine for working. Thus, the arc of a governess, as exemplified by *Jane Eyre*, is to *become* a woman—to become gendered.

In addition to becoming a wife, the bourgeois female character in the traditional Victorian novel is identified by her narrative culmination as a mother. While in many of the later novels I examine it is true that the female detective is invested in liberal notions of the individual and a cis-heteronormative gender binary, she nevertheless always resists the Victorian ideal of woman. Indeed, of the thirteen female detectives I consider throughout this dissertation, only two have a child by the end (Valeria and Mina in *Dracula* whose son is the result of queer kinship), one begins the novel as a biological and then adoptive mother (*The Orphan of the Rhine* in which the mother-daughter duo both act as detectives), and one is the aunt in a queer triad (*The Woman in White*). This resistance to the most traditional of Victorian narratives highlights a disinterest in not only the idealized category of woman but also the inherent dissidence of the female detective figure.

When thrown in relief with the female detectives I have so far examined, *Jane Eyre*'s resistance to detection signals a disinterest in the detective's investments in queerness and gender dissidence I have so far considered. Though the novel has been historically considered protofeminist, Armstrong's insistence that it holds up a gender binary is paramount. While

Armstrong's analyses are not through a queer lens, her work elucidates Jane's dependence on the binary to achieve her status as an individual. Novels like *Jane Eyre* clarify the divergent projects of investigative novels, which imagine a different subjectivity. Lucy's remark in *Villette* encapsulates the heroine's relationship to detection in Brontë's novels: "'Discoveries made by stealth seem to me dishonourable discoveries'" (Brontë 349). In Brontë's Gothic novels, detection hits a brick wall in favor of the comforts of becoming gendered.

The degree to which the female detective's gender subjectivity runs counter to the chapters' respective periods' dominant ideological category of woman shifts over these one hundred years. Although her ongoing negotiation between a feminine-masculine binary is always set against the periods' respective ideological conventions of "woman," I contend that late Victorian literature is much more willing to accept a gender binary than its predecessors whose understanding of gender were in a state of flux. The literary female detective's early attempts to elude womanhood to, then, her embrace of a reformed binary develops steadily over this period as she becomes increasingly mainstream and, beyond the page, British women demand more robust rights.

WORKS CITED

- Allen, Grant. *Miss Cayley's Adventures*. G. Richards, 1899.
- Armstrong, Nancy. *Desire and Domestic Fiction: A Political History of the Novel*. Oxford UP, 1990.
- . "Gender Must Be Defended." *The South Atlantic Quarterly*, vol. 111, no. 3, 2012, pp. 529–47.
- Austen, Jane. *Northanger Abbey*. Random House, Inc. 2002.
- Braddon, Mary Elizabeth. *Thou Art the Man*. 1894. Valancourt Books, 2008.
- Brontë, Charlotte. *Jane Eyre*. 1847. Penguin Classics, 2006.
- . *Villette*. 1854. Bantam Books, 1986.
- Clarke, Clare. *British Detective Fiction 1891–1901: The Successors to Sherlock Holmes*. Palgrave Macmillan, 2020.
- Collins, Wilkie. *The Law and the Lady*. 1875. Electric Book Co., 2001.
- . *The Woman in White*. 1860. Barnes & Noble Books, 2005.
- Craig, Patricia and Mary Cadogan. *The Lady Investigates: Women Detectives and Spies in Fiction*. St. Martin's Press, 1981.
- Davidoff, Leonore and Catherine Hall. *Family Fortunes: Men and Women of the English Middle Class, 1780–1850*, Routledge, 2019.
- "detect, v." *OED Online*, Oxford UP, 2021, www.oed.com/view/Entry/51191. Accessed 11 Nov. 2021.
- "detective, adj. and n." *OED Online*, Oxford UP, 2021, www.oed.com/view/Entry/51195. Accessed 11 Nov. 2021.
- Ellis, Edward. *Ruth the Betrayer; or, The Female Spy*, edited by Dagni A. Bredesen. 1863. Valancourt Books, 2019.
- Forrester, Andrew. *The Female Detective. The First Female Detectives*, ed. Dagni Bredesen. 1864. Scholars' Facsimiles & Reprints, 2010.
- Hayward, William. *Revelations of a Lady Detective. The First Female Detectives*, ed. Dagni Bredesen. 1864. Scholars' Facsimiles & Reprints, 2010.

- Kestner, Joseph A. *Sherlock's Sisters: The British Female Detective, 1864-1913*. Ashgate, 2013.
- Klein, Kathleen. *The Woman Detective: Gender & Genre*. U of Illinois P, 1988.
- Miller, D.A. *The Novel and the Police*. U of California P, 1988.
- Pirkis, Catherine Louisa. *The Experiences of Loveday Brooke, Lady Detective*. Hutchinson & Co., 1894.
- Poovey, Mary. *Uneven Developments: The Ideological Work of Gender in Mid-Victorian England*. U of Chicago P, 1988.
- Radcliffe, Ann. *The Mysteries of Udolpho*. 1794. Penguin Books, 2001.
- Sleath, Eleanor. *The Orphan of the Rhine*. 1798. Valancourt Books, 2014.
- Stoler, Ann Laura. *Race and the Education of Desire: Foucault's History of Sexuality and the Colonial Order of Things*. Duke UP, 1995.
- Stoker, Bram. *Dracula*. Penguin Books, 2003.
- Stryker, Susan. Foreword. *TransGothic in Literature and Culture*, edited by Jolene Zigarovich, Routledge, 2018, pp. xi–xvii.
- Taylor, Jenny Bourne. “Introduction,” *The Law and the Lady* by Wilkie Collins. Oxford UP, 1992.
- Worthington, Heather. *The Rise of the Detective in Early Nineteenth-Century Popular Fiction*. Palgrave Macmillan, 2005.
- Zigarovich, Jolene. *TransGothic in Literature and Culture*. Routledge, 2018.

CHAPTER ONE:

THE GOTHIC ORIGINS OF THE FEMALE DETECTIVE

“Emily, bending over the body, gazed, for a moment, with an eager, frenzied eye . . .”

—Ann Radcliffe, *The Mysteries of Udolpho* (1794)

Shrouded among the Apennine Mountains, Castle Udolpho strikes a menacing air. Its Gothic turrets and grey walls tower over the surrounding pines. Fog seeps through its portcullis. It is a scene that bends its inhabitants’ imaginations to its will. As Emily St. Aubert flees her prison, she looks back on it. The castle, now from some distance, loses its power over her and she feels the superstition it kindled dissipate. Udolpho is no longer terrifyingly obscure and so she can hold it within her view and—momentarily—smile at her impressions of murder and ghosts. The heroine of Ann Radcliffe’s quintessential Gothic novel, *The Mysteries of Udolpho* (1794), does not wield a magnifying glass. She keeps no notes and has no biographer to glorify her. Yet, Emily St. Aubert is among the first fledgling female detectives in British literature. Among her investigative peers are Julie de Rubine and Laurette of Eleanor Sleath’s *The Orphan of the Rhine* (1798), one of several Gothic novels that would be named in Jane Austen’s satire of the genre in the early nineteenth century. In response to the mysteries with which they must contend, Emily, Julie, and Laurette exhibit qualities that have become essential to the fictional detective. In this chapter, I specifically attend to the detective’s openness to solutions through her capacity hold sensibility and sensibility in tension. Radcliffe and Sleath’s use of curiosity as an investigative methodology also the earliest characteristics of the fledgling female detective; it is not only her curiosity, which leads her to investigate, but furthermore her sympathy that develops her curiosity into perception. Within a mystery plot, the fledgling female detective is the first to be

proactive about revealing hidden truths about the circumstances in which she is in. She is not only curious but curious to the point of investigation and perception.

Though Gothic and detective novels' inceptions are separated by decades, this chapter demonstrates the Gothic's centrality in the detective figure. Propelled by writers like Radcliffe and Sleath, the Gothic heroine-cum-sleuth predates not only the female detective but, I argue, also the male, epitomized in the nineteenth century by Sherlock Holmes and, later, the hardboiled noir detective for whom Dickens's Inspector Bucket is a model. Gothic and detective novels' shared preoccupations with mystery, crime, violence, and secrets—and their elevation of perceptions as antidotes to the problems these themes generate—present genres that spill over one another. Edgar Allan Poe, Charles Dickens, Wilkie Collins, and Arthur Conan Doyle, all authors of canonical detective fiction, borrow extensively from the Gothic tradition that eighteenth-century novelists establish—sometimes, as in *The Hound of the Baskervilles* (1902), in the detective stories themselves. Thus, even as detective fiction diverges and consolidates into its own genre, its Gothic antecedents haunt the figure at their heart. Though detective fiction isn't rooted in the Gothic writ large, it develops from a particular formulation of it best represented by authors like Radcliffe, who combines the supernatural with the rational and demonstrates the power struggle between the two with artful complication.

My interest in locating the detective's birth in the Gothic heroine springs from the allusion to investigation many scholars of the genre connect to characters like Emily. She is, alternatively, an "unreliable detective" (Heller 24), an "almost-detective" (Dresner), one of the "precursors to later fictional female detectives" (Veisz), and "a sleuth, a sort of feminized Sherlock Holmes" (Hoeveler 96). In addition to *The Mysteries of Udolpho*, Radcliffe's *The Romance of the Forest* (1791) and *The Italian* (1797), according to A.E. Murch, introduced

several features that “link them unmistakably” with detective fiction (27). Despite these analyses, however, few scholars have taken up the Gothic origins of the fictional detective, much less considered her advancement of the generic conventions typified in superlative literary detectives like Holmes. While Dresner identifies Emily (and several of the characters I examine in this dissertation) as one of the “almost-detectives,” she employs the limiting prefix due to the “fundamental lack” of skill and success in her mystery-solving prowess (9); Emily is, according to Dresner, only ever “almost.” Yet, many of the fictional detective’s characteristics and the mysterious plots in which he finds himself predate not only the genre but also the nineteenth century. And they are first found in the Gothic heroine.

Written in a period during which, as Diane Long Hoeveler so aptly puts it, “gender was fled even as it was being rewritten” (92), the female detective’s origins are situated within a decade of immense flux that accordingly lends itself to a queer analysis of the figure. Hoeveler asserts that an “androgynous compulsion” characterizes the Gothic novel (92), and Jolene Zigarovich insists that the Gothic has always been trans (‘A Strange and Startling Creature’ 102). Evincing through their resistance to eighteenth-century discourses of sensibility, curiosity, inheritance, and female sexuality regularly trafficked in conduct books and judicial decree (among other avenues, official and informal), *The Mysteries of Udolpho* and *The Orphan of the Rhine*’s fledgling female detectives refuse womanhood at the historical moment when modern gender subjectivity was being formulated. Their resistance, however, does not preclude the novels’ conservative impulses that seek to foster a space in which individuals can elude the category of woman while reinscribing anti-Catholic sentiment and class stratification.

My argument that the female detective’s characteristics are established in *The Mysteries of Udolpho* and *The Orphan of the Rhine* offers two primary interventions. First, the female

detective precedes the male detective in fiction. Scholars like D.A. Miller who have taken up Foucauldian readings of detective fiction typically overlook the centrality of gender in the detective's construction. By attending to the female detective's origins, we may better appreciate not only how the fictional detective developed out of discourses of gender that authors negotiate through the figure but also its lasting effects in Victorian literature. Second, these characteristics counter contemporaneous discourses of gender that defined the category of "woman" whose conventions and constraints Radcliffe and Sleath's novels consciously mine. I conclude that their female detectives, rather than trying to reform the category of "woman," instead elude the category of woman. The female detective in this chapter offers a queer subjectivity that does not seek to reformulate stabilized gender categories and instead refuses to be formatted in that manner. Through this figure's investigations, I contend, she maintains a continuum between (and beyond) the feminine and the masculine that unfix her from "woman," thus eluding binaries. Accordingly, as I explore in chapter four's conclusion, the centrality of gender negotiations endemic to the female detective offers new ways of understanding gender in canonical literature and popular culture's consolidated male detective.

I understand this approach to investigation—as a method by which characters can elude (or later reform) womanhood—as a foundational characteristic to the figure. By overlooking the fledgling female detective who negotiates gender through the process of investigation itself, we lose insight into the monumental significance of the literary detective's development: Gender is at the heart of the detective figure from its very beginning and, consequently, investigation is intrinsically about this negotiation.

The Gothic Gender

From its inception, the Gothic interrogated contemporaneous shifts in gender norms. Zigarovich notes that the genre's acknowledgement of gender as something "constantly negotiated" situates it as "a threat to the dominant eighteenth-century perspective" (*TransGothic* 3). Works by eighteenth-century female novelists allowed them to examine "the uneasy slippages that existed between apparently opposed concepts of women during the period: public and libidinal sexuality poised against private and unimpeachable chastity" (Hoeveler 4). As Hoeveler points out, these gender norms were "a legal and social construct that could be persistently attacked, deconstructed, and dissolved in the female gothic novel" (7). She argues that the Gothic ought to be read as "elided representations of the political, socioeconomic, and historical complexities of women's lives under a newly codified bourgeois ideology" (5). In both *The Mysteries of Udolpho* and *The Orphan of the Rhine*, the heroine functions as the site of the authors' negotiations between the Gothic's central dichotomies and, in particular, the changes in the meaning of "woman."

Coming off the heels of the Enlightenment and Industrial Revolution, the Gothic manifested in response to a period of momentous transformation. During this time, "bouregeois and industrial revolution" left behind feudal practices in favor of commercial "notions of property, government, and society" while, concurrently, "Enlightenment philosophy and increasingly secular views" (Botting 13). As a result, Great Britain rejected "feudal barbarity, superstition, and tyranny" to privilege "progress, civilization, and maturity" (Botting 14). According to Fred Botting, Gothic literature developed as a "projection of the present onto a Gothic past" from these dichotomous ideologies and practices (Botting 13).³ All of these

³ For more on the historical conditions from which the Gothic novel emerged, see Nick Groom's *The Gothic*.

entanglements grapple with shifts in women's social positionality under the new bourgeois class and as members of a nation undergoing an expansive imperial project. The bourgeoisie's emergence in post-revolutionary Europe correspondingly incited an ontological adjustment of the category of woman. In 1765, Sir William Blackstone published his treatise *Commentaries on the Laws of England*, which dictates, "The husband and wife are one person in law; that is, the very being or legal existence of the woman is suspended during the marriage, or at least is incorporated and consolidated into that of the husband: under whose total protection and cover, she performs everything" (qtd. in Hoeveler 6). Amid the Industrial Revolution, the socioeconomic situating of the bourgeois woman into the home developed the "separate sphere" ideology in which the public is coded as male and the private as female. As Enlightenment science concurrently switched its medical understanding of the body from the one sex to two sex model, according to Thomas Laqueur (8), it likewise enforced a gender binary through the feminization of the nervous system in which "women's nerves were normatively distinct from men's, normatively making them creatures of greater sensibility" (Barker-Benfield 27).⁴ In conjunction with nerve theory, the conflation of nerves with womanhood dominated the contemporaneous understanding of women's bodies and was further extrapolated by the eighteenth-century sensibility novel. Sensibility (that is, feeling) is characterized by imagination, moral superiority, and "wished-for resistance to men" but it also "betoken[s] physical and mental inferiority, sickness, and inevitable victimization, circumstances throwing severe doubt on the effectiveness of the female will" (Barker-Benfield 35–36). The resulting conventions of

⁴ ". . . a human being's weakness and illness represented the overbalance of the originally female side. (The natural constituency for the specialist concentrating on the state of nervous liquids could be seen as a female one.) . . . Lacking these literally male qualities, those born with innately fine or delicate nerves were not 'made capable of running into the same Indiscretions or Excess of Sensual Pleasures' as were those born with 'strong Fibres or Robust Constitutions.' According to this scheme, it could be claimed that women were naturally the moral superiors of most men, a superiority shared by men who were becoming more like women in this regard" (Barker-Benfield 24).

eighteenth-century womanhood revolved around the imperatives of the home: “feminine qualities compensated for the ‘inequality of man-made laws’ by assigning women very specific social responsibilities, and thereby assuring them of very specific powers” (Poovey 309)—that is, the domestic and moral welfare of a woman’s family.

The Gothic novel seemingly sprang up overnight in 1764 with the publication of *The Castle of Otranto, a Gothic Story* by Horace Walpole. Although we may observe some of the genre’s characteristics in, for example, canonical literature as early as Shakespeare (especially his dramas that burst at the seams with ghosts, witches, and the vengeful return of past crimes like *Hamlet* and *Macbeth*), the Gothic synthesized into a distinctive mode in the mid-to-late eighteenth century following Walpole’s peculiar novel. Of its inception, he wrote to the Reverend William Cole on 9 March 1765:

Your partiality to me and Strawberry [Hill] have I hope inclined you to excuse the wildness of the story. You will even have found some traits to put you in mind of this place. When you read of the picture quitting its panel, did you recollect the portrait of Lord Falkland all in white in my gallery? Shall I even confess to you what was the origin of this romance? I waked one morning in the beginning of last June from a dream, of which all I could recover was, that I had thought myself in an ancient castle (a very natural dream for a head filled like mine with Gothic story) and that on the uppermost bannister of a great staircase I saw a gigantic hand in armour. In the evening I sat down and began to write, without knowing in the least what I intended to say or relate.

It is probable that Walpole was the first to popularize the term “Gothic” literature. First inspired by his Gothic Revival villa Strawberry Hill House, the genre heralded by *The Castle of Otranto*

is named for the architectural style as well as the period in which many of the genre's early novels are set, the Middle Ages.

At the turn of the nineteenth century, the Gothic's principal elements stabilized but never ventured far from *Otranto's* initial fascination with patriarchal tyranny, transgressive practices (such as incest and queerness), and the return of the sins of the past. Patrick O'Malley interprets the Gothic as "an eruption of a traumatic past into the present" whose "suggestion of the supernatural" which flirts with the junction between repulsion and desire (12). The late eighteenth century was instrumental in the genre's construction: The political turmoil of first the American Revolution rejecting British rule and, later, the threat of the French Revolution both imbued the genre with a striking political edge. The change in the United States and France's regimes, combined with the Enlightenment's profuse influence and the burgeoning imperial project, provided a neat dividing line for the British psyche. The barbaric, superstitious past thus contrasted the civilized and democratic present.⁵ Through this dichotomy, the Gothic insists that violent political change, like France's Reign of Terror, belongs to the past and to foreign nations whereas England operates with a gradual and rational approach to such change.

Over the course of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, the Gothic promoted Britain's self-perception as a civilized and rational democracy against foreign nations. Literature, like all forms of media, has been historically complicit in this us-versus-them mentality. In *Imagined Communities*, Benedict Anderson analyzes the creation of nationalism in the eighteenth century through its modern trajectory. The Enlightenment, he states, brought its own darkness through this construction of nationalism, which necessarily arose at the crux of historical events, like

⁵ While the British monarchy by no means dissolved its governing influence, Sir Robert Walpole (1676–1745), Horace's father, is widely considered its first Prime Minister, ushering in a semblance of democracy. It is unsurprising that the tumult between past and present reigned in the author's imagination.

widespread revolution, that both lost nations' grips on the divine rights of kings and were increasingly global (and, thus, awareness of religious pluralism) (6). In conjunction with religious and geographically based nationalism, the Gothic relied on its depiction of transgressive modes of gender and sexuality as other to supplement Britain's self-perception. Eighteenth-century Gothic literature regularly figures continental Europe, and frequently the Catholic south, as sexually deviant. Contrasting Protestant England, the Gothic renders Catholicism and its representations (e.g., Italy/Italians) as "threats to the sexual and familial ideals" of Great Britain (O'Malley 24). In *Catholicism, Sexual Deviance, and Victorian Gothic Culture* (2006), O'Malley notes, "In its ideological structure, the English Gothic novel, though it typically represents Catholicism, is fundamentally a Protestant genre" (O'Malley 32). Such conceptions bolstered the dichotomous relationship between the past and present, the Catholic south and the Protestant north, the sexually perverse and the virtuous, who was and was not considered civilized.

The Gothic envelops and subverts this binary world within its pages. *The Mysteries of Udolpho* and *The Orphan of the Rhine* are emblematic of the Gothic's ideological complexities that underpin the fictional detective. Both Radcliffe and Sleath's novels locate a significant portion of their narratives in southern Europe. Early Gothic literature commonly dedicates its narratives to Italy but also often to France and Germany, firmly setting it beyond Britain's borders. In many cases, as in Parson's *The Mysterious Warning: A German Tale* (1796), the novel's subtitle invokes a foreign setting. Like many of her most famous novels, Radcliffe's *Udolpho* occurs largely in Italy.⁶ And while Sleath is unusual among her contemporaries for her largely favorable view of Catholicism in *Orphan* and it has "no pretense to the German origins

⁶ By degrees, Radcliffe also works within the period's popular framework of travel writing, for example *New Observations on Italy and Its Inhabitants* (1796) by Pierre Jean Grosley, as well as her own.

that signaled to English readers much tabooed material and graphic description of sensational and/or sexual violence inflicted on bodies found here,” the narrative is nevertheless set in Germany, Italy, and Switzerland (Moody viii).

The fledgling female detective of the Gothic novel emerged during the 1790s, developing out of Enlightenment values and anxieties. At the same time Walpole invented the Gothic novel, politicians and philosophers hotly debated women’s roles in society. Edmund Burke penned a treatise on the sublime, which Ann Radcliffe would adopt in her formulation of Gothic terror. A few decades later, after the revolutionary spirit gripped Europe and America, Radcliffe was at the height of her career and Mary Wollstonecraft (mother of Gothic novelist Mary Shelley) argued in favor of women’s rational education and against the excess of sentimentality. In the Gothic heyday of the eighteenth century, women authors like Radcliffe and Sleath imbued the character with some of their earliest and most enduring traits.⁷ Their tales of mysterious motives, disguised identities, hidden documents, revenge and justice frequently pit virtuous women against dastardly criminals. In the 1790s, Radcliffe refined the Gothic genre to elevate the female imagination, emphasizing gendered anxieties of confinement, madness, and patriarchal violence that continue to be rerouted in Gothic media today. Although Walpole is credited with the creation of the Gothic genre, Radcliffe likewise occupies an authoritative standing in the genre’s history as a principal architect. Austen’s Gothic satire aside, Radcliffe was admired by numerous nineteenth-century authors in the following decades. Her influence filters through the Brontë sisters, Edgar Allan Poe, Victor Hugo, Romantic poets like Byron and Keats,

⁷ Another possible contender for the early construction of the detective is William Godwin’s 1794 crime novel *The Adventures of Caleb Williams* which demonstrates the use of reason to combat injustice within a murder mystery. Godwin’s innovative method of planning the novel from end to beginning may have also played a role in detective fiction’s development (Murch).

and Gothic literature itself as well as its generic heirs including sensation, mystery, and, most significantly for my purposes, detective fiction.⁸ The Gothic's status as a predecessor to so many genres of literature, all of which contribute to the detective figure, makes it foundational. Due to Radcliffe's enduring popularity, it has a disproportionate influence on the figure and later fiction. By not starting with the Gothic novel, we lose the roots that have developed the female detective—and all detectives. Nevertheless, the genre's overarching preference for female protagonists lends itself to more female sleuths than male. As such, it is imperative to specifically consider the Gothic heroine.

It is not that there are no male heroes in the Gothic. To the contrary, from Walpole's Theodore to Radcliffe's Valancourt, men of action populate these novels. However, rather than act as predecessors to the familiar male sleuth, they fulfill the role of the medieval knight after which they are typically modeled.⁹ The genre's Romantic features also manifest considerably through these characters. Gothic heroes are more likely to ride horses, sing songs, and fight than spy on evildoers. In rare examples of the fledgling male detective in eighteenth-century Gothic novels, they stand out for their feminized position.¹⁰ In *The Mysterious Warning*, Ferdinand is more suited to the traits typical of the Gothic heroine than that of the hero, who, according to Karen Morton, "occupies the space where we normally find the Gothic heroine. He asks Ernest's advice, he cries, faints, and believes in ghosts. He is emasculated by cuckoldry, acts as a carer

⁸ In another instance of Gothic-cum-detective story, Groom likens Clara Reeve's exhaustive explanation of inheritance law in her 1777 Gothic novel *The Old English Baron* to "a case on trial" (84).

⁹ Not to be conflated, the romances of the Middle Ages were, in addition to contemporary Romanticism, great influences on Gothic novels.

¹⁰ Jonathan Harker presents a similar subversion of the male Gothic hero when he is trapped in Dracula's castle a century later, though it is his wife Mina who figures more prominently as investigator.

and displays feminine sensibility” (xiv). He is also tasked with solving the novel’s primary mystery, suggesting a correlation between investigation and gender slippage.¹¹

That the detective finds its roots in so thoroughly female a genre may surprise readers. But what, upon closer inspection, could make more sense? Nowadays, we cannot conceive of the Gothic without a woman carrying an ornate candelabra through a darkened hallway.¹² She peers frightfully over her shoulder. The threat of her captors crowds her like shadows. She nevertheless tiptoes up a staircase or down into a cellar; she is dogged in her pursuit of an awful discovery. As in the macabre French fairytale, Bluebeard’s wife desires the satisfaction of her curiosity as much as her freedom. In many cases of the Gothic plot, a full assessment of the environs is instrumental in the heroine’s escape. Although Emily may never go for midnight strolls in a diaphanous nightgown, she tracks spilled blood on stairwells, suspects men of murder, and resolves to follow leads no matter how dreadful. Even as she flees the villains’ advances and is ultimately united with her beloved chevalier, the Gothic heroine must investigate to survive her circumstances.

The Rational Supernatural in *The Mysteries of Udolpho*

The Mysteries of Udolpho is Radcliffe’s fourth and most beloved novel, published in four volumes by G. G. and J. Robinson, a press which often printed work by women. The modern presumption that all women novelists prior to the twentieth century published behind a male pseudonym or as an anonymous “Lady” (as Jane Austen did throughout her life) due to disreputability or the reading public’s misogyny represents a fallacious literary history. It is, at

¹¹ For more on the male detective’s engagement with gender slippage, refer to my examination of Sherlock Holmes in the conclusion of chapter four.

¹² One is hard-pressed to find a more illustrative example than Edith Cushing in Guillermo del Toro’s Gothic film *Crimson Peak* (2015), for which the director named *The Mysteries of Udolpho* as a major influence.

least, incomplete.¹³ The Gothic's immense popularity disrupts the myth of the masked woman author. In the eighteenth century, female novelists lined readers' shelves. Among Radcliffe's fellow authors of the Gothic were Eleanor Sleath,¹⁴ Clara Reeve, Mary Robinson, Sophia Lee, Charlotte Smith, Eliza Parsons, and Regina Marie Roche. Indeed, several of their works were sufficiently memorable for Isabella Thorpe in Austen's *Northanger Abbey* (1817) to recommend to Catherine Morland seven "horrid novels;" four are by women. *The Mysteries of Udolpho* is not recommended, as Catherine and Isabella have already acknowledged their shared love of "Mrs. Radcliffe." In addition to *The Mysteries of Udolpho*, Radcliffe's *The Romance of the Forest* and *The Italian* are among the most influential works of the late eighteenth century, and she was paid well for them. For the last novel published in her lifetime Radcliffe received £800, earning not only thrice her husband's income but also making her the highest-paid professional writer of the decade.

Radcliffe's substantial copyright payment ensured that the Gothic, a genre dominated by women and considered trivial (unlike poetry, a genre dominated by men), was not only popular but also a serious endeavor. With *The Mysteries of Udolpho*, Radcliffe promoted novel-writing as a viable career for women and its popularity surely warranted concern among those who promoted respectable literature for women, like "religious doctrine, household hints, and . . . conduct literature" (Benedict 138). Indeed, eighteenth-century female readership "was a matter

¹³ Though modern popular thought incorrectly suggests all women prior to the twentieth century were forced to write under pseudonyms, the reality was not a bed of roses either: "Female authorship, though prevalent, was not for all that seen as legitimate nor, as we shall see, did it necessarily resist the status quo. Women frequently prefaced their work with advertisements that proleptically disclaimed any literary merit, ambition, or ability. As the following prefaces to Elizabeth Boyd's *The Female Page* (1737) and Susannah Rowson's *Charlotte Temple* (1790) make painfully clear, writing was something for which the woman writer needed to apologize" (Freeman 76–77).

¹⁴ Contrasting Radcliffe's retiring lifestyle, the authors of a 2012 biographical account claim that Eleanor Sleath's life was "as tempestuous as those of her heroines" (Czlapinski and Wheeler 6). Although Sleath has not achieved nearly Radcliffe's level of fame and was in fact largely forgotten until recently, she published at least one novel after *Orphan* entitled *Who's the Murderer?* (1802).

of public concern” (Ellis x), particularly in the post-revolutionary period during which time “English writers represented women’s reading pleasure as a threat to conventional social relations” (Benedict 138). Whereas such texts instructed women to be “creature[s] of feelings that [were] naturally inclined to household management and caring for the sick, needy, and young” (Armstrong and Tennenhouse 11), the Gothic novel, argues Kate Ferguson Ellis, subverts “the construction of separate spheres for men and women” and “creat[es], in a segment of culture directed toward women, a resistance to an ideology that imprisons them even as it posits a sphere of safety for them” (x). In *The Mysteries of Udolpho*, Radcliffe offers a novel largely congruent with philosopher Mary Wollstonecraft’s protofeminist gender politics regarding women’s rationality, upsetting the confinements in which the post-revolutionary period had begun to position women. By the way of brutish Catholics and false ghosts, *The Mysteries of Udolpho* achieves for Emily Wollstonecraft’s hope for women at the turn of the century: a rational education. Perhaps Radcliffe’s most significant contribution to the Gothic (and detective narratives) is the logical explanation of the seemingly supernatural she offers by the novels’ conclusions. Despite legend, no ghosts haunt Castle Udolpho.

The Mysteries of Udolpho begins at the St. Auberts’ idyllic estate, La Vallée. After the death of her father while travelling together,¹⁵ Emily is put under the care of her aunt who promptly marries the villainous Italian nobleman Montoni. After Emily declines to sign away her estate in France, Montoni locks her and his wife in his ruinous castle Udolpho; his wife—Emily’s aunt—soon dies. Separated from her beloved Valancourt and pursued by Montoni’s friend Morano, she rebuffs proposals and refuses to sign away the estates inherited from her aunt.

¹⁵ It is noteworthy that the first significant actions of the novel occur throughout Emily’s travels: Her journey mirrors the Grand Tour, an enterprise in which young men of means and rank travelled throughout the continent as a pleasurable addendum to their formal education. Hoeveler furthermore comments that Emily is instructed in Latin and English (to her, a foreign language), science, botany, art, and music (90).

With the threat of Montoni and the dark past of the castle affecting her mental state, Emily becomes susceptible to strange occurrences, believing them to be supernatural but which are later revealed to have rational explanations. After a dispute among political dissidents involving Montoni, Emily escapes Udolpho to France where she is reunited with Valancourt. As the novel concludes, she learns that a dying nun whom she met while staying at a convent after her father's funeral is actually Signora Laurentini, the former owner of Udolpho assumed murdered by Montoni. Laurentini confesses that she poisoned the Marchioness of Chateau-le-Blanc because she loved her husband, the Marquis de Villerois and Emily's uncle, thus making Emily the sole surviving heir. Laurentini wills her property to Emily, who finally marries Valancourt and bestows Udolpho onto friends.

Before Poe's Dupin story, "The Murders in the Rue Morgue" (1841), first employed ratiocination to solve a mystery and Holmes became Britain's most famous logician, Emily sought to guide herself with rational thought. The ability to rationalize one's way through mysteries that cloud others' perception, one of the most prominent characteristics of the detective, is the central conflict for Radcliffe's heroine. In explicit contrast to the dominant ideology of the period, *The Mysteries of Udolpho* portrays the heroine's attempted rejection of sensibility in favor of rationality. The novel, however, resists complete repudiation of sensibility and instead presents the values of it and rationality. Of course, rationality is not inherently masculine. However, as a trait and practice, it is situated within a cultural moment in which it is gendered as masculine. *The Mysteries of Udolpho* is in conversation with the gendered ideology prevalent at the end of the eighteenth century and crucially engages with its fixity of gender categories. Emily's ability to utilize both sensibility and rationality—attributes respectively considered feminine and masculine in the 1790s—resists late eighteenth-century constructions of

gender. Yet, even as she eludes “woman,” Emily’s queer subjectivity is what allows her to claim the privileges of the bourgeoisie.

Although the narrative is set in the sixteenth century, *The Mysteries of Udolpho*’s preoccupations speak to the turn of the eighteenth. Similarly, though the St. Auberts are French, Radcliffe mirrors the family in relation to her contemporary British Protestants. Setting Catholic Italy against the St. Auberts and Valancourt’s anachronistic Protestant attitudes, Radcliffe throws into relief the contemporary readers’ enlightened “now” against the misguided and superstitious past. The barbaric vestiges of the past—represented through female disempowerment, the loss of democratic liberties, and the supernatural and extrarational—haunt the present. It is Emily’s job to parse these conflicts and emerge into the daylight of the Enlightenment. Easier said than done.

Emily has an “uncommon delicacy of mind” that, while informing her benevolence, also makes her excessively sentimental (Radcliffe 8). It is this excess that supposedly endangers her mind throughout the novel. Before his death, Emily’s father instructs her not to ““indulge in the pride of fine feeling, the romantic error of amiable minds. Those,”” he continues: ““who really possess sensibility, ought early to be taught, that it is a dangerous quality, which is continually extracting the excess of misery, or delight, from every surrounding circumstance . . . and since our sense of evil is, I fear, more acute than our sense of good, we become the victims of our feelings, unless we can in some degree command them”” (Radcliffe 78). M. St. Aubert forewarns his daughter of the sensibility that will later govern her actions at Udolpho. Upon her father’s death, Emily finds good reason to exercise his lessons. When Montoni locks her in his castle, she becomes susceptible to strange occurrences; the legend of a ghostly woman on the grounds and the supposed murder of her aunt arouse her fear.¹⁶ There, this “dangerous quality” exaggerates

¹⁶ Many years ago, when Montoni was a young man, Udolpho belonged to Signora Laurentini, a lady of some relation. Though he hoped to marry her, she was in love with another and refused him. One evening, the Signora

Emily's sense of imperilment; in one moment, it makes her insensible to the point of unconsciousness. Against superstitions, Emily must entreat her logic. It wavers often.

Unlike Dupin and Holmes with their (supposedly) congenitally scientific minds, Emily must learn to privilege reason above sensibility over the course of the novel. She in effect undergoes an education in rationalism. This tutelage is paramount. Though in the twenty-first century we might balk against the notion that Emily's feminine mind must undergo trials in order to become rational, in the late eighteenth century Radcliffe's portrayal of a woman capable of such education was quite progressive.¹⁷ That she learns these lessons at all is significant: By 1794 when Radcliffe published *The Mysteries of Udolpho*, British ideology long maintained that reason, that great Enlightenment ideal, was solely the purview of men and women of feeling. Hoeveler describes this education as an "androgynous compulsion" that seeks "to create . . . a manly woman" who "must be the perfectly masculinized and sensible woman." "The impulse," Hoeveler continues, "to transmute rigid gender stereotypes was endemic throughout the late eighteenth and early nineteenth-centuries. The cultural attempt to create a new type of gendered being, a person who embodied the best stereotyped qualities of both sexes, recurs obsessively in the literature written by both men and women throughout this era" (89–90). As new gender

took her regular walk despite the chill. "Well, they saw her go down among the woods," the servant Annette tells Emily as wind around them whistles, "but night came, and she did not return" (226). After the Signora's disappearance, Montoni claimed the castle. Since, Udolpho's inhabitants have witnessed her spirit crossing solitary halls. Though Emily laughs at Annette's story, she begins to feel fear "steal upon her" (227). And no wonder: it is a good ghost story.

¹⁷ In *The Rise of the Woman Novelist*, Jane Spencer contends that female characters within the didactic tradition was not as conservative as it may appear. Rather, Spencer argues that such novels provided a "rational for women to argue for great freedom of action on the grounds that female virtue could be trusted" (157). She emphasizes Austen's works, pointing out that in *Pride and Prejudice*, both Darcy and Elizabeth have "something to teach the other" and are equals (172). Thus, heroines may be at once reformed but not subdued. She concludes that the didactic tradition normalized the assumption that "women's moral growth was both more important and more interesting than had usually been thought" (177).

norms were being established, Radcliffe resists binaries through her depiction of a rational heroine.

To better understand the significance of Emily's rationality, it is useful to consider thinkers like Mary Wollstonecraft whose *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman* (1792) examines the confluence between gender norms and rational education. Though unopposed to sensibility itself, Wollstonecraft believed sensibility's over-cultivation ensured women would remain in "the night of sensual ignorance" (44). The excess of sensibility's characteristics of "compassion, sympathy, and sensitivity" became dangerous, according to such line of thought, when it became "the exaggerated emotional responses to a scene or action, the enjoyment of emotion for its own sake" (Smith 579). In *Vindication*, the philosopher resists this gendered attribution of masculine reason and feminine sensibility, and proposes a rational education as the antidote to excessive sensibility. Wollstonecraft's conception of an individual rational education encompasses "the important task of learning to think and reason" (47), achieved through the suppression of emotion. Attributes further include the sharpening of the senses, the forming of the temper, and the regulation of passions from an early age. Without a rational education, she claims, bourgeois women cannot understand the virtues of moral beliefs to which the sexes should be equally subject.

When considered within the context of master detectives, that the fledgling female sleuth must *learn* to employ reason distinguishes her. It places her at the heart of juxtaposed qualities: If she is born sentimental but can learn rationalism, what does this say about her gender or its innate traits? The implicit gender slippage in female detectives' experiences with the feminine sentiment and its associations with the supernatural as well as the development of her rational mind reveals a foundational contestation of fixed gender categories within the detective.

Through female characters, Gothic novelists found space to examine their social world. Fledgling female detectives like Emily are fashioned after these contemporary debates. Discourses of rationalism questioned whether women were capable of rationality. Because men were considered inherently rational it was unnecessary to portray such an education. Women, on the other hand, must be shown to employ rationalism. By placing a female character at the heart of a mystery plot that teaches her rationalism and induces her to investigate, the Radcliffean Gothic heroine argues that women may be rationally competent if given the opportunity to learn the skill and at once demonstrates some of the earliest detective work. In this way, one of the first examples of the fictional detective proffers concerns regarding womanhood.

When, two years after *Vindication*, Radcliffe published *The Mysteries of Udolpho* M. St. Aubert relays a similar appeal:

[St. Aubert] endeavored, therefore, to strengthen her mind; to enure her to habits of self-command; to teach her to reject the first impulse of her feelings, and to look, with cool examination, upon the disappointments he sometimes threw her way. While he instructed her to resist first impressions, and to acquire that steady dignity of mind, that can alone counterbalance the passions, and bear us, as far as is compatible with our nature, above the reach of circumstances, he taught himself a lesson of fortitude; for he was often obliged to witness, with seeming indifference, the tears and struggles which his caution occasioned her. (Radcliffe 9)

Though it is uncertain that Radcliffe read Wollstonecraft's work, their philosophies are compatriot: "Radcliffe's apparent wish to teach women of her era to check their outflow of sensibility with the firmness of reason is the same as Burney's, Austen's, and Wollstonecraft's, all parallel to Hume and Smith's goal in holding up modified Stoicism as a male ideal" (Barker-

Benfield 318). Authorial consideration of popular discourses on gender and sensibility was indeed thorough in the latter half of the eighteenth century. As women's literacy increased, as did their roles as writers. The novel, a new form in the eighteenth century, had been elevated by the midcentury through writers like Samuel Richardson, author of *Pamela; or, Virtue Rewarded* (1740) and *Clarissa: Or the History of a Young Lady* (1748). In *The Culture of Sensibility: Sex and Society in Eighteenth-Century Britain* (1992), G.J. Barker-Benfield notes that the rise of sentimental fiction entreated male and female authors to examine gendered modes of values, manners, and morality, sometimes leading to further questioning of patriarchal gender roles.¹⁸ Wollstonecraft, however, takes the role of the novel to task in its reinforcement of female sensibility who are "subjected by ignorance to their sensations" (215), led to ignore rational thought in favor of love and sensuality. She points to "the reveries of the stupid novelists," though emphasizes that when she:

exclaim[s] against novels, I mean when contrasted with those works which exercise the understanding and regulate the imagination.—For any kind of reading I think better than leaving a blank still a blank, because the mind must receive a degree of enlargement and obtain a little strength by a slight exertion of its thinking powers; besides, even the productions that are only addressed to the imagination, raise the reader a little above the gross gratification of appetites, to which the mind has not given a shade of delicacy.

(215–16)

¹⁸ "Popular novels written by men in the 1760s and 1770s," writes Barker-Benfield, "'were preoccupied with the meanings of sensibility for manhood. The 'unfitness' of the oversensitized man for 'the world' . . . was the object of satire" (142). Though not satirical, the feminized hero of *The Mysterious Warning* demonstrates the singular position of a man in the Gothic, which Barker-Benfield identifies as a subgenre of the sentimental novel. In this light, Ferdinand's fulfillment of the role typically reserved for women is a further testament to the Gothic's openness to gender dissidence.

Bedeviled by tales of murder and ghosts as she is, Emily's endeavor to think with tranquil logic is no small task. Radcliffe writes that her heroine's suffering "made her spirits peculiarly sensible to terror, and liable to be affected by the illusions of superstition . . . Yet reason told her, that this was a wild conjecture, and she was inclined to dismiss it; but, with the inconsistency so natural, when imagination guides the thoughts, she then wavered towards a belief as wild" (Radcliffe 311). This is the regular pace Emily strikes between rationality and sensibility, in a constant waver. Persistently, Emily is unable to "wholly resist its contagion," laughing off superstitions only for them to resurface when she is vulnerable (Radcliffe 67).

Yet, while Emily is certainly persuaded by tales and rumors, *The Mysteries of Udolpho* debunks each supernatural element that plagues Emily's fancy:

the assertion of Laurentini, and the mysterious attachment, which St. Aubert had discovered, awakened doubts, as to his connections with the Marchioness, which her reason could neither vanquish, or confirm. From these, however, she was now relieved, and all the circumstances of her father's conduct were fully explained; but her heart was oppressed by the melancholy catastrophe of her amiable relative, and by the awful lesson, which the history of the nun exhibited, the indulgence of whose passions had been the means of leading her gradually to commission of a crime, from the prophecy of which in her early years she would have recoiled in horror, and exclaimed—that it could not be!—a crime, which whole years of repentance and of the severest penance had not been able to obliterate from her conscience. (623)

Thus possessed with the full knowledge of her experiences at Udolpho, Emily completes her rational education. The "awful lesson" Laurentini confesses further compounds the dangers of passion and Emily is successfully taught to steer her sentiments away from excessive sensibility.

Read in such a manner, Wollstonecraft's wariness about novels is particularly effective: Sentimentalism is both induced by and repelled by literature—an approach we will later see Austen take up in *Northanger Abbey*.

More than a century before Professor Van Helsing, the erudite vampire hunter of Bram Stoker's *Dracula* (1897), implores his compatriots to acknowledge the existence of “things which you cannot understand, and yet which are” and the great detective Sherlock Holmes conversely elucidates the science behind the Baskerville hound's glowing eyes, Emily finds herself in a tug-of-war between the rational and the supernatural. As discourses of rationality and sensibility swirled around gendered poles, the inception of rationality's fundamental use in mystery solving must be considered likewise gendered. As Emily proceeds to invoke her rational education as she investigates the mysteries at Udolpho, she becomes among the earliest of all literary detectives. To Murch, *The Mysteries of Udolpho*'s insistence upon “a reasonably rational explanation of the enigmas” that, “when investigated intelligently, proved to be due to human agency, or to some natural, if far-fetched coincidence” is uniquely central to Radcliffe's contributions to detective fiction (27–28). Radcliffe unique emphasis on the rational positions her as an antecedent of Wilkie Collins and Arthur Conan Doyle who likewise inveigle their sleuths within Gothic plots.

Never entirely opposed to sensibility, *The Mysteries of Udolpho* likewise does not fully embrace rationality. The result is a continuum between the two, which Emily must constantly negotiate. Emily, it turns out, is not a very good detective. Julie, similarly, is kidnapped, as is Laurette who finds herself ultimately “incapable of investigating the subject with the minute attention it required” (Sleath 301). Despite Emily's inability to hit on the right conclusions—the corpse is not her aunt; the horrid figure of human remains behind a black veil is only made of

wax—her amplification of reality into the supernatural and macabre is nevertheless appropriate. She *is* in danger. Although Montoni neither slices his wife's neck nor feeds her poison, her death nonetheless results from his caustic behavior. Meanwhile, Morano hounds Emily, as does another of Montoni's men, and Valancourt is nowhere to be seen. Emily's inheritance, furthermore, is in jeopardy.

The protection of Emily's inheritance is ensured through her use of both sensibility and rationality. Her gender slippage thus crucially reinforces class stratification. The question of inheritance is dominant throughout *Udolpho*; Mary Poovey notes, "Money, in fact, lurks behind every turn" of the novel's plot (323). Because Radcliffe locates the novel in sixteenth-century continental Europe, the legal system employed differs from eighteenth-century Britain and offers an implicit critique of contemporaneous property laws. In the 1790s, a husband's acquirement of his wife's money and property was "a long-established custom," which would not be revoked until the Married Woman's Property Act of 1837 (Ellis 123). By contrast, property passes through female lines in *Udolpho*: La Vallée, before the Quesnel's purchase, was passed down from Emily's mother; Mme. Cheron (later Montoni) has two estates in Toulouse, which Emily inherits upon her death; in the novel's conclusion, Laurentini bequeaths Udolpho to Emily and, upon her death, reveals that, through the Marchioness, Emily is heir to the estate of the Marquis de Villerois that she and her father came across on their travels.

This exchange of inheritance comes to Emily in its entirety when she discovers the truth behind her relationship to the Marchioness—whom the novel teases could be Emily's mother but is in fact her aunt—and is protected throughout the novel by Emily's resistance *and* her suspicion of Montoni. When Emily informs Montoni, "The law, in the present instance, gives me the estates in question, and my own hand shall never betray my right," he replies that although she

may “speak like a heroine . . . we shall see whether you can suffer like one” (Radcliffe 360). She counters:

But his power did not appear so terrible to her imagination as it was wont to do: a sacred pride was in her heart, that taught it to swell against the pressure of injustice, and almost to the glory of the quiet sufferance of ills, in a cause, which also had the interest of Valancourt for its object. For the first time, she felt the full extent of her own superiority to Montoni, and despised the authority, which, till now, she had only feared. (Radcliffe 360)

After her investigations and her apprehension of her aunt’s supposed corpse, Emily is better equipped to deal with Montoni’s villainy. Though her aunt is not a victim of murder and no ghosts roam the castle, Emily is correct in her understanding of the situation’s gravity. Her openness to the supernatural, though mistakenly applied, thus allows her to conceive of the real dangers surrounding her. She adjusts accordingly. Her sensibility, in sum, prepares her to combat Montoni’s patriarchal violence. It leads her to investigate, itself an act of masculine empirical study. Emily thus “earn[s] her right to be a heroine by aping traditional masculine qualities. Throughout the text she is motivated by ‘duty’ and ‘good sense’; she is praised by Montoni for being different from others of her sex. Unlike other women, Emily, he claims understands that ‘strength of mind,’ willpower, is the only quality worth having” (Hoeveler 100). Sensibility, when balanced with a rational education, is demonstrably valuable.

At Udolpho, Emily learns to resist Montoni’s authority. Her resistance notably occurs after her encounter with the corpse, suggesting that the sublime experience empowers her in future contestations. Before her arrival at Udolpho, Montoni separates her from Valancourt as the family travels to a mansion in Venice. At night, Emily’s “unquiet mind had . . . presented her

with terrific images and obscure circumstances, concerning her affection and her future life” and when she wakes, Emily attempts to “chase away the impressions they had left on her fancy,” though cannot and instead wakes “from imaginary evils . . . to the consciousness of real ones” (Radcliffe 155). This moment portends the conflation of “imaginary evils” with “real ones”: Emily’s imagination teaches her, from her first encounters with danger and patriarchal control, to take her concerns seriously. Later at the castle, Montoni criticizes her for being too fearful, instructing her to “conquer such whims” but her fears are entirely “too reasonable to ridicule” (232). In this way, Radcliffe demonstrates the value of sensibility and, furthermore, that it is not irreconcilable with reason.

While people in the social world will always fall short of gendered ideals, the distinction I wish to make is that the period’s fiction typically reinscribes these ideals. *The Mysteries of Udolpho* problematizes those ideals through its attentiveness to the possibilities it offers. Nevertheless, it provides only limited possibilities within existing social structures, such as the class system. Indeed, the possibilities offered here are already moves of compromise; they do not completely destabilize the existing ideological structures. Rather, they offer new ways to operate that bend or elude the period’s ideological strictures. In *The Mysteries of Udolpho*, Emily maintains a remarkable balance of these ascribed feminine and masculine traits, thereby unfixing herself from the ideals of womanhood. The heroine’s engagement with the sublime thus demonstrates two imperatives: first, that she is capable of rational education in that it leads to perception and reason and, second, through her relation to it, she can assert power over her situation. The heroine plays with the sublime and allows for the transformation of the self; she encounters the macabre, sinister, or supernatural and incorporates herself into it.

Though Radcliffe takes up Wollstonecraft's campaign for a rational education, *The Mysteries of Udolpho* does not entirely excise the supernatural from its pages. Likewise, the reassertion—and amplification—of Emily's class status through the masculine rationalism-feminine sensibility continuum suggests that Radcliffe does not appropriate Wollstonecraft's anticapitalistic politics. Poovey reminds us that sensibility is "hospitable to capitalism" (330) and Wollstonecraft "explicitly repudiated both the sentimental ideology and the emergent capitalism that threatened it" (325). Rather than a rejection of the new economic system emerging out of the Industrial Revolution in post-revolutionary England, *The Mysteries of Udolpho* proscribes than "an earlier, more matriarchal-rural culture" would not have resulted in Emily's disinheritance of La Vallée nor the tyranny she experiences at Udolpho (Hoeveler 89). The novel implicitly advocates for the same in Radcliffe's contemporaneous England. Her presentation of the servants, like Emily's maid Annette, as comically superstitious reinforce *The Mysteries of Udolpho's* class politics and concurrently contrasts Emily's new gender subjectivity from the excessively sentimental Annette and the preternaturally irrational Catholic South. While class has always inflicted different expectations upon women, Radcliffe's novel demonstrates a shift in representations of heroines toward rationalism that does not align with the various class-dependent modes of femininity acceptable in the eighteenth-century social world.

Though the Gothic borrows heavily from the sentimental novel, scholars have traditionally understood *The Mysteries of Udolpho* as distinct from its peers as a stringent proponent of rationality. Accordingly, scholarship has overlooked the implications of the sentimental guidance Emily employs in her resistance. The novel's logical conclusion, though vital, must be considered alongside the novel's desire to luxuriate in the sensations of sensibility. In *The Mysteries of Udolpho*, sensibility is so far accentuated that it becomes terror. This terror

becomes an alternate way of understanding a situation: Emily's fear not only matches the severity of the situation even if it is misplaced onto the supernatural but also induces Emily to investigate. Although *The Mysteries of Udolpho* purports to privilege reason above sensibility in a manner reminiscent of *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman*, its ultimate convictions are more ambivalent: reason and sensibility in *The Mysteries of Udolpho* are not incompatible. In her first moment of investigation, Emily circles around to curiosity-terror not as the antithesis of reason but a symptom of it: "she even doubted, whether [her father's instructions] could justly be obeyed, in contradiction to such reasons as there appeared to be for further information" (Radcliffe 100). Her father's past puts her inheritance and lineage into question. Radcliffe's logical gratification of her readers' curiosity distinguishes her from both her contemporaries and successors. Although Sleath's *The Orphan of the Rhine* (1798) takes pains to account for some of the novel's strangeness, no other Gothic novelist in the period clarified the supernatural with such polished gusto as Radcliffe.

Satisfaction Brought It Back: Curiosity and Investigation

Whether apprehending what she perceives to be a dead body or trailing hot after a criminal, the fledgling female detective finds herself overcome by curiosity and the sublime experience it induces. Curiosity motivates her. It compels her. Try as she might, she cannot resist its temptation. Now a staple of the detective, *The Mysteries of Udolpho* and *The Orphan of the Rhine* offer early representations of the sleuth whose curiosity drives their heroines to investigation. In the former, Emily's curiosity is "identifie[d] . . . as the female sublime" (Benedict 235). In the latter, Julie de Rubin and her ward Laurette's curiosity engages heavily with sympathy, an expression of feminine sensibility.

Though curiosity had long been associated with women, in the eighteenth century, its theorization entangled drastically with gender and raised new social concerns in the post-revolutionary period. As women increasingly entered “masculine arenas of politics, literature, and consumption,” female curiosity was framed as “idle, ignorant, prurient, useless or even socially destructive” (Benedict 118) whereas male curiosity was driven by noble scientific inquiry. Barbara M. Benedict’s analysis of curiosity in the early modern period argues, “English culture portrays curiosity as the mark of a threatening ambition, an ambition that takes the form of a perceptible violation of species and categories: an ontological transgression that is registered empirically.” “Curiosity,” she continues, “is seeing your way out of your place. It is looking beyond” (2) and is “the mark of discontent, the sign of a pursuit of something beyond what you have” (2–3). Benedict explains that early modern critics considered female inquiry transgressive and even harmful to “society or the individual” (155). Supposedly more spiritual than men, as the Age of Enlightenment consolidated its emphasis on rationalism, inquiry divided along gendered lines. She elaborates that:

male curiosity was culturally conceived of as a phenomenon closer to superstition and antirational wonder than to the scientific enterprise . . . Early prose fictions that capitalize on curiosity exploit this permeable boundary between superstition and empiricism. As a new audience fostering new prose forms and social issues, and as the ancient embodiment of disobedience, women were figured as disrupting, at least potentially, formal and social conventions. (Benedict 155)

Women in particular embodied curiosity’s manifestation of “ontological transgression” (Benedict 134); curious people—considered “monsters, ‘queers,’ and curiosities” themselves—were social challengers (Benedict 2) who sought to “manifest new realities and reshape their own identities”

(4). In doing so, they “destabilized categories and identities” (Benedict 4) and by the end of the century, curiosity “offered a rich form of resistance to the cultural march toward systematization, classification, and the regulation of morality and social behavior” (Benedict 202). Thus, even as women (or female characters) exhibit curiosity, a gendered double standard ensured that their inquiry was subversive and dangerous.

In *The Mysteries of Udolpho*, M. St. Aubert entreats Emily to uncover and burn a bundle of papers. She follows his deathbed request to the letter except for one direction: not to look at the papers as she destroys them. The first instance of Emily’s investigation, this work is forbidden. The knowledge hidden among these secret papers proves too tantalizing for Emily to ignore:

Returning reason soon overcame the dreadful, but pitiful attack of imagination, and she turned to the papers, though still with so little recollection, that her eyes involuntarily settled on the writing of some loose sheets, which lay open; and she was unconscious, that shew as transgressing her father’s strict injunction, till a sentence of dreadful import awakened her attention and her memory altogether. She hastily put the papers from her; but the words, which had roused equally her curiosity and terror, she could not dismiss from her thoughts. So powerfully had they affected her, that she even could not resolve to destroy the papers immediately; and the more she dwelt on the circumstance, the more it inflamed her imagination. Urged by the most forcible, and apparently the most necessary, curiosity to enquire farther, concerning the terrible and mysterious subject, to which she had seen an allusion, she began to lament her promise to destroy the papers. For a moment, she even doubted, whether it could justly be obeyed, in contradiction to such

reasons as there appeared to be for further information. But the delusion was momentary.
(Radcliffe 99–100)

The combative forces of Emily's sensitive imagination against her better angel of reason compete to mixed results: as a dutiful daughter, she overcomes her desire to save and scour the papers but still sneaks a look at them. Though she only catches a glimpse at their contents, this passage prepares the reader for the temptation Emily will regularly face at Udolpho—and it furthermore sets up the novel's entangled mystery. Try as Emily might, curiosity implores her to look, to know.

By this point, Radcliffe has already apprised readers of Emily's excess of sensibility; we are familiar with her openness brought on by her "uncommon delicacy of mind" that portends "a degree of susceptibility too exquisite to admit of lasting peace" (8). Emily's psychological permeability, against which M. St. Aubert warned, is thus harnessed through her experience of holding these papers. Her excessive sensibility compels her to observe them. Emily's curiosity "awaken[s] her attention and her memory altogether," leading to the perception of her father's secret. The "sentence of dreadful import" will haunt her through the end of the novel; it is Laurentini's mystery that unravels at the conclusion.

Although Radcliffe expounds upon Emily's curiosity long before she arrives at the castle, it is there that she hones her investigative skills. Indeed, in *The Mysteries of Udolpho*, Emily's curiosity is explicitly juxtaposed with sensibility: the search for empirical evidence is a tool against Emily's superstitious fears. In the heady middle of the novel, Montoni locks Emily and her aunt Madame Montoni in a room together after which he retrieves his wife with the intention of putting her away into the castle's east turret. With the castle under siege and the fate of her aunt unknown, Emily faints. When she awakes, Emily finds the door unlocked and, certain that

Montoni has murdered her aunt, resolves to wander Udolpho in search of answers. Her investigation peaks in this moment:

At length a track of blood, upon a stair, caught her eye; and instantly she perceived, that the wall and several other steps were stained. She paused, again struggled to support herself, and the lamp almost fell from her trembling hand. Still no sound was heard, no living being seemed to inhabit the turret; a thousand times she wished herself again in her chamber; dreaded to enquire farther—dreaded to encounter some horrible spectacle, and yet could not resolve, now that she was so near the termination of her efforts, to desist from them. (Radcliffe 304)

Observing the blood, she recognizes it as a potential clue to Madame Montoni's murder.

Although fearful, she continues; she *must* make that dreadful discovery. With the threat of Montoni lurking around every corner, however, and the dark past of the castle affecting her mental state, Emily soon flees to her room and forestalls the knowledge she desires.

Emily nevertheless perseveres in her investigation. After her servant Annette refuses to continue with her, “Emily proceed[s] alone.” She returns to the track of blood, “which she had before observed, her spirits fainted, and, being compelled to rest on the stairs, she almost determined to proceed no further. The pause of a few moments restored her resolution, and she went on” (Radcliffe 344). Mirroring her essay on the supernatural, Radcliffe writes in *The Mysteries of Udolpho* that terror “expands the mind,” and “elevates it,” so that the heroine is at once fascinated “to seek even the object, from which we appear to shrink” (236). Radcliffe thus theorizes terror as a tool of knowledge and apprehension, inextricable from curiosity.

In her appraisal of the object of curiosity, the Radcliffean heroine is concurrently enveloped within a sense of terror.¹⁹ In this first significant instance of Emily's tendency toward investigation as she considers her father's papers, curiosity and terror enflame her equally. As we see in the passage above, Radcliffe conflates this invocation of terror with curiosity. She does so throughout the novel. In her pioneering essay "On the Supernatural in Poetry" (1826), Radcliffe delineates her use of "terror":

Terror and horror are so far opposite, that the first expands the soul, and awakens the faculties to a high degree of life; the other contracts, freezes, and nearly annihilates them . . . and where lies the great difference between horror and terror, but in the uncertainty and obscurity, that accompany the first, respecting the dreaded evil. (149–50)

"On the Supernatural in Poetry" neatly distinguishes terror as an experience of awakening the mind in the face of some unknowable or awe-some evil. Radcliffe's essay is much indebted to Edmund Burke's *A Philosophical Enquiry into the Origin of Our Ideas of the Sublime and Beautiful* (1757). For Radcliffe, "Gothic terror is for her a medium of the sublime" (Groom 84). In his treatise, he attempts to theorize human emotional experience—particularly pleasure, pain, and sympathy. To this end, Burke explicates the difference between beauty and the sublime: the former is small and incites minute pleasure whereas the latter is massive and creates a sense of simultaneous terror and delight. *Sublime and Beautiful* emphasizes obscurity as more affecting than clarity, thus inducing terror. Though Emily has not yet encountered evil, or what she perceives to be evil, her engagement with M. St. Aubert's papers hint at terror on the margins. She is "urged by the most forcible, and apparently the most necessary, curiosity to enquire

¹⁹ Although *The Orphan of the Rhine* is less concerned with terror as a manifestation of sensibility, it is not absent from the novel: "The Signora was informed of it, and, willing to remove what she termed causeless superstition, endeavored to convince them of the absurdity of allowing themselves to be deluded by imaginary terrors" (Sleath 312).

farther, concerning the terrible and mysterious subject” of which she sees only an allusion (Radcliffe 100). Her mere glimpse is significant in the terror it arouses. Radcliffe continues in her essay:

. . . obscurity, or indistinctness, is only a negative, which leaves the imagination to act upon the few hints the truth reveals to it; confusion is a thing as positive as distinctness, though not necessarily so palpable; and it may, by mingling and confounding one image with another, absolutely counteract the imagination, instead of exciting it. Obscurity leaves something for the imagination to exaggerate; confusion, by blurring one image into another, leaves only a chaos in which the mind can find nothing to be magnificent, nothing to nourish its fears or doubts, or to act upon in any way. (“On the Supernatural” 150)

As in Burke’s notion of the sublime, Radcliffe’s theorization of terror considers obscurity central. The tantalizing mystery of her father’s papers, obscured by her instructions to avoid reading them, aggravates her response to them. When Emily arrives at Udolpho, the impenetrability of her circumstances rapidly escalates and motivates her to investigate.

The sublime experience is superbly suited to investigation. Radcliffe’s sublime Gothic develops several of investigation’s key characteristics: the heroine’s engorged curiosity in the face of obscurity, her desire to discover solutions and answers, and its terrifying pleasure. When Burke contends that the sublime object “will of itself excite something very like that passion in the mind,” he mirrors the faculty with the sublime phenomenon (120). Thomas Weiskel in *The Romantic Sublime: Studies in the Structure and Psychology of Transcendence* concurs that the sublime object induces sensation that leads to consciousness: “a vast sensation *signifies* (because it is somehow like) a vast faculty . . . Consciousness is thus set over and against order, as a

spectator who plays no role and cannot interfere; yet it has no self-knowledge outside of this order. If the sensations are withdrawn, consciousness knows only a vacancy” (15). *The Mysteries of Udolpho* portrays a female detective who encounters the sublime object and cannot overcome it without tutelage, though the reader will notice inklings of this when Emily flees the castle. With the castle totally within her line of sight, its obscurity and thus its power loosens. Weiskel writes of this tension:

So Burke argues that obscurity has a greater affective appeal than clarity, which ‘is in some sort an enemy to all enthusiasms whatever.’ In nature, ‘dark, confused, uncertain images have a grater power on the fancy to form the grander passions than those which are more clear and determinate.’ This is so because ‘it is our ignorance of things that causes all our admiration, and chiefly excites our passions. Knowledge and acquaintance make the most striking causes affect but little.’ Hence the sublime comes to be associated both with the failure of clear thought and with matters beyond determinate perception.

(17)

The sublime objects that Emily cannot (but seeks to) understand, such as her father’s papers, a corpse, or a track of blood on the stairwell, “excite[] [her] passions” *because* they are unknown. In such an experience, the subject must mine the logical from the incomprehensible to remain intact.

Contemporaneous examinations of the sublime are uniquely patriarchal, but Emily, as a heroine, evinces a divergent approach to the sublime in *The Mysteries of Udolpho* in which she subsumes the self within the sublime before emerging changed. Barbara Claire Freeman explains how scholars like Edmund Burke and Immanuel Kant theorize the sublime through misogynistic constructions in which “a self--sacrifice by the putatively weaker partner: in the theory of the

sublime the imagination must yield itself to reason” (72). For men—and it is necessary to here acknowledge that eighteenth theorization of the sublime implicitly figures the subject as male—engagement with the sublime object typically categorizes overwhelming feelings in relation to the object of the sublime. Encounters, even when operating in relation to different kinds of sublime phenomenon, have a conventional structure as in much Romantic poetry. When the subject encounters the destabilizing object, he sees his capacity to be shattered as a point of privilege, as proof his own openness, his own curiosity and sensitivity. But this point of shattering must be concluded; it must be conquered. He thus encapsulates the encounter, establishing an equivalence between himself and the sublime phenomenon. In poetry and theory of the eighteenth century, “the sublime becomes associated not with the clear and the distinct but with the vague and the obscure” (Weiskel 16). The subject’s ability to delineate and “provide a vocabulary for” this experience—that is, master it—that equalizes the sublime object and the subject (Weiskel 13). Unlike Emily’s response, his imperative process appropriates this feeling into containment and control within the self, which allows the subject to emerge with a new sense of identity that “maintains the self’s domination over its objects of rapture” (Freeman 3). He thus refines the object of profound terror and anxiety, into a manageable component of his own identity; he absorbs the sublime into himself.

Characterized by their need to be conquered by civilization in the Western mind, these objects are “evoked by the spectacular and wild in nature,” such as a tempest or mountains, “or by a vivid impression of supernatural beings such as ghosts and demons” (Weiskel 13). For the experience to progress effectively, the subject must relate to the sublime object on a masculine level. Sublime nature, for example, is not figured as feminine but rather patriarchal and God-like. The individual subject returns from his experience a version of himself in which his strength and

power is reasserted; he finds himself equal to the sublime object because he can consolidate it. Conversely, Freeman argues that the feminine sublime does not seek to master the sublime object. She contends, “Unlike the masculinist sublime that seeks to master, appropriate, or colonize the other, I propose that the politics of the feminine sublime involves taking up a position of respect in response to an incalculable otherness. A politics of the feminine sublime would ally receptivity and constant attention to that which makes meaning infinitely open and ungovernable” (11). Rather than a mastery of the sublime, Freeman theorizes it through its *relation* to the self.

The Mysteries of Udolpho presents an encounter akin to Freeman’s feminine sublime. However, it is imperative to note here that Freeman’s characterization of the “feminine” sublime constructs a binary that I wish to interrogate. Indeed, while Freeman seeks to examine the “other sublime”—that is, that of women’s literature—her delineation nevertheless upholds the binary through her terminology. While Freeman is apt in her argument that this otherness is gendered feminine, my goal here is to deconstruct this binary by considering Radcliffe’s use of these divergent modes of the sublime. Radcliffe utilizes the framework of Burke’s sublime within a pseudo-feminist subjectivity, revising the traditional theorization of the sublime with Freeman’s feminine sublime. As such, Emily demonstrates neither the traditional (or masculine) experience of the sublime nor entirely the feminine sublime; instead, Radcliffe’s novel sustains Burke’s vast faculty and conscious-expanding experience while concurrently resisting mastery over the experience or object. While Weiskel’s analysis of the sublime examines the subject’s ability to master the object, he does not consider its transformative potential which we see in Emily’s sublime experience.

Emily's narrative arc demonstrates that there is another way for characters to negotiate sublime encounters that keeps the possibility of mystery in play but makes it manageable. When she encounters an object or scene that arouses her curiosity and her terror, the experience de-subjectifies her: The boundary between herself and the subject of her curiosity-terror dissolves. This experience, however, is momentary. In its aftermath, she rebuilds her subjectivity but concurrently remains open to future experiences.

The Mysteries of Udolpho's second volume ends with a cliffhanger. The castle's porter offers to take Emily to the east turret to see her aunt—unfortunately, the visit must be undertaken in the dead of night. When the third volume opens, Emily finds herself waiting in a chamber, which she begins to examine. Pulling back a curtain, she spies what she believes to be her aunt's corpse:

Beyond, appeared a corpse, stretched out on a kind of low couch, which was crimsoned with human blood, as was the floor beneath. The features, deformed by death, were ghastly and horrible, and more than one livid wound appeared in the face. Emily, bending over the body, gazed, for a moment, with an eager, frenzied eye; but, in the next, the lamp dropped from her hand, and she fell senseless at the foot of the couch. (Radcliffe 329–30)

In this critical moment, Emily is beset by terror. She observes the body minutely; she is “eager” and casts over it with a “frenzied eye.” Emily must analyze the corpse that seems to be the answer to her questions and yet, “This moment where the female gaze would penetrate the ‘dark abyss’ of male power dissolves into a scene of feminine panic” (Heller 24). The corpse elicits a sublime response in Emily, rendering her overpowered by the sensations it generates.²⁰ In

²⁰ Sensibility's characteristics parallel affect, which here describes sensations before they are categorized into emotion. It disrupts disciplinary knowledge through its emphasis of the connection between feeling and concepts, often furthermore evoking bodily responses. Affect extends the individual outward, de-subjectifying the self, and absorbs the exterior or else analyzes the collectivity, complicating the ability to know the self and the social.

Udolpho, the sublime response is a requisite to reason. Emily encounters that which is obscure and shattering and supernatural, and moreover demonstrates openness and curiosity that mirrors that of the Romantic poet. In her case, she learns to assert this control through her rational education by the novel's conclusion but remains permeable, "infinitely open."

Emily's unique response to terror is central to *The Mysteries of Udolpho*'s resistance to fixed gender categories; Radcliffe figures curiosity and terror as defiant sensations. Sleath likewise portrays her heroines' indulgence in curiosity in contrast to their "nice" and "amiable" traits but refrains from condemning them for it. In his theorization of the sublime, Burke highlights the confusion between pleasure and terror that coalesce into the sublime: "this delight I have not called pleasure, because it turns on pain, and because it is different enough from any idea of positive pleasure. Whatever excites this delight, I call *sublime*" (Burke 47). The often-eroticized drive to indulge in curiosity is foremost among Gothic literature's contributions to the literary detective. Curiosity-terror, this habitual interrelation between the two sentiments, engenders an affective response.

The Radcliffian Gothic's adoption of the sublime is notably erotic. Its sensations, demonstrably pleasurable, painful, and overwhelming, characterize the heroine's curiosity; the experience is both thrilling and terrible. It is not simply *terror*, however, that creates and eroticizes the heroine's response, but the intrigue inherent to it. Scholar Tamar Heller concurs: "The anxiety about feminine sexuality is encoded through the linking of terror to the typical sexual plot of the Gothic. Terror becomes a way of coding the sexual feelings of the Radcliffian heroine . . . by insistently referring to her body; Gothic heroines are always sighing or fainting or shivering" (23). Likewise, the significance of Emily's experiences in Italy must not be overlooked: Protestants like Radcliffe, O'Malley argues, used the Gothic to present "a fantasy of

Roman Catholicism . . . deeply anxious about [its] national, sexual, and theological ramifications”; Catholicism, that is, is a shorthand for sexual deviance (26). But it is also a setting which allows for gender slippage.²¹ Radcliffe condemns the Catholic south while also utilizing it to the advantage of her heroine’s gender slippage.

The pleasure of solving a mystery and privileging the puzzle above monetary or career rewards is now a routine characteristic of the detective or amateur sleuth, as for *The Moonstone*’s cast of characters for whom “detective fever” runs rampant (Collins 267). Works like *The Mysteries of Udolpho* and *The Orphan of the Rhine* showcase this compulsion’s role in investigation—an itch that not only demands being scratched but results in the pleasurable satisfaction of doing so. In Radcliffe and Sleath’s heroines, we see the earliest demonstration of this most important investigative tool in the detective’s arsenal. The Gothic heroine’s desire to more fully understand their circumstances—for their own sakes and others’, as well as its pure satisfaction—and to engage in the pleasure of the puzzle illuminates a complex relationship between the detective and their gender.

Because this excess of sensation Emily experiences when she views the “corpse” is what Wollstonecraft contends is precisely the detriment to the writers’ contemporary conceptions of “woman,” its central invocation in *The Mysteries of Udolpho* problematizes Radcliffe’s portrayal of a rational education. Yet, this experience is imperative to Emily’s rational education and neither Radcliffe nor Sleath’s novels ultimately rejects sensibility despite their heroine’s fallible plans and conclusions. Radcliffe’s ability to hold *The Mysteries of Udolpho*’s logical imperatives in balance with its indulgence in the supernatural—which “dramatize[s] the limitations of

²¹ “Walpole illustrates that gender and sexuality are constantly negotiated, which engendered the Gothic genre as a threat to the dominant eighteenth-century perspective. Transgressive expression thereby emerges in the Gothic as textual symptoms of the denial of not only female desire, but same-sex desire” (Zigarovich, *TransGothic* 3).

empiricism in a world always partly inexplicable” (Benedict 233)—mirrors the gender continuum. Sleath, though somewhat less invested in explaining away the supernatural potential that *Orphan* teases, likewise refuses to entirely excise sensibility from her novel. Instead, both novels “offer readers a pleasure that is distinctly not rational” (Benedict 231). Their shared ability to operate on a continuum between masculine rationality and feminine sensibility thus allows the heroines, through the act of investigation, to undo the fixity of gender categories through their investigations. Each heroine’s use of curiosity, moreover, is framed not as a feminine flaw but rather as a noble pursuit. Benedict notes that many Gothic novels present curiosity as “the noble collection of impressions and information about others” that “imply a moral rationale or application that endorses gossip and prurience as the acquisition of enlightenment” (203). In *The Mysteries of Udolpho* and *The Orphan of the Rhine*, curiosity’s nobility, directly contesting gendered discourses about curiosity in the late eighteenth-century, thus loosens its heroines from the fixity of gender categories.

In *The Mysteries of Udolpho* and *The Orphan of the Rhine*, rather than serving as a traditionally feminine flaw, curiosity is instead positioned as a threat to patriarchal control. The investigation spurred by the heroines’ curiosity avoids “implicating [these] agents of inquiry in the crimes they discover: they are usually female witnesses of male evil” (Benedict 205). Furthermore, in opposition to the characterization of curiosity as superstitious and “antirational wonder,” Radcliffe and Sleath figure curiosity as a guide to empirical evidence, to perception—that is, the period’s masculine theorization of curiosity in contrast to the feminine, which invokes gossip and snooping. Both novels, however, maintain the radical potential that Benedict identifies: Because the heroines’ experiences with the feminine sublime and sympathy are routed through masculinized curiosity (e.g., empirical evidence), the result is an “androgynous

compulsion” that is necessary in their resistance to patriarchal violence. Curiosity is recast as masculine in the heroines, but, concurrently, its pairing with the feminine sublime and sympathy (itself a trait of sensibility) reinforces a continuum between the feminine and the masculine. In doing so, the heroine’s survival is contingent on her ability to navigate the feminine-masculine continuum and thus elude fixed categories of gender.

From Curiosity to Perception in *The Orphan of the Rhine*

Curiosity is satisfied through perception. Perception, it hardly needs be said, is the crux of all detection. The immortal words Holmes speaks upon his introduction to Dr. Watson—““You have been in Afghanistan, I perceive”” (Conan Doyle 13)—foregrounds its inextricability with the detective. In the late seventeenth century, philosopher John Locke theorized perception (or “Thinking” as he synonymized it) as one of the “two great and principal Actions of the Mind” in his essay *An Essay Concerning Humane Understanding* (1690). By the eighteenth century, thinkers like minister and writer Isaac Watts and astronomer James Harris further refined perception respectively as “that Act of the Mind (or as some Philosophers call it, rather a Passion or Impression) whereby the Mind becomes conscious of any Thing” and “the Senses and the Intellect.” Watts’s 1725 treatise *Logick, or The Right Use of Reason in the Enquiry After Truth With a Variety of Rules to Guard Against Error in the Affairs of Religion and Human Life, as well as in the Sciences* in particular analyzed perception as one of the four primary modes of logic in addition to judgement, reasoning, and method. Wollstonecraft in *Vindication* similarly invokes sensibility as defined by a Dr. Johnson: ““Quickness of sensation; quickness of perception; delicacy”” (qtd. in Wollstonecraft 90). In what were contemporaneously considered oppositional traits, sensibility and reason both claim perception as a defining characteristic. The definitions of

each are curiously alike: Even as perception is a mode of reason and logic, it is passionate; even as it invokes the mind, it cannot exist without the sensual relationship to the body. The very theorization of perception belies its sticky nature, illustrating that attempts to define rationality and sensibility along gender lines are dependent upon the author's intent. Perception, as we may gather from several prominent eighteenth-century thinkers, amalgamates the body and mind, the feminine and masculine. It is a union of the "the Senses" and "the Intellect."

Whereas *The Mysteries of Udolpho* centers Emily's curiosity, Sleath's novel takes such impulses one step further into perception. *The Orphan of the Rhine* is a Gothic novel with two heroines across two generations, both of whom do their share of sleuthing. When the first heroine Julie de Rubine hears a man menace another within a castle tower she can't help but stop and listen. As she "conceal[s] herself in the thick foliage of the trees that surrounded the lonely turret" (Sleath 95) her curiosity evolves into perception.

The Orphan of the Rhine opens after Julie's sham marriage with the Marchese de Montferrat and the birth of their infant son, Enríco. When the Marchese, Enríco's father, demands that she care for the infant Laurette, Julie agrees and moves with the children to a castle in Germany called Elfinbach. Years later, she encounters La Roque, an old acquaintance from her travels, who had named the Marchese a murderer. She frees him from his castle town prison but is kidnapped in the process. In the first half of the novel, Julie is constantly "impelled" and "induced" by curiosity, which is for her an "irresistible impulse" (Sleath 94, 104). She is compelled to "examine" and enter perilous spaces to satiate her curiosity:

Thus enabled to gratify a curiosity which was augmented by the small prospect of gratification the first view of it had been presented, she walked slowly through the passage, and was within a few spaces of the stairs when a deep groan, which was

instantly succeeded by the clinking of a chain, overcame her with horror and amazement.

(Sleath 94; emphasis added)

In the novel's latter half, Laurette, now a young woman, seeks the truth of her parentage and meanwhile refuses the Marchese's marriage proposal. She likewise feels "curiosity, triumphing over the nicer feelings of her mind" as she attempts to "unravel the mystery that had involved her in such a series of calamities" (297, 301) Her curiosity "triumph[s] for the moment over every other consideration," and she feels "an irresistible inclination" to hear "unfold the important secret" of her parentage (284). At the end of the novel, Enríco rescues Laurette; the two marry and the Marchese dies after confessing his crimes. Julie is discovered in a convent where she was forced to live as a nun. Her marriage to the Marchese is revealed to have been lawful all along, making Enríco his heir. Laurette likewise learns of her noble lineage. Wealthy and charitable, the family of three resumes living in Elfinbach together. For these characters kept in the dark about their own lives and those around them, perception leads to the freeing power of knowledge.

In *The Orphan of the Rhine*, Sleath consistently conflates sympathy with curiosity, which in turn becomes Julie's motivation to investigate, leading her to discoveries. That which is mysterious and arouses her sympathy drives Julie to draw a plan to rescue a prisoner. Initially, Julie's investigation of the tower's prisoner is motivated solely by pure curiosity:

In a state of inconceivable dread she listened for some moments to be assured from whence the voices proceeded . . . Anxious to be assured who were the people thus strangely secluded in the subterranean recess of this gloomy abode, and to be acquainted with the purpose of their concealment, she advanced fearfully towards the door, and examining it attentively, endeavoured to discover some way of opening it; but no visible means appearing, she pressed forcibly against it. (Sleath 94)

The satisfaction of knowing—the “prospect of gratification” (Sleath 94)—compels Julie despite her “dread.” She is not only “anxious” from fear but also because she is impatient to understand the circumstances under which the people she hears are concealed. Recalling the key moment in *The Mysteries of Udolpho* when Emily sees the “track of blood” on the stairs (Radcliffe 304), Sleath’s depiction of curiosity likewise emphasizes the tug and pull of attraction and repulsion. However, unlike Emily, Julie does not flee. She instead acquires the knowledge she desires: In *The Orphan of the Rhine*, curiosity drives her to perceive the hidden details, taking Julie a step further than Emily.

However, it is ultimately sympathy²² for the man Julie discovers locked in Elfinbach’s tower that motivates her to further action. Entering the passage, she hopes to “avert the fate that awaited this victim of perhaps unjust resentment” (Sleath 95) who is now the “ill-fated object of her compassion” (Sleath 96). With her sympathy aroused, Julie is “resolved” to “release a fellow-creature from the grasp of inflexible tyranny” (Sleath 96). She forcibly passes through an iron door and “grope[s] her way” through the following passage (Sleath 98). There, she finds a key to unbolt a door, leading her to the prisoner. Sleath writes that because the “peculiar circumstances” are “veiled in mystery” and the prisoner has thus “much interested her compassion,” she develops a “plan . . . so much more eligible than any she had before conceived that she was resolved to put it into execution” (Sleath 101). In this moment, Julie’s curiosity, crucially mingled with her sympathy, make her a successful investigator.

²² Though the mode of feeling Sleath’s heroines experience may be recognizable to modern readers as empathy, translated from the German “Einfühlung,” meaning “feeling oneself into the place” of someone or something, “empathy” was not coined until the early twentieth century (Burdett). I therefore make use of the period-appropriate term “sympathy” in this dissertation. For more on the historical distinction between sympathy and empathy, see Greiner.

Although Julie stands out as the novel's more adept sleuth who is (at least partially) able to gather information, formulate a plan, and execute it, Laurette similarly experiences this drive to investigation: "Compassion, as well as curiosity, now warmed the heart of Laurette; and unable any longer to resist the amiable impulses of her nature, she ventured to intrude upon the sacredness of his sorrow by asking him why he wept" (Sleath 391). The conflation of curiosity and compassion that motivates Julie and Laurette to seek the truth and act on that knowledge lays the foundation of future sleuths whose relationship with the law, justice, and their own feelings are often at odds. This emotional permeability is thrown into greater relief when read within its larger gendered context. Like sensibility, this sentimental regard for others in the late eighteenth century was a defining female trait; an openness to feeling for not only oneself but others reinforces the problematic force of excessive sentimentality. Over the long nineteenth century, sympathy and broader notions of permeability become useful tools to the detective—ones which demonstrate an openness to possibility that in turn allows detectives to succeed in their work.

The Gothic Heroine Becomes Detective

In the eighteenth century, the literary detective issues from the heart of the period's primary contentions. The Gothic heroine counters dominant ideology to establish a new gender subjectivity that never stabilizes but rather moves along a feminine-masculine continuum, unfixing the category of "woman." Her destruction of conventional roles—achieved through her amalgamation of sensibility and rationality, and her incisive and unique presentation of curiosity—furthermore challenges the patriarchal violence which she faces. She is a gender rebel whose "curiosity [is] the means to escape social corruptions and confinements" (Benedict 243).

Marked by an invocation to justice and survival, the Gothic heroine is a fledgling female detective whose investigations broadly characterize the future of detective work.

Emily, Julie, and Laurette negotiate the conclusiveness of a rational solution and the openness of sensibility and the supernatural. In both Radcliffe and Sleath's novels, investigation leads their heroines to resist patriarchal rule and lasciviousness; it protects them, despite their sufferings, from the worst conclusions. Heller in *Dead Secrets: Wilkie Collins and the Female Gothic* (1992) writes:

The 'system of terror' within the Radcliffean Gothic novel represents a form of resistance to a society that treats women as the property of men. Yet the Gothic, like the changing legal and judicial discourses of the period, provides through terror a form of internalization for women—heroines and readers—that diffuses the most radical implications of the revolt of mothers and daughters that it evokes. (25)

Heller associates the “radical tendencies” (15) of the female Gothic with the French Revolution's aftermath in which dynamics of power and gender were contested to reveal “ambivalence about female rebelliousness” (17). Indeed, in each novel's conclusion, a radical outcome is avoided: Emily marries Valancourt and inherits her estate; Julie, Laurette, and Enrico consolidate their family within the Elfinbach castle. The threat of the Catholic south—and the deviance it represents—is dispersed. This, too, predicts the politics of the female detective (and detective fiction, I argue, broadly) who contests gender ideologies on an individual basis but maintains hegemonic conceptions of class, religion, and race. Nevertheless, the middle of Radcliffe and Sleath's narratives present a feminist potential of thinking outside the self through the detective's relationship to the sublime. When Emily encounters otherness, she is undone. Although the threat is ultimately vanquished and the supernatural entities rationalized, the encounter ensures that she

walks away with her subject position reformulated and resistant—at least on an individual level—to patriarchal rule and ideology. The Gothic revels in the distinctions it appears to (and frequently does) police. With room for both reactionary and radical impulses, the nineteenth century re-examined its complexities and offered new depictions of the female sleuth. By the 1860s, the female detective gained new ground and populated midcentury novels. But in the decades prior, the female sleuth disappeared. The Gothic plots remained, as did explorations of the relationship between gender and curiosity, but the early nineteenth-century novel largely avoided the fledgling female detective.

The Gothic Satire: A Beginning and End

Though Jane Austen's *Northanger Abbey* was not published until 1817, the year of her death, the manuscript was completed in 1803. This posthumous satire of the Gothic serves as connective tissue across centuries: from the eighteenth in which the Gothic novel and, as I have argued, female detective emerged, and the nineteenth during which the detective figure consolidates. Consciously mining what she perceives as the primary elements of the eighteenth-century Gothic novel, Austen foregrounds investigation in *Northanger Abbey*. Indeed, Ellen R. Belton concludes that Austen novels, most thoroughly evinced by *Northanger Abbey* but present in all, are indebted to the Gothic mystery plot. She asserts that Austen's heroines function as detectives, albeit of social and romantic mysteries. Of *Northanger Abbey*, Belton writes:

As she takes the first tentative steps away from the role of mere recipient of experience and toward that of active investigator and interpreter, the nature of the text itself undergoes a transformation. By the end of the novel Catherine has fulfilled the mission

assigned to all of Austen's heroines: she has learned to penetrate the deceptive social facade, though without disrupting it. (44)

The novel therefore not only highlights several of the novels I examine in this chapter but also centralizes the role of the female detective as an essential component of the Gothic. Like Radcliffe but with a winking eye, *Northanger Abbey*'s satirical critique equates the irrationality of belief in the supernatural with notions of foreignness. The novel similarly follows a trajectory to its Gothic predecessors in which the female detective receives a rational education, which serves to contrast foreign irrationality. I argue that Austen mounts English national identity through a Wollstonecraftian sense of rationality, making *Northanger Abbey* an example of the female detective as arbiter of national identity.²³

In *Northanger Abbey*, Catherine Morland travels with Mrs. Allen to Bath, where she meets Henry Tilney and the Thorpe siblings, Isabella and John. She befriends the former with whom she shares her love of Gothic literature and dislikes the latter, despite his advances; both siblings (rather aggressively) take to Catherine and her brother, believing them to be rich. Catherine is introduced to Henry's sister Eleanor and their father, General Tilney. Despite Isabella's engagement to James, Catherine's brother, she flirts with Frederick Tilney. With the Tilneys planning to leave Bath, Eleanor invites Catherine to their estate Northanger Abbey with which Catherine begins to associate the Gothic, in part due to Henry's characterization of the estate. His awareness of Catherine's interest in Gothic novels allows him to pique her curiosity by presenting Northanger Abbey as a space with a mystery at its heart. Her association of the estate with the Gothic extrapolates to the point that she believes Tilney murdered his wife for which Henry chides her. She then receives word Isabella has left James for Frederick but remains

²³ The relationship between the female detective and English nationality is further analyzed in chapter four.

unengaged. Catherine must suddenly and uncivilly leave *Northanger* at the General's word.

Henry goes to Catherine's home to explain that the General thought she had more money and asks her to marry him.

Northanger Abbey's delineation of the English national identity proffers the same nationalistic impulses as many eighteenth-century Gothic novels with less subtlety. It locates the Gothic abroad and insists upon its irrelevance in the modern age—except, of course, as a method of female education. Catherine's role in *Northanger Abbey* begins to clarify the female detective's role in the construction of an English national identity more broadly. Her paramount lesson, learned through her bumbling investigation, is that, in the enlightened age, England is ruled by law and rationality; the "horrid" Gothic plots are things of the past and, more importantly, foreign nations. Henry, Austen's heroic voice of reason, dictates:

"Remember the country and age in which we live. Remember that we are English, that we are Christians. Consult your own understanding, your own understanding, your own sense of the probable, your own observation of what is passing around you—Does our education prepare us for such atrocities? Do our laws connive at them? Could they be perpetrated without being known, in a country like this . . . Dear Miss Morland, what ideas have you been admitting?" (Austen 164; emphasis added)

Though Catherine ultimately draws the wrong conclusions, her insistence upon General Tilney's guilt and the investigation she undertakes—during which she feels the "anxious desire to penetrate this mystery" (Austen 136)—consolidates the Gothic heroine's role as detective and, moreover, as a woman who learns to distinguish the irrational foreign from rational England. Caroline Reitz contends that nineteenth-century detective fiction directly served Britain's imperial project, stating, "In making an English virtue of an imperial necessity, detective fiction

not only set off a shift in national identification with both the detective and the imperial project, but also refashioned Englishness as an imperial instead of insular identity” (xxv). Though Reitz does not consider Austen in *Detecting the Nation*, her argument that the “detective narrative shaped this complex new imperial reality” (xxv) is temporally farther reaching than even her text allows. Starting with the divisions enabled by the Gothic and set forth in a modern, Austen defines the female detective’s role through English nationality.

We may see *Northanger Abbey* as at once the pinnacle of the eighteenth-century Gothic and its death knell. Following Austen’s satire, the Gothic novel and, more so, the female detective, slipped away from popular literature. She does not resurface until the mid-nineteenth century. The decades between the publication of *Northanger Abbey* in 1817 and the female detective novels of the midcentury are glaring, particularly given the construction of the London police in the 1840s and, across the pond, Edgar Allan Poe’s Dupin stories. Her seeming absence may, in part, be attributed to the deflation of the Gothic’s popularity after the late eighteenth century. When she notably reappears in the midcentury, the securities presented in *Northanger Abbey* of law and epoch are reexamined.

WORKS CITED

- Anderson, Benedict. *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*. Verso, 1991.
- Armstrong, Nancy and Leonard Tennenhouse. "The literature of conduct, the conduct of literature, and the politics of desire: an introduction." *The Ideology of Conduct: Essays in Literature and the History of Sexuality*, edited by Nancy Armstrong and Leonard Tennenhouse. Routledge, 2014, pp. 1–24.
- Austen, Jane. *Northanger Abbey*. 1817. Random House, Inc., 2002.
- Barker-Benfield, G.J., *The Culture of Sensibility: Sex and Society in Eighteenth-Century Britain*. The U of Chicago P, 1992.
- Belton, Ellen R. "Mystery Without Murder: The Detective Plots of Jane Austen." *Nineteenth-Century Literature*, vol. 43, no. 1, 1988, pp. 42–59.
- Benedict, Barbara M. *Curiosity: A Cultural History of Early Modern Inquiry*. The U of Chicago P, 2001.
- Botting, Fred. "In Gothic Darkly: Heterotopia, History, Culture." *A New Companion to the Gothic*, edited by David Putner. Wiley-Blackwell, 2012, pp. 13–24.
- Burdett, Carolyn. "'The subjective inside us can turn into the objective outside': Vernon Lee's Psychological Aesthetics." *Interdisciplinary Studies in the Long Nineteenth Century*, vol. 19, no. 12, 2011, doi: <https://doi.org/10.16995/ntn.610>. Accessed 16 Aug. 2021.
- Burke, Edmund. *A Philosophical Enquiry into the Origin of Our Ideas of the Sublime and Beautiful*. 1757. Oxford UP, 2008.
- Conan Doyle, Arthur. *A Study in Scarlet*. Berke Publishing Corporation, 1975.
- Czlapinski, Rebecca and Eric C. Wheeler. "The Real Eleanor Sleath." *Studies in Gothic Fiction*, vol. 2., no. 1, 2012, pp. 5–12.
- del Toro, Guillermo. "Guillermo del Toro's Guide to Gothic Romance." *Rookie Mag*, 29 Oct. 2015, <https://www.rookiemag.com/2015/10/guillermo-del-toros-guide-gothic-romance/>. Accessed 4 Aug. 2021.
- Dresner, Lisa M. *The Female Investigator in Literature, Film, and Popular Culture*, McFarland, 2006.
- Freeman, Barbara Claire. *The Feminine Sublime: Gender and Excess in Women's Fiction*. U of California P, 1997.

- Greiner, Rae. "1909: The Introduction of the Word 'Empathy' into English." *BRANCH: Britain, Representation and Nineteenth-Century History*. Ed. Dino Franco Felluga, 2012. *Extension of Romanticism and Victorianism on the Net*. Accessed 6 Oct. 2021.
- Groom, Nick. *The Gothic: A Very Short Introduction*. Oxford UP, 2012.
- Harris, James. *Hermes*. 1751. "perception, n." *OED Online*, Oxford UP, June 2021, www.oed.com/view/Entry/140560. Accessed 16 Aug. 2021.
- Heller, Tamar. *Dead Secrets: Wilkie Collins and the Female Gothic*. Yale UP, 1992.
- Hoeverler, Diane Long. *Gothic Feminism: The Professionalization of Gender from Charlotte Smith to the Brontës*. Penn State UP, 1998.
- Laqueur, Thomas. *Making Sex: Body and Gender from the Greeks to Freud*. Harvard UP, 1992.
- Locke, John. *An Essay Concerning Humane Understanding*. 1690. "perception, n." *OED Online*, Oxford UP, June 2021, www.oed.com/view/Entry/140560. Accessed 16 Aug. 2021.
- Murch, A.E., *The Development of the Detective Novel*. Philosophical Library Inc., 1958.
- O'Malley, Patrick R. *Catholicism, Sexual Deviance, and Victorian Gothic Culture*. Cambridge UP, 2006.
- Parsons, Eliza. *The Mysterious Warning*. Edited by Karen Morton. 1796. Valancourt Books, 2008.
- Poovey, Mary. "Ideology and *The Mysteries of Udolpho*." *Criticism*, vol. 21, no. 1., 1979, pp. 307–30.
- Radcliffe, Ann. *The Mysteries of Udolpho*. 1794. Penguin Books, 2001.
- . "On the Supernatural in Poetry." *New Monthly Magazine*, vol. 16, no. 1, 1826, pp. 145–52.
- Reitz, Caroline. *Detecting the Nation: Fictions of Detection and the Imperial Venture*. The Ohio State UP, 2004.
- Sleath, Eleanor. *The Orphan of the Rhine*. 1798. Valancourt Books, 2014.
- Smith, Nelson C. "Sense, Sensibility and Ann Radcliffe." *Studies in English Literature, 1500-1900*, vol. 13, no. 4, 1973, pp. 577–90.
- Spencer, Jane. "Reformed Heroines: The Didactic Tradition." *The Rise of the Woman Novelist: From Aphra Behn to Jane Austen*, Oxford UP, 1986, pp. 142–80.
- Stoker, Bram. *Dracula*. Penguin Books, 2003.

Veisz, Elizabeth. "Northanger Abbey, Gothic Parody, and the History of the Fictional Female Detective." *Persuasions: The Jane Austen Journal On-Line*, vol. 40, no. 1, 2019.

Walpole, Horace. *The Castle of Otranto*. Oxford UP, 2008.

---. "Appendix A: Walpole's Correspondence and Strawberry Hill." *The Castle of Otranto and The Mysterious Mother*, edited by Frederick S. Frank. Broadview Press, 2003, p. 259.

Watts, Isaac. *Logick, or The Right Use of Reason in the Enquiry After Truth With a Variety of Rules to Guard Against Error in the Affairs of Religion and Human Life, as well as in the Sciences*. 1725. "perception, n." *OED Online*, Oxford UP, June 2021, www.oed.com/view/Entry/140560. Accessed 16 Aug. 2021.

Weiskel, Thomas. *The Romantic Sublime: Studies in the Structure and Psychology of Transcendence*. The Johns Hopkins UP, 1976.

Wollstonecraft, Mary. *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman*. 1792. Yale UP, 2014.

Zigarovich, Jolene. "'A Strange and Startling Creature': Transgender Possibilities in Wilkie Collins's *The Law and the Lady*," *Victorian Review*, vol. 44, no. 1, 2018, pp. 9–112.

---. editor. *TransGothic in Literature and Culture*. Routledge, 2018.

CHAPTER TWO:
PROFESSIONAL DETECTIVES IN THE MIDCENTURY

“‘You’re new in the force, I suppose, or you’d have known me. There, don’t stare so—I’m one of
you!’”

—Edward Ellis, *Ruth the Betrayer* (1863)

There were, officially, no female detectives in Victorian Britain in the mid-nineteenth century. Historical records tell another story about genuine female detectives: Midcentury newspapers and court documents “indicate that there were actual women who identified themselves or were designated by others as female detectives” (Bredesen, “Introduction” iv). These women, whether contracted by the Metropolitan Police or toiling out of their own volition (or necessity), are largely shrouded by the precarious nature of their social positions in mid-Victorian Britain.²⁴ Though the existence of genuine female detectives contradicts the historiographical supposition that no women investigated crime until they were hired as policewomen in the early twentieth century, little else is known about their lives and what they thought of their craft.

The female detective, however, did indeed seem to be missing from canonical literature.²⁵ While there were Gothic survivals in popular literature during this period, none have survived with much recognition. The female detective, while likely not absent from literature, may have been sustained through ephemeral and inexpensive texts. This chapter considers the female detective within the resurgence of the female detective in the first half of the century. I examine three novels in two forms of literature: the penny dreadful (*Ruth the Betrayer* [1863] by Edward

²⁴ Additionally, official female detectives served abroad in colonies. Dagni A. Bredesen highlights an 1859 case picked up by *Lloyd’s Weekly* from the *Bombay Gazette* that “included a feature on female detectives hired to detect the crimes of infanticide and abortion” (Bredesen, “Introduction” v).

²⁵ Male detectives, however, began to emerge in early form between 1820 and 1850 (Worthington 3).

Ellis) and the yellowback casebook (*The Female Detective* [1864] by Andrew Forrester and *Revelations of a Lady Detective* by William Hayward). Despite the dearth of real-life widely publicized or professional women detectives, fictional female detectives crept into the reading public's conscience in novels of the 1860s. Some, like *Revelations of a Lady Detective* (1864) were yellowback casebooks designed to allure travelers in train stations—and with the lady detective herself splashed across the illustrated cover provocatively showing off her ankles, it's no wonder readers were drawn to them. Others demanded a months-long subscription to keep up with a novel's female detective, as was the case with Edward Ellis's dastardly Ruth Trail. The female detectives of the middle decades of the nineteenth century, from the late 1850s through the mid-1870s, run the professional gamut—official and amateur (as we will see in the next chapter) alike—and, furthermore, have diverse reasons for investigation, making the figure resistant to generalization. In this chapter we will see a paramount shift in the figure in which she sometimes seeks not to elude (as in *Ruth the Betrayer*) but instead redefine (as in the two casebooks) contemporaneous categories of womanhood.

In contrast to chapter one in which I emphasize the psychological and perceptual processes that developed the female detective, this chapter largely focuses on performances of gender. As we will see, the physical act of detection is foremost in these novels. These novels' contestation of gender varies in manner, but all deliberate over the professional status of mid-nineteenth-century women through the female detective's investigations. Profession, in this chapter, serves as a vehicle for analyzing these concerns in their historical context. Charged with radical possibilities, these novels negotiate the figure's disruptive potential and her role as an individual. I argue that professional detection realizes the characters' personal gender satisfaction yet abdicates institutional change; it serves to develop individual freedom only. Beginning with

several of these novels, we see how authors revise the female detective from the heroine with an “androgynous compulsion” to a modern woman. Though queerness is extant in characters like Ruth, broader trends indicate that the female detective novel’s investment in resisting a cis-heteronormative gender binary is increasingly replaced by liberal attitudes toward gender and individualism. When considered as a whole, female detective fiction in the mid-nineteenth century, I conclude, establishes a shift away from attempts to elude gender categories to the renegotiation of individual woman within the confines of this binary.

Though each novel draws its own relationship to patriarchal strictures enforced through institutions—the casebooks, for example, are explicitly invested in glorifying the Metropolitan Police—the female detective uniformly resists them for personal motives. Like their successors in popular culture, many female detectives of the mid-nineteenth century, as many of all fictional detectives in popular culture will come to be, maintain playful queer subjectivities while they concurrently allow the persistence of oppressive structures by which they are not equally impacted. The novels I consider in this chapter, for example, sustain class hierarchy and often blithely reinforce racial and religious difference: That which is other to white English Protestantism is represented as inferior. Thus, as will come to be the norm in the most popular detective media, the female detective in the mid-nineteenth century constructs a self-serving relationship between gender dissidence and (un)official policing.

In a period during which professional detective policing strengthened nationally and Victorian sociopolitical ideologies consolidated, authors turned to the female detective to interrogate the evolving intersection of profession, gender, and class. In the mid-nineteenth century, Victorian politics embraced liberalism (Harvie 67), emphasizing its values of self-respect, self-reliance, and individualism, which “came to permeate every aspect of Victorian life

and thought” (Harvie 69). Concurrent with a move away from attempts to elude a gender binary and instead reform it, female detective fiction likewise begins to champion the individual. Sublimating institutional change into individual conduct, the figure of the individual within society emerged during the Enlightenment in the eighteenth century but solidified over the long nineteenth century, parallel to the development of modern society. The individual encompasses “19th-century notions of independence, self-help and liberalism” (White np). It is also highly gendered, based intrinsically on sexual difference. Nancy Armstrong identifies the middle-class woman as the first modern individual (*Desire and Domestic Fiction* 16), and Davidoff and Hall likewise note that for “middle-class men who sought to be ‘someone,’ to count as individuals because of their wealth, their power to command or their capacity to influence people, were, in fact, embedded in networks of familial and female support which underpinned their rise to public prominence” (Davidoff and Hall 13). Issuing from a period of reform in the first half of the century, the liberal mid-nineteenth century asserted the concept of individuation as its leading political ideal.

Over the first half of the nineteenth century, gender became a stabilizing force for the individual. Tracking the rise of the novel, Armstrong argues literacy—and specifically the Victorian novel’s portrayal of the gendered modern subject—became a tool of social control in the nineteenth century. In contrast to the ideal female character in the domestic novel, whose values are based on “the notion of the family, norms of sexual behavior, the polite use of language, the regulation of leisure time,” the monstrous female character provided a space for the neutralization of political resistance (Armstrong 209). The struggle for political power moved from “the level of physical force to the level of language” (Armstrong 106). The domestic novel adopted the ideologies of the conduct novel, thus becoming the basis for literacy and middle-

class ideology. By the midcentury, Armstrong identifies the resurgence of the domestic novel and its use of marriage to further enforce such strictures (171).

The female detective, however, troubles these dichotomies, as she is typically neither monstrous nor ideal but rather a subversive interplay between the two. As we will see, the midcentury female detective seeks to reform womanhood to maintain acceptable forms of ways to be gendered, while also reevaluating what women are allowed to do. Professionalism is central to this, and some further historical context helps us understand why. “Household suffrage,” enacted in the 1832 Reform Act, granted voting rights to male property owners (Harvie 72) and was later expanded into the Reform Act of 1867, which enfranchised working-class men (Harvie 73). Women, however, would not achieve suffrage until the twentieth century. Within this context of both the individual proffered by a liberal society and women’s continued lack of rights, authors utilized the female detective to negotiate what it meant to be gendered and increasingly in control of oneself. As more women agitated for rights, the female detective novel presented professional women who oversaw their own lives and livelihoods.

The female detective’s development in nineteenth-century literature may not only be attributed to the nation’s broader sociopolitical circumstances but also to the evolution of the police force—and thus ruminations on crime within Great Britain—as well as the position of the individual’s role within society. In the midcentury, the detective shifted from a “menacing figure to national celebrity” (Shpayer-Makov 7). Modern police work in Britain began in the eighteenth century and evolved into a national preventive force in the nineteenth. Prior to 1842, criminal law was disorderly and corrupt, and “the aggrieved person” was largely responsible for setting “the legal procedure in motion” (Shpayer-Makov 20). In the late eighteenth-century, a few constables were paid to arrest and prosecute felons, which historian Haia Shpayer-Makov argues

is an early distinction between a corrupted police officer and the heroic detective. The nineteenth-century police force's function was to fight crime and "preserve the social order"—directives from which the professional police detective emerged (Shpayer-Makov 4). In 1842, the London government established Scotland Yard, partially due to assassination attempts on Queen Victoria. Detectives matured into their own distinct unit over the nineteenth century and, by the 1870s, "came to be seen as forming an occupational entity on its own" Shpayer-Makov 46), contrasting the popular image of the inept policeman. The novels I examine in this chapter are intimately entangled with the police for the first time in the history of the literary female detective. They highlight the professional female detective at work in a period when the detective figure becomes a real figure in the social world

Ruth the Betrayer, Detective for Hire

Boundaries frequently dissolve in *Ruth the Betrayer*. Victorian society's juxtaposition of justice and criminality, professional and amateur, and male and female muddle in Edward Ellis's 1863 penny dreadful. Ruth Trail is notably the only working class *and* contracted detective in this dissertation as well as cutthroat criminal. In the course of her exploits, Ruth seeks vengeful justice while avoiding retribution. In doing so, Ellis collapses her status as a criminal detective with her rejection of Victorian gender ideology, specifically through her use of crossdressing and disguise. *Ruth the Betrayer* thus explicitly links the "androgynous compulsion" to the detective. She is furthermore implied to be sexually active²⁶ and broadly favors masculine characteristics. Though Ellis presents radical depictions of androgyny, *Ruth the Betrayer* simultaneously presents its criticism of the Victorian class system with a reactionary response to Ruth's use of

²⁶ One character terms Ruth an "out and out slut" (Ellis 125).

gender dissidence to escape her circumstances, thus deflating its ideological critique. Between *Ruth the Betrayer* and the following conservative casebooks, the female detective's ideological shift from gender dissidence to reform begins to emerge.

Due to increasing literacy and technological advancements in the publishing industry in the early to mid-nineteenth century, the penny dreadful flourished in the 1830s as a popular mode of literature for the lower classes. Though it was initially a mode of adventure fiction, it soon adopted criminal, mystery, and true crime elements. The penny dreadful owes much to the Gothic as a literary ancestor—and, like the Gothic, it was historically criticized as “bad literature.” However, whereas the early Gothic primarily features the aristocracy and was largely unavailable to the working class, the penny dreadful had a broad audience. Published weekly, penny dreadfuls—originally known as penny bloods—told melodramatic and excessively violent stories, which borrowed from clichéd Gothic plots. The prints were also often accompanied by illustrations. In the first half of the nineteenth century, penny dreadfuls were so popular that, in addition to numerous magazines, there were “up to 100 publishers of penny-fiction” (Flanders “Penny dreadfuls”). During this time, they focused on criminals—highwaymen and pirates being prominent. After the beginnings of detective fiction in the mid-1840s, however, and over the next two decades, the penny dreadful began to feature stories of detection and true crime: “In the 1860s, after highwaymen and evil aristocrats, the next penny development was the remorseless policeman hunting down criminals” (Flanders, *The Invention of Murder* 60).²⁷ The penny dreadful was free from middle-class respectability.

²⁷ Three years after Poe's Dupin first appeared in “The Murders of Rue Morgue,” G.W.M. Reynolds began the most successful penny dreadful ever, *Mysteries of London* (1844); he would pen it over the next twelve years (Flanders, “Penny dreadfuls”). Unlike the dreadfuls that had come before it, *Mysteries of London* was about modern London and the ordinary lives of its inhabitants (“Penny dreadful”).

Though *Ruth the Betrayer* is a little-known penny dreadful, the eponymous character holds the distinction of being the first hired female detective in British literature. It was, upon its release, advertised as a “NEW ‘SENSATION’ TALE” (Advertisements) and implicated in the scourge of “bad literature” that captured the public’s imagination in the mid-nineteenth century. In *Lloyd’s Illustrated Newspaper*, an 1868 article quotes a writer who “deplores the increasing love of bad literature.” Judging from the writer’s summation of the state of literature, the article’s author terms it “lamentable.” He continues:

The writer describing his attempts to organise a book-club, tells us that the good standard works were thrown aside for the unreal and highly-coloured pictures of life published in penny and halfpenny journals. He says he has heard comparisons between “Adam Bede,” and something which the critic called “Ruth the Betrayer, or the Female Spy,” which would have startled the admirers of George Eliot. The only remedy for this evil, the writer affirms, is—education. ([ill.])

From this piece, we can glean that, though *Ruth the Betrayer* does not seem to have been well-read in its own day, it was treated with disdain by cultural critics. Directly contrasted with Eliot’s respectable novels, *Ruth the Betrayer* is implicitly characterized as low-brow, even “evil.” Employed upon occasion by the London police, the anti-heroine Ruth Trail is a spy, informer, and detective. In keeping with the salacious nature of penny dreadfuls, few of Ellis’s colorful cast of characters are morally upstanding; Ruth, the narrator tells us, is particularly fiendish.

Ruth the Betrayer is a penny dreadful aware of its radical investments and, throughout most of the text, consciously resists moralizing. As the narrator explains, “this book is not intended to be a series of sermons upon public morals” (Ellis 384). Its criticism of British law—“But this is a land of liberty, and one cannot trample down the poor—openly” (Ellis 586)—

suggests that Ruth's criminality is the natural progression of her working-class status, though the narrative also criticizes Ruth as "foully black and damnable" (Ellis 142). The collapse of the criminal and the detective demonstrates the law's injustices wherein the sole recourse is vigilante justice. Ruth's resistance to the law and her self-serving justice is enacted through her position as the criminal-detective, which Ellis figures as queer.

As *Ruth the Betrayer* is a largely unknown novel, it is helpful to provide a summary. Ruth Trail comes from a line of exploited women, beginning with her mother who was born in a coal-pit during which Ruth's grandmother died due to her grandfather's brutality. Ruth's mother was left to die but found and cared for—though not too much for she grew to be a "ragged, dirty, shock-headed little girl; a young savage, knowing no God; a hard-mouthed little heathen, leading the life of a dog" (Ellis 584). Ruth's mother worked in mining brutal conditions: She "grew up a young she-devil, corrupt in heart, unclean in body, utterly shameless and lost" (Ellis 584). After an accident in the mine, several gentlemen inspected the pit where she worked and was removed to be educated. Her benefactor, Hardwick, however, was not kindly but a "hard-hearted, grinding, and exacting task-master" who was "determined upon making her his mistress" (Ellis 586). Ruth's mother rejected him and fled, but was pursued, and finally married him. She had four children, including Ruth Trail.

In the present day, Ruth, disguised as a sailor, infiltrates Jacob Stone's criminal enterprises and assists in his arrest by London's Metropolitan Police. When Stone escapes the clutches of the police, he seeks revenge on Ruth's betrayal. After an assassination attempt on her, Ruth again apprehends Stone so that he may be executed. Throughout the sprawling narrative, Ruth evades her pursuers—including a vengeful Italian prince—and enacts her own revenge, killing and committing numerous crimes in the pursuit of her goals. She ultimately wishes to

leave England for a more peaceful life to escape her past. At the end of the narrative, Ruth leaps from a window to escape Jack Rafferty—her old enemy—and nearly dies in the process. Though she survives, she loses her good looks and her wits:

Her mind was shattered. She was not insane or idiotic, but she no longer retained that gigantic power of scheming and plotting which through life had urged her on to commit God only knows what black crimes and damnable acts of treacherous baseness. It was only by watching her closely that the signs of weakness were observable in her intellectual powers; but that there was weakness was very certain. (Ellis 1098–99)

Ruth is taken to a convent to recover and instead goes mad so that she looks “more ape than woman” and whose “inside and outside [were] alike hideous” (1104). *Ruth the Betrayer* concludes with Ruth in her cell in the abandoned convent.

With over a thousand pages to its name, Ellis’s penny dreadful often deviates from Ruth’s primary narrative.²⁸ This digression is typical of the penny dreadful as a form: With consistent installments, authors were forced write quickly (and often poorly) to maintain the requisite pace. *Ruth the Betrayer* is no different, and though Ellis always returns to Ruth eventually and connects characters like Earthworm to her, there are nevertheless swathes of the text in which Ruth is not present.

Though most of Ruth’s detective work occurs in the first few chapters of the book, it is an essential framework that dictates many of her actions throughout and is consistently tied up to her masculinity. Her work as for-hire “female detective—a sort of spy we use in the hanky-

²⁸ For example, while Ruth evades Jacob Stone, another minor character named Ernest Trevellyan unsuccessfully attempts suicide so his wife Alice may find happiness and be removed from poverty. He shoots himself but kills another man in the process. Ruth rescues and blackmails Trevellyan into working for her. Meanwhile, Alice is wrongfully imprisoned for the murder of her husband and is offered freedom by Eneas Earthworm, but only if she will be his mistress; she refuses.

panky way when a man would be too clumsy” (Ellis 5), as one policeman puts it, is well-known throughout the Metropolitan force. Ruth comments, ““You’re new in the force, I suppose, or you’d have known me. There, don’t stare so—I’m one of you!”” (Ellis 4). Both part of the force and separate from it, Ellis positions Ruth as a comrade of the police force and its antagonist; one police officer, Ruth notes, expresses “a faint indication of dislike and dread” in reaction to her (Ellis 26). “Had he a fear and horror of her?” Ruth wonders, “What did it matter if he had?” (Ellis 26). Unique among the female detectives I examine in this chapter, Ruth:

at best marks a transition from women used as police informants or spies to the more modern if still *ad hoc* occupation of female detective. As such, Ruth anticipates the detective heroine who soon followed in the 1864 yellowback casebooks *The Female Detective* and *Revelations of a Lady Detective*. (Bredesen xiii)

Although Dagni A. Bredesen is correct to link Ruth to the casebooks that I consider in the next section of this chapter, her role as a for-hire female detective rather than an official policewoman, I maintain, does not preclude her from a study of the figure. A thorough analysis of the female detective (and indeed the detective more broadly), as I hope this chapter and next demonstrate, must contend with characters across the professional spectrum. Ellis more clearly defines Ruth’s role as a for-hire detective rather than an official policewoman few pages later:

But although well known to almost every member of the police force in London, she was not, as Mr. Hardstaff’s words would have led the Captain to believe, a female detective, employed by Government. On the contrary, she was attached to a notorious Secret Intelligence Office, established by an ex-member of the police force, and her services were only rarely employed, as upon the present occasion, in connection with the regular police. (6–7)

Ruth's role as a for-hire detective allows her to at once work within the law and against or beyond it, as will become commonplace for amateur consulting detectives like Sherlock Holmes and private eyes in the twentieth century. Ellis further conflates Ruth's detective status with her criminality: "She is an informer in the pay of the police. She has just given up a man to them, and it's not the first by a score or more. She lives by men's blood. There's nothing that's too bad for her" (31). The same tools Ruth uses as a spy, she uses as a criminal, including her many aliases ("God grant you may not, or it may go as hard with you as with the woman you are about to take—this Mrs. Trail *alias* Mrs. Belvidere, *alias* Mrs. Beresford, *alias* Ruth Hardwicke, *alias* Ruth the Betrayer, *ailas* the Female Spy!" [Ellis 662]) and her extensive use of male attire.

Collapsing Ruth's detective criminality with her androgyny, Ellis contrasts Ruth with the ideal Victorian woman. Whereas women might be expected to "scream and faint," Ruth would do neither "at twice the danger," declaring, "It is not the first time I have faced death, man!" (Ellis 9). Moreover, Ruth engages in many physical altercations. In one particularly brutish moment, Ruth's "delicately chiselled features" of her "lovely face" contrast with a "malignant smile of triumph" as she stands over the body of her enemy and proceeds to kick "the head contemptuously with the toe of the tiny blue satin boot which she wore. Had not a feeling of shame deterred her, she would have liked to set her foot upon that hated face, and stamped out the features until they were unrecognisable" (Ellis 143). Later, Ruth shatters a man's knuckles with a pistol "with a diabolical cruelty, which scarcely another woman in the world would have been capable of" (155). Set against the ideological construction of the Victorian woman, Ruth's violence is part and parcel of her masculinity. In the text's introduction, Bredesen argues that "Ruth's demeanor and actions . . . distinguish her from idealized representations of Victorian femininity" (xii). Pointing to characters like Agnes Wicklow in *David Copperfield* and Dorothea

Brooke in *Middlemarch*, Bredesen highlights Ruth's brutality with the purity of the idealized female character (xii).

As much as *Ruth the Betrayer* emphasizes Ruth's masculinity, it equally reminds the reader of her femininity in order to contrast the façade of Ruth's beauty with her cold-heartedness. Ellis writes, "Yet was that angel's face, which masked a devil's heart, to lure fresh victims to her net—make fresh captives, and bring more babbling dotards, with sacks of gold, and honours and titles, to her feet, beseeching her to give them her love" (155). As the conclusion of *Ruth the Betrayer* illustrates, the Victorian preoccupation with the manifestation of characters' interiority is often confined to beauty and cruelty in female characters. *Lady Audley's Secret* (1862) similarly features a beautiful woman who harbors secrets of her malicious acts, though her motivation is fueled by her madness—a perhaps more acceptable and familiar female flaw, according to Victorian ideology—than Ruth's lust for revenge and violence. No doubt propelled by Darwin's publication of *On the Origin of the Species* (1859), Ruth's appearance at the end as "more ape than woman" whose "inside and outside [were] alike hideous" (Ellis 1104) equalizes Ruth's personality with her morality. *Ruth the Betrayer*, in this context, anticipates novels like *Strange Tale of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde* (1886) and Max Nordau's theorization of degeneration at the *fin-de-siècle*. Ruth's drastic end adheres to Victorian fiction's reassertion of the status quo by the conclusion.

Ruth's duality demonstrates Ellis's investment in portraying her as both masculine and feminine, a female detective who—like her Gothic predecessors—maintains a continuum between the two. Indeed, *Ruth the Betrayer* wastes no time in figuring Ruth as queer through her apparel. An epigraph opening the first chapter details its contents as well as the penny dreadful's first illustration of Ruth in a sailor's uniform:

“MAN OR WOMAN.—A DELICATE QUESTION.—THE GALLANT ENTERPRISES OF
CAPTAIN CHARLEY CROCKFORD.—A LADY QUITE CAPABLE OF DEFENDING
HERSELF.—THE FEMALE DETECTIVE.—THE ENTERPRISE.—UPON THE TRACK OF
THE DOOMED.—A THIRST FOR BLOOD. ”

This epigraph summarizes *Ruth the Betrayed*'s representation of gender as consistently evasive, neatly conflating Ruth's gender dissidence—man or woman?—with her role as a female detective. Though Ruth's work with the police occurs largely in the first few chapters, Ellis later returns to the utility of crossdressing and its relationship to her status as a detective, stating that “in Ruth's case, practising the trade of a spy, an informer, and a detective, it had many a time been a matter of life and death with her that her sex should be unknown, even unsuspected” (909). The first chapter makes much of Ruth's ambiguous gender, opening the penny dreadful with a debate between policemen on whether she is a man or a woman (Ellis 1–2) and comedically emphasizing the pronouns they believe suit her: “‘We must have missed *him*!’ ‘*She* has given us the slip.’ ‘What has become of *him*?’ ‘I can't see *her* anywhere’” (2). The narrator describes Ruth, “If a boy, a very pretty one, surely; but very like a pretty woman in disguise, there was no denying” (2). When she reveals herself to be Ruth Trail, spy and informer for the Metropolitan Police, her gender becomes legible but only briefly.

Ruth's ability to move between the masculine and the feminine—her gender becoming illegible to those around her—is a key tool in her work. Ellis writes, “Hitherto she had contrived to baffle all the attempts of the police to discover what became of her at those times when she was not employed in her detective duties. She rarely, if ever, performed them in female attire, and never under any circumstances without making some very material alterations in her personal appearance” (284). *Ruth the Betrayed* consistently draws attention to her comfort in

male clothes and the frequency with which she wears them. Whereas many instances that Ruth crossdresses are “off stage,” one moment late in the penny dreadful depicts the moment of her change:

Ruthlessly breaking away button-holes and laces, and demolishing hooks and eyelet-holes with a wrench, she stripped herself, with the exception of her fine linen chemise. . . . It was not by many the first time that she had assumed man’s attire, as any one might easily have told if they had seen her now rapidly dressing herself in this sailor costume. (Ellis 708)

Ruth finds male clothes allow for increased mobility, and to fight and approach men (Ellis 708). Working as both a detective in male clothes, as the first chapter demonstrates, and later as a criminal, crossdressing is a requisite to Ruth’s success as a detective-criminal.

To illustrate the innate complexity of Ruth’s crossdressing, the penny dreadful highlights Ruth’s complex relationship to gender. Chapter 101’s epigraph reads: “IN WHICH IT IS SHOWN HOW VERY AWKWARD RUTH THOUGHT IT WAS THAT SHE HAD NOT BEEN BORN OF THE OPPOSITE SEX” (Ellis 824). This epigraph offers insight into the distinction between performative crossdressing and a more complex negotiation of gender with which Ruth engages. *Ruth the Betrayer* not only rejects ideals through its eponymous detective-criminal but altogether eschews the gender to which Ruth is born. Indeed, before Ruth’s downfall, Ellis makes clear that Ruth eluding womanhood is not strictly physical: “Ruth, who had very little taste for shopping, or, indeed, for most of those occupations which the softer sex were wont to take delight in, preferred to await her arrival, and was amusing herself with a novel” (Ellis 1050). When considering Ruth’s crossdressing, her resistance to feminine qualities further establishes her queerness.

To appreciate the significance of Ruth's crossdressing, we must turn to analyses of historical figures who wore clothing of a gender other than that which they were assigned at birth. Katie Hindmarch-Watson provides a compelling analysis of Lois Schwich, assigned female at birth, who was arrested in London, 1886 for theft, though Hindmarch-Watson points out that Schwich was "on trial as much for her gender transgressions" (69), as was the case for many crossdressers in the nineteenth century. Although I do not wish to conflate crossdressing with criminality, it is important to note that the Victorian state certainly did and there was indeed a minority of crossdressers "who deliberately used a male guise to facilitate criminal careers; theft, fraud, and violent gang behavior were often in their repertoires" (Hindmarch-Watson 74). Nineteenth-century crossdressers were in particular associated with prostitution and homosexuality, the former which sometimes served as a strategy for economic survival (Hindmarch-Watson 73–74). Like Ruth, Schwich was working class; passing as male was more common among the working class (Hindmarch-Watson 73). Within this context, Ruth's crossdressing may be understood to be both strategic as well as an enactment of genuine cross-gender identification.

Perhaps the most notable example of crossdressing in the nineteenth century came in London, 1870. Assigned male at birth, Fanny (Thomas Ernest Boulton) and Stella (Frederick William Park) were arrested while in female clothing under charges of sodomy but were eventually acquitted. Their case led to the 1885 Labouchere Amendment, which made "gross indecency" a crime and therefore opened up broader prosecution of gender and sexual transgressions. As such, scholarship has established Fanny and Stella's case as central to the history of Victorian homosexuality. In *LGBT Victorians*, however, Simon Joyce posits that reading them as prototypical transgender women allows us to resist the Victorian project to

collapse homosexuality with gender dissidence. Indeed, Fanny and Stella's "trial exemplifies . . . the struggles that the Victorian state encountered in its efforts to legally suture together cross-gender identification and homosexual practices" (Joyce 191). Although distinct from Schwich's example as Fanny and Stella were assigned male at birth, their case—and others which similarly tried "to connect gender expression with sexual misconduct" (Joyce 204)—demonstrates the Victorian impulse to collapse prototypical transgender identities, homosexuality, and prostitution. Like her many aliases, Ruth's identity is an amalgamation of many facets, none of which Ellis privileges above the other. Ruth is, in essence, truest when she is performing, from the elegant Mrs. Belvidere or as a sailor. Ellis emphasizes Ruth's fluid identity through crossdressing. In *Ruth the Betrayer*, crossdressing is therefore not simply an act of trading one manner of clothing for another but a complete shift of identity, or, to borrow from Joyce, room to read Ruth as a prototypical transgender character.

Ellis's innovation to collapse the already collapsed crossdresser-criminal with the detective establishes the first female detective with an explicit androgynous compulsion. While later detectives would also come to be conflated with the criminal—Sherlock Holmes himself having myriad criminal tendencies—Ruth's status as a betrayer is significant as both a detective and crossdresser. Her gender becomes suspect; she "betrays" perceptions of her gender or otherwise uses gender play in order to betray. Elizabeth Carolyn Miller elucidates the utility and prominence of crossdressing within the context of the criminal's movement beyond the law:

stories featuring female criminals emphasize the ways that criminological identification doesn't work, or the ways that it can be eluded. Female criminals use disguise, passing, cross-dressing, or cosmetics to manipulate their image; while such devices have a long literary history, here they become tactics specifically for resisting the criminological

gaze, and image and bodily modification become forms of leverage for women entering the public sphere. (15)

Loyal to neither the police nor the criminal underworld, she glides through both depending on her motivations and how particular circumstances can be used to service herself. While the narrative is invested in offering social criticism, largely regarding class, its depiction of Ruth's gender is at once radical and reactionary. The female criminal's subversion of feminine presentation, according to Miller, demonstrates that "traditional ideals governing gender, morality, self, and society can no longer operate as expected" (6). *Ruth the Betrayer* no doubt presents some of the most nuanced and subversive depictions of gender in a female detective novel, yet it functions within the state's conflation of the crossdresser with the criminal. Furthermore, its depiction of Ruth's downfall is so egregiously brutal and punitive, it is difficult to argue that *Ruth the Betrayer* follows through with its radical investments. As such, it is a model example for the ideological negotiations played out in the female detective novel at the midcentury.

Whereas *Ruth the Betray* portrays the female detective's movements beyond the law, *The Female Detective* and *Revelations of a Lady Detective* place their protagonists at the very center of the Metropolitan Police. Though still gender dissidents, these female detective novels signal a rebuttal of the earlier female detective novels' radical queer potential. It is with the next two novels I examine in this chapter that the figure of the female detective emerges as a directly comparable figure to our modern conception of the detective.

Professionalizing the Female Detective: *The Female Detective* and *Revelations of a Lady Detective*

The two casebooks in this section, *The Female Detective* and *Revelations of a Lady Detective*, present a mutually beneficial—albeit reactionary—relationship between the female detective and the Metropolitan Police: The female detectives’ careers pursue modes beyond Victorian ideological womanhood whereas the police utilize the female detectives to defang the public’s perception of the police. I contend that these detectives’ lack of traditional success coheres with the casebooks’ project to ease the reading public’s resistance to the Metropolitan Police. Rather than instill public confidence through depictions of arraignments and hangings, *The Female Detective* presents alternate routes to justice. It thus eases the belief that the British police force must necessarily leads to pervasive observation and the constant threat of apprehension, as was the leading perception (Shpayer-Makov). In this way, *The Female Detective* and *Revelations of a Lady Detective* uphold Foucauldian readings of detective fiction but, as I argue, they do so specifically through their use of gender.

Scholarship has traditionally framed female police detective stories like *The Female Detective* and *Revelations of a Lady Detective* as empowerment narratives (Kestner). The novels’ female detectives, G and Mrs. Paschal, demonstrate individualized resistance to dominant gender ideology in midcentury Britain that loosens them as individuals from such restraints, while at the same time reinforcing a cis-heteronormative gender binary through their work as institutional detectives. Their positions as detectives allow them to reform the category of woman, but their statuses as police reify the very constraints of a cis-heteronormative gender binary that they personally elude in addition to reasserting class hierarchies and racialized prejudices. The degree to which gender categorization can be contested within the confines of a doubled institution (i.e.,

a cis-heteronormative gender binary and the Metropolitan Police), though stunted, is also nuanced for the casebooks' fantastical premise: In 1864, there were no women working as detectives for the London police. Even as *The Female Detective* and *Revelations of Lady Detective* contain the figure's radical potential through their position as police, they nevertheless present a unique negotiation between law enforcement and justice, and gender subversion.

The nearly simultaneous publications of Andrew Forrester's *The Female Detective* and William Hayward's *Revelations of a Lady Detective* are typically considered the first with female detectives in British literature. These casebooks, which follow their respective detectives through distinct stories, indeed feature the first female police detectives. Unlike Ruth Trail, whose employment with the police is contingent, "G" (as she is only known) and Mrs. Paschal are public-facing official policewomen. Many scholars locate the female detective's genesis with these casebooks (Klein, Craig and Cadogan), despite also being characterized as anomalous (Klein). However, as I have demonstrated, the fictional female detective was long in circulation prior to these casebooks. In *Revelations of a Lady Detective*, we especially notice the connective tissue between the midcentury female detective and her Gothic predecessor. Many of Hayward's cases are Gothic in nature: One centers around Italian secret society at whose hands Paschal almost dies, saved only by a bolt of lightning; in another, a countess imbues poison after she is discovered as a thief. Both demonstrate affective responses or insatiable pulls towards curiosity. Forrester's G contends "if there is one thing a detective—whether male or female—is less able to endure than another, it is a mystery" (60). Though Forrester and Hayward's texts are distinct (perhaps the most notable difference is the former's preoccupation with puzzles and the latter with adventures), I will examine them together due to their shared remarkable literary significance and contributions to the development of the figure. Like Ruth, the titular heroines of

The Female Detective and *Revelations of a Lady Detective* are professional outliers; they are the only policewomen in this dissertation.

Casebooks, though slightly more tempered in their adoption of Gothic and sensational elements, nevertheless in Forrester and Hayward's examples contribute to the midcentury preoccupation with broad readership and (somewhat) salacious narratives. Midcentury circumstances, including an increased readership and the professionalization of the author, gave rise to the popularity of the serial or, in the case of the two casebooks, a collection of disparate stories presented by a singular narrator to highlight an overarching theme. Like 1892's *The Adventures of Sherlock Holmes* or any of Arthur Conan Doyle's subsequent Sherlock Holmes collections, *The Female Detective* and *Revelations of a Lady Detective* compile short stories centered around a series of cases. Borrowing from Bredesen's generic description, my application of "casebook" to describe their particular mode is apt: Each is narrated by their titular detective, occasionally threading light connections between each case, all of which have their own titles. The disparate nature of the casebooks—that is, a collection largely unrelated stories—nonetheless imitates the experience of reading a serial as its singular narrator guides the reader throughout various mysteries. Forrester and Hayward's casebooks are thus similar to *Ruth the Betrayer*, whose overarching narrative ebbs and flows with disparate episodes that are often concluded within the span of a hundred pages, never to return.

Largely due to their label as Victorian pulp fiction, *The Female Detective* and *Revelations of a Lady Detective* have received little critical assessment (Bredesen, "Introduction ii). Yet the attributes that have historically limited their appraisal—that is, their ability to be "produced for quick sales and consumption"—are those that made the books popular enough to be reprinted multiple times (Bredesen, "Introduction ii). Bound in yellow, the color of the casebooks' covers

informed readers of their price and content: cheap, popular fiction, the kind one might now pick up at an airport. Like the penny dreadful, the yellowback novel was a sign of increased industry and literacy. It emerged in the mid-nineteenth century and populated railway bookstalls, serving as ideal leisure reading for travel, “designed to be read in transit” whose stories are “not meant for domestic consumption” (Bredesen, “A Conformist Subversion” 21). *Revelations of Lady Detective* are particularly suited to entertain travelers, as the casebook provides “adventures, rather than armchair detection, that can be presented and resolved in the space of a round-trip ride on the train” (Bredesen, “Introduction” (xxiii). The two casebooks are prime examples of the yellowback phenomenon. Published by Ward Lock & Co. (also publishers of the first Sherlock Holmes novel, *A Study in Scarlet*)²⁹ more is known about *The Female Detective* than *Revelations of a Lady Detective*. Andrew Forrester, whose name was long assumed to be a pseudonym, was not connected with James Redding Ware until recently (Flanders “The hanky-panky way”). Ware’s further detective works include *Revelations of a Private Detective*, *Secret Service*, or, *Recollections of a City Detective*, and *The Private Detective*. The discovery of Forrester’s identity not only demonstrates a prolific interest in the detective figure but also a longer publication history of his female detective. In 1862, shortly following *Ruth the Betrayer*, she appeared in “A Child Found Dead,”—which would be published two years later in the casebook—in a short-lived penny weekly magazine, *Grave and Gay* (Flanders). Ware’s use of his pseudonym, historian Judith Flanders elucidates, further shows “The Mystery,” another casebook story, to have been previously published as “The Mystery of Harley-street. A Tale in Edgar Allan Poe’s Most Thrilling Style” (Flanders, “The hanky-panky way” 15). Intrigue—and, perhaps correspondingly, scholarship—surrounding *Revelations of a Lady Detective*, on the other

²⁹ Ward Lock & Co additionally published several other nineteenth-century classics, such as the 1891 edition of *The Picture of Dorian Gray*.

hand, is minimal. It was published by the exceedingly minor E. Griffiths³⁰ and has not yet been reprinted by a modern press, whereas, in 2016, *The Female Detective* was reprinted by Poison Pen Press as part of the British Library's Crime Classics series.

Much can be gleaned about these casebooks from examining their illustrated covers, which were drawn to catch the eye of travelers, particularly within the context of their status as the first consolidated female detective stories. *The Female Detective* features a woman—presumably the eponymous detective—opening a door to a man's body on the floor. He is crumpled, limbs twisted uncomfortably over and under his torso, obviously dead. If there were any doubt, a splash of red over his shoulder and near his head ensures readers get the message: Forrester's casebook isn't just stories of a woman investigating domestic squabbles. While *Revelations of a Lady Detective* at a first glance offers a less sensational cover with substantially less action implied, closer inspection reveals its allure and “plays on the sensational and salacious potential of a profession that might require a woman to don any disguise from her ‘costumier’s shop’ of a closet and use any means to obtain information” (Young 23). Hayward's casebook illustrates a stationary woman staring directly at the reader. In her left hand, she holds a cigarette close to her mouth from which smoke plumes. In her right hand, she gathers her skirts, revealing her ankles and a small portion of her calves. To her side, a drink sits on a table. This provocative cover tells us that this lady detective is happy to violate feminine norms and propriety. Published thirty years before the New Woman's reign, Hayward's detective portrays both smoking and confident female sexuality, two signifiers of the prototypical *fin-de-siècle* feminist.

³⁰ The British Library, however, cites George Vickers as the publisher who also began *The Mysteries of London* (“Penny dreadful”).

In *The Female Detective* and *Revelations of a Lady Detective*, the authors present early iterations of female police officers whose gender performances resist Victorian norms of womanhood. Unlike Ruth, however, G and Mrs. Paschal function within a gender binary; they do not attempt to elude the category of woman but rather stretch notions of what women can do, particularly as professionals. D.A. Miller's argument that the "entanglement" between the novel and the police, and its affect on the liberal subject—particularly on two fronts: the portrayal of police within the novel and the novel as police—helps us begin to understand the female detectives' role in these casebooks. However, it is also imperative to consider their gender alongside Miller's argument. While it is true that one may suspect readers to be equally, if not more, frustrated by a woman investigating the populace, G comforts them by stating that "in a very great many cases women detectives are those who can only be used to arrive at certain discoveries. . . . the woman detective has far greater opportunities than a man of intimate watching, and of keeping her eyes upon matters near which a man could not conveniently play the eavesdropper" (Forrester 2). In one story, Mrs. Paschal responds to an Italian character's comments on the "unusual" state of women's employment with the police, "'in this country it is not so uncommon a thing'" (Hayward 20). G and Mrs. Paschal's womanhood poses an even "less visibly violent" mode of "'social control'" (Miller viii) than Miller suggests detective novels present, making surveillance not only easy but less threatening. Shpayer-Makov agrees that Marxist and Foucauldian readings are accurate to a degree; she contends Miller's reading of detective fiction as surveillance as many writers felt that official social control was "not sufficiently resolute and was often in the hands of ineffectual agents" (267). She argues detective fiction advocates for middle-class morality and communal aid in which individuals work with the state, concluding that detective fiction argues for "a kind of middle way" between the liberal

subject and the police state (Shpayer-Makov 268). In the worlds of both casebooks, the British female detective fulfills this capacity as a commonplace necessity.

Despite the assertions that female detectives improve the Metropolitan Police, many cases in both texts fail to apprehend the criminal. This, however, is a crucial component to the casebooks' project to reform the perception of the police. The detectives' alternate modes of justice present a kinder police force whose sole interest is the public's safety. In some cases, the criminal escapes, in others they die; in a few, the detective concludes the case through means beyond apprehension. In *The Woman Detective: Gender & Genre*, Kathleen Klein cites these incidents as failures, arguing that female detectives are accepted on the grounds of their failure as women or as detectives; the fiction "acknowledges no positive correlation between her gender and her profession" (23). In contrast, Klein argues that because the female detective "pushes off-center the whole male/female, public/private, intellect/emotion, physical strength/weakness dichotomy," her respectability "must be stripped away" so that if "she can be shown as an incompetent detective or an inadequate woman, readers' reactionary preferences are satisfied" (4–5). Bre desen concurs that "the first of the woman detectives does not achieve the same material success. Nor is she a ratiocinative genius; she works hard to figure out the truth" ("Introduction" xvii–xviii).

Revelations of a Lady Detective and *The Female Detective* each approach their titular characters with distinct rejections of Victorian conceptions of femininity, respectively through the portrayal of an independent widow—the first and only example of a widowed female detective in this dissertation, and through obfuscation, thus rendering the reader completely without grounds on which to categorize her. Beginning with *Revelations of a Lady Detective*, Mrs. Paschal introduces herself as a widow approaching forty (Hayward 2) who independently seeks

work as a detective, finding that she is “always happier in harness than out of it” (Hayward 55)—that is, happier working. Bredesen argues that Mrs. Paschal, unlike “other fictional widows whose remarriage is assumed,” evades marriage plots to which the narrative might be expected to conform (“A Conformist Subversion” 23). Her widowhood provides Mrs. Paschal not only “personal independence,” but also the “socially sanctioned freedom of movement that widowhood allows facilitate her detective work,” thus “peculiarly equips her to decipher clues and decode mysteries” (Bredesen, “A Conformist Subversion” 21). In essence, “Mrs. Paschal can run fast because she runs alone” (Bredesen, “A Conformist Subversion” 23). Her freedoms are achieved only through individual circumstances. Though Mrs. Paschal defies professional boundaries as a woman in the mid-nineteenth century, this transgression is tempered by her elevation of Victorian liberal ideals. She is self-reliant and independent in her career. Crucially, Mrs. Paschal represents the unique individual rather than the threatening emergence of professional women. As a detective, she leverages her gender to gain individual freedoms while refrains from institutional change.

Mrs. Paschal’s mobility afforded by her widowhood allows her access to infiltrate private spaces and spy in order to accrue clues, which she achieves through disguise. She describes herself as, “an accomplished actress” who can “play [her] part in any drama in which [she] was instructed to take a part,” and is bolstered by her “nerve and strength, cunning and confidence” (Hayward 2). Mrs. Paschal heartily uses the privileges her status as a widow affords her in Victorian England (Bredesen, “A Conformist Subversion” 30). Bredesen elaborates, “Mrs. Paschal manages to slip in and out of multiple roles without censure. She undercuts hegemonic gendered ideologies and expectations for women and yet consolidates them in her performances and aims (“A Conformist Subversion” 30). She contends that Mrs. Paschal’s “alternate use and

abuse of the strictures of patriarchal logic,” enacted through her status as a widow, according to Bredeesen, allows her to both engage in thrills and restore the status quo (“A Conformist Subversion” 30). Collapsing her privileges as a widow with her skills at disguise, Mrs. Paschal moves easily between various worlds without belonging to them, providing her the space to bend their rules while enforcing them on others (Bredeesen, “Conformist Subversion” 24). Her “contradictory impulses,” demonstrated, for example, by her criticism of the Catholic church while also “endorsing the domestic” and “rejecting both for herself” (Bredeesen, “Conformist Subversion” 29) draw a character that is now a typical formulation of the detective regardless of gender: one whose ability to move between worlds afforded by their position simultaneously uses that position to maintain dominant ideologies.

In comparison *Ruth the Betrayer*, whose eponymous character adopts several identities and often crossdresses to accomplish her policing and criminal feats, Mrs. Paschal’s disguises are that only: Whereas Ruth lives as her various identities, Mrs. Paschal, for whom they are only costumes, wears hers briefly as necessary. Like Ruth’s changes of clothing, Mrs. Paschal also removes her petticoat in order to pursue a criminal, the bank-robbing countess. Arlene Young writes that Mrs. Paschal’s undercover disguises show that she may infiltrate anywhere and that “her success is clearly related to her gender” (22). Mrs. Paschal’s narrative demonstrates the ease with which she moves through spaces and, furthermore, that she manipulates the normative trappings of her gender to succeed in her investigations. She must occasionally remove markers of her gender to investigate; she transgresses in order to police. To illustrate, the countess that Mrs. Paschal pursues dresses in masculine wear as she undertakes her crime, drawing a parallel between the two characters. *Revelations of Lady Detective* “registers an appropriate awareness of cross-dressing’s transgressive charge” as Mrs. Paschal “continues to call the person that she

follows a man even though she knows that ‘he’ is the countess” (Young 27). Despite her description of female detectives as “petticoated police” (Hayward 1), she is forced to remove the signifier of her gender to succeed: “The literalness of this encumbrance is manifested in one of Mrs. Paschal’s investigations, when she feels impelled to remove her crinoline while tracking a thief through a narrow passage” (Young 19). This moment elaborates on the conflation of criminality and crossdressing, as we see in *Ruth the Betrayer*. Mrs. Paschal must become like the countess to catch her. Yet, it is important that she does not transgress so far as the countess or Ruth; her simple removal of a feminine article of clothing does not pose the same threat as crossdressing itself. What this moment demonstrates is Mrs. Paschal’s willingness to transgress in her role as a detective in order to police. Hayward positions Mrs. Paschal beyond the expectations of Victorian women so that *Revelations of a Lady Detective* can at once justify her status as a policewoman (she resists gender norms) while also putting her in the position to enforce on the London populace the very gendered confines she escapes.

The independence that their status as a policewoman offer ensures that Mrs. Paschal is suited to enforce the dominant ideology of the mid-nineteenth century. Her rejection of femininity “breaks the very rules of Victorian femininity that [they] rigorously, if not uniformly, enforce[] on others” (Bredesen, “A Conformist Subversion” 21). The casebook argues that their detectives’ gender is essential to their work. In the opening paragraphs of *Revelations of a Lady Detective*, Mrs. Paschal states that the Metropolitan Police’s head of the Detective Department is a “clever adapter” who is “not above imitating those whose talent led them to take the initiative in works of progress,” citing the use of female detectives by French Minister of Police under Napoleon Bonaparte’s reign (Hayward 1). By using her status as female police, Mrs. Paschal gains individual independence while elevating institutional policing of the metropole.

The Female Detective likewise proffers a female detective who resists midcentury notions of Victorian womanhood through her career. “G,” as she is only known, details a series of investigations in her role as a police detective. Whether she is married or a widow, young or elderly, a mother or not, she explicitly refuses to clarify:

It may be that I took to the trade, sufficiently comprehended in the title of this work without a word of it being read, because I had no other means of making a living; or it may be that for the work of detection I had a longing which I could not overcome. It may be that I am a widow working for my children—or I may be an unmarried woman, whose only care is herself. (Forrester 1)³¹

G “enigmatically calls attention to and then dismisses central markers of Victorian femininity—marital status, motherhood, age, respectability—as she introduces herself” (Bredesen, “Introduction” xii) The sole name she gives—Miss Gladden—is offered only while undercover so the reader may (or may not) assume it is an alias. It is difficult to draw inferences based on the text, but that absence is notable in and of itself. Her intentionally ambiguous introduction offers so little information that readers are functionally unable to stereotype her based on gender markers, and she may pass through London without judgement. Klein extrapolates upon her argument that not only do these novels lack positive correlation between womanhood and professional success, but *The Female Detective* offers “escape routes for readers troubled by the unusual sight of a woman detective” (23). She continues:

[Forrester] creates a case where a woman’s quarry is another woman; gender rather than professional ability is then identified as the investigator’s important characteristic. As this

³¹ G’s assertion that she had a “longing which [she] could not overcome” (Forrester 1) recalls the curiosity compulsion I consider in the first chapter. This compulsion towards detection threads through most detective figures. While G offers it as a mere possibility, it is a firm one in light of earlier (and later) iterations of the figure.

is a quality Mrs. Gladden [G] possesses by birth rather than by training or talent, she can claim no special skill in using it until she solves the case by *being* more than by *doing*.

(Klein 23)

However, we must take into consideration the project of *The Female Detective*, which is not to present the most successful of G's cases but to rather support the Metropolitan Police, which was contemporaneously resisted, and disliked and distrusted. In G's own words:

My trade is a necessary one. . . . The world would very soon discover the loss of the detective system, and yet if such a loss were to take place, if the certain bad results which would be sure to follow if abolition were made most evident, the world would still avoid the detective as a social companion, from the next moment he or she resumed office.

(Forrester 1–2)

The midcentury was a period of momentous transformation in the Metropolitan Police. Over the course of a few decades, attitudes towards criminals and law enforcement reversed. Dominant ideology in the midcentury concentrated around respectability and obedience to the law so that “the criminal was perceived as an outsider to society . . . while the person charged with imposing the law was seen as necessary and even a benefactor” (Shpayer-Makov 240). The changing focus from criminal to detective in the penny dreadful is one such representative example. Shpayer-Makov explains that as extreme punishment such as public executions were abolished or otherwise lessened to “fit the crime,” “the attitude to criminals in literature changed correspondingly” wherein the criminal was deserving of his punishment (239). As such, “the diminishing stature of the criminal in literary texts created an opportunity for the detective to take his or her place as the central character” (Shpayer-Makov 239). She further considers why the police detective is considerably less popular than amateur detectives, reasoning that it is a

combination of “bourgeois anxiety” about the working-class police who represented a threat to their societal position, classism regarding beliefs about working class police’s competency and intelligence, and the lingering effects of community efforts to police themselves in the early nineteenth century.

It is precisely the detective’s gender that offers an alternative to the traditional means of policing that therefore eases this moment of transition from disdain of police to wider conceptions of the Metropolitan Police’s necessity. Proffering G as an alternative to the stereotypical policeman, *The Female Detective* illustrates a unique reformulation of the detective in Victorian fiction. Though not amateur detectives, Forrester’s policewoman is sufficiently distinct from the typical policeman to warrant an alternative approach. Thus, Klein’s argument that G is an “honorary” man who solves her cases “by *being* more than by *doing*” (23) falls short.

G not only embodies a different kind of Metropolitan Police but enacts alternate modes of justice as well. As part of her project to elevate the Metropolitan Police, G contradicts the poor perception of the force: “It had appeared as though the English detectives were in the habit of prying into private life, and as though no citizen were free from a system of spydom, which if it existed would be intolerable, but which has an existence only in imagination” (Forrester 60). Bredesen suggests that G’s “ordinariness as a respectable if lower-class woman” not only allows her to conduct her investigations, but also “accounts for the popularity, the market appeal, of her unusual but still everywoman adventures”; her “limited successes serve to offset her pioneering position by reassuring readers that . . . detection itself . . . was not the efficient . . . social control that the mid-Victorian public feared” (Bredesen, “Introduction” xviii). *The Female Detective*’s cases often feature unsolved crimes or justice that is otherwise achieved without criminal apprehension. In presenting these narratives, G hopes to instill confidence in her profession by

narrating a series of cases to, as Shpayer-Makov states, advocate for “an equilibrium between reliance on the individual and the state” (268) in which G is the intermediary. Seemingly antithetically, these cases often result in the criminal’s escape or justice served without apprehension by the police.

G’s refusal to offer any details about herself beyond her gender privileges her intention to elevate the detective force as she simultaneously seeks to fade into the background, but, nevertheless, her status as a gender and professional outlier conflates the circumvention of punitive justice without the aid of the legal system with unique position as a female police detective. She argues that “more intellect should be infused into the operation of the police system, that it is impossible routine can always be a match for all shapes of crime, and finally that means should be taken to avoid so much failure as could be openly recorded of the detective police authorities” (Forrester 71). Reminding the reader that detectives are fallible, G at once defangs the police—and thus concerns that detectives are enlisted in a pervasive “system of spydom” (Forrester 60)—and, furthermore, offers avenues to justice that do not end in arrest, and are thus more palatable.

Even as G strives to reduce the influence of her gender on her readers’ perception of her by obscuring the facts of her life, her conduct as a female detective derives from previous iterations of the figure. Sympathy, one of the central traits developed in the fledgling female detective in the Gothic, also plays a major role in G’s investigative toolset. Her use of confidence further consolidates the confidence she seeks to instill in the police force. In “Tenant for Life,” a case which revolves around inheritance fraud, G asserts that ““there is much good to be found, even amongst criminals, and that it does not follow because a man breaks the law that he is therefore heartless” (Forrester 3). In the same story, she later approaches a woman involved in

switched identity for whom she wants to ““save . . . from the consequences of [her] duty”” (Forrester 41) by imploring her to confess rather than apprehend her. G’s involvement in the case ensures that, by the end, she may attain justice beyond the letter of the law: “it all came right at last, and no man was punished in order to procure justice” (Forrester 50). Her sympathy extends from those “seduced servant and work girls” whom she meets in the course of her investigations (and whom female detectives especially “know quite enough of such matters”) (Forrester 10) to criminals themselves. By reminding us that ““the law knows no pity”” (Forrester 41), she can instead offer pity and sympathy to those who break the law but who are nevertheless liberal subjects of Great Britain. The implicit suggestion that G is able to employ sympathy because she is a woman is The law may be heartless, but G—and therefore the institution she represents—is not.

Though G and Mrs. Paschal conduct their investigations and measure their successes differently, their shared occupation as official members of the Metropolitan Police distinguish the casebooks from their predecessors. While both detectives resist dominant ideologies of womanhood, they do so within the limits of their profession through which they are given the means of their individual resistance norms of femininity. Because the presiding image of the detective in the mid-nineteenth century was that of a man, Klein argues that the category of “woman” did not overlap with the notion of the detective (4). Therefore, these early casebooks, she contends, fail in their depictions of the depiction of unconventional women pursuing a male profession because the “conflicting script for women intervened” (Klein 4). She surmises, “To succeed commercially, authors decided that their character was either not a proper detective or not a proper woman” (Klein 4). However, my argument rather figures the “incompetent detective or an inadequate woman” (Klein 5) not as stipulations to appease a misogynistic reading public

but as alternate modes designed to align with changing attitudes to the Metropolitan Police. Their imperfections and resistance to dominant gender ideologies cohere to present a police force that is once unthreatening to the law-abiding public—or, as in some of G’s cases, sympathetic criminals who do not commit violent crimes—and demonstrates the necessity of an intelligent individual to serve as a mediator between the state and the populace. The fantastical premise of the casebooks imagines a police force that is neither pervasive nor bumbling. *The Female Detective* and *Revelations of a Lady Detective* thus revise the role of the literary detective at a crucial point in nineteenth-century law enforcement. They likewise contribute to the fictional detective’s archetypal individual resistance to the law and dominant ideologies while at the same time policing the populace.

When considered within the longer trajectory of the female detective whose roots lie in the Gothic heroine’s rational education, the female detective’s reasoning skills are not sexist as they may appear. The rational education that Emily St. Aubert undergoes in *The Mysteries of Udolpho* demonstrates women’s ability to parse out puzzles or mysteries, even if they do not succeed outright. It is the process that matters. Of her investigations, Mrs. Paschal maintains, “These were not random thoughts. I had made minute observations, and deduced, as I have said before, the inferences I have stated” (Hayward 46). Though she admits that she does not always “hit the mark,” she always has “another feathered shaft ready for action in my well-stocked quiver” (Hayward 13). While over half a century has passed since Emily employed rationalism in the face of mystery, the perception of women’s rationally minded intelligence did not alter drastically by the mid-nineteenth century. The Gothic model reminds us that the demonstration of women employing their rationality is more important than whether they make the right conclusion first. Reading these books in light of novels like *The Mysteries of Udolpho*

underscore that the insistence upon women's ability to rationalize their way through cases may be read as a feminist act.

That these cases are headed by women is imperative: Demonstrating that both a just police force and female independence is possible, the casebooks reassert the importance of policing and a reformed cis-heteronormative gender binary through its fantastical premise. Despite *The Female Detective* and *Revelations of a Lady Detective*'s popularity, the official policewoman did not remain in vogue and would not reappear until the 1890s. G and Mrs. Paschal were the first to consolidate the female detective in nineteenth-century literature and influenced its *fin-de-siècle* generic descendants.

Professional Police

Ruth's career as a for-hire detective, and G and Mrs. Paschal's as official police together represent the first examples in British literature that the female detective became a professional. Considering within their historical context of consolidation of the Metropolitan Police force and larger sociopolitical questions of liberalism and gender ideology opens new ways of understanding their function within these novels.

Ruth's criminality ultimately collapses with her gender, serving to demonstrate the dangerous nature of such dissidence. While much of *Ruth the Betrayer* conveys queer attempts to elude a cis-heteronormative gender binary, she succeeds at a dire cost. Ellis therefore emphasizes his punitive conclusion. While not elevating the police, he neither suggests that Ruth, as a queer criminal detective, can survive in British society. She must be locked away. In turn, *The Female Detective* and *Revelations of a Lady Detective* portray acceptable methods of gender performance within the police state while simultaneously—*through* their individual gender

dissidence—reforming patriarchal institutions. Their elevation of a gender binary and the police force allows them to access freedoms within those constraints women were not typically afforded. In the next chapter, we will see how the amateur female detective actively resists patriarchal strictures in Victorian gender ideology and the law.

WORKS CITED

- “Advertisements & Notices.” *Reynolds’s Newspaper*, 16 Feb. 1862. *British Library Newspapers*, link-gale-com.proxy1.cl.msu.edu/apps/doc/Y3200532868/BNCN?u=msul&sid=bookmark-BNCN&xid=2b03e72b. Accessed 21 Dec. 2021.
- Armstrong, Nancy. *Desire and Domestic Fiction: A Political History of the Novel*. Oxford UP, 1990.
- . “Gender Must Be Defended.” *The South Atlantic Quarterly*, vol. 111, no. 3, 2012, pp. 529–47.
- Bredesen, Dagni A. “Conformist Subversion: The Ambivalent Agency in *Revelations of a Lady Detective*.” *Clues: A Journal of Detection*, vol. 25, no. 1, 2006.
- . “Introduction: On the Trail of the First Professional Female Detectives in British Fiction.” *The Female Detective. The First Female Detectives*, edited by Dagni Bredesen. Scholars’ Facsimiles & Reprints, 2010, pp. i–xxviii.
- Brontë, Charlotte. *Jane Eyre*. 1847. Penguin Classics, 2006.
- . *Villette*. 1953. Bantam Books, 1986.
- Cohn, Elisha. “Affect.” *Victorian Literature and Culture*, vol. 46, no. 3-4, 2018, pp. 563–67. DOI:10.1017/S1060150318000244. Accessed 22 Dec. 2021.
- Costantini, Mariaconcetta. “Sensation, Class and the Rising Professionals.” *The Cambridge Companion to Sensation Fiction*, edited by Andrew Mangham, Cambridge UP, 2013.
- Craig, Patricia and Mary Cadogan. *The Lady Investigates: Women Detectives and Spies in Fiction*. St. Martin’s Press, 1981.
- Cvetkovich, Ann. *Mixed Feelings: Feminism, Mass Culture, And Victorian Sensationalism*. Rutgers UP, 1992.
- Davidoff, Leonore and Catherine Hall. *Family Fortunes: Men and Women of the English Middle Class, 1780–1850*, Routledge, 2019.
- Davison, Carol Margaret. “Victorian Gothic and Gender.” *Victorian Gothic: An Edinburgh Companion*, edited by Andrew Smith and William Hughes, Edinburgh UP, 2012, pp. 12–41.
- Dickens, Charles. *Great Expectations*. 1861. Tom Doherty Associates, Inc. 1998.
- Flanders, Judith. “The hanky-panky way.” *The Times Literary Supplement*, no. 5594, 18 June 2010, pp. 14–15. The Times Literary Supplement Historical Archive,

- link.gale.com/apps/doc/EX1200555525/TLSH?u=msu_main&sid= bookmark-TLSH&xid=6adc5859. Accessed 6 Dec. 2021.
- . *The Invention of Murder: How the Victorians Revelled in Death and Detection and Created Modern Crime*. St. Martin's Griffin, 2014.
- . "Penny dreadfuls." *The British Library*, 2014, <https://www.bl.uk/romantics-and-victorians/articles/penny-dreadfuls>. Accessed 29 Nov. 2021.
- Forrester, Andrew. *The Female Detective. The First Female Detectives*, edited by Dagni Bredesen. Scholars' Facsimiles & Reprints, 2010.
- Harvie, Christopher and H.C.G. Matthew. *Nineteenth-Century Britain: A Very Short Introduction*. Oxford UP, 2000.
- Hayward, William. *Revelations of a Lady Detective. The First Female Detectives*, edited by Dagni Bredesen. Scholars' Facsimiles & Reprints, 2010.
- Heller, Tamar. *Dead Secrets: Wilkie Collins and the Female Gothic*. Yale UP, 1992.
- Hindmarch-Watson, Katie. "Lois Schwich, the Female Errand Boy: Narratives of Female Cross-Dressing in Late-Victorian London." *GLQ: A Journal of Lesbian and Gay Studies*, vol.14, no.1, 2008, pp. 69–98.
- "[ill]." *Lloyd's Illustrated Newspaper*, 20 Sept. 1868. *British Library Newspapers*, link-gale-com.proxy1.cl.msu.edu/apps/doc/BC3206230745/BNCN?u=msul&sid=bookmark-BNCN&xid=ef3f7472. Accessed 21 Dec. 2021.
- Joyce, Simon. "Two Women Walk into a Theater Restroom: The Trial of Fanny and Stella." *LGBT Victorians: Sexuality and Gender in the Nineteenth-Century Archives*, Oxford UP, 2022, pp. 192–226.
- Klein, Kathleen. *The Woman Detective: Gender & Genre*. University of Illinois Press, 1988.
- Law, Graham. "Sensation Fiction and the Publishing Industry." *The Cambridge Companion to Sensation Fiction*, edited by Andrew Mangham, Cambridge UP, 2013.
- Maturin, Charles. *Melmoth the Wanderer*. 1820. Penguin Books, 1977.
- Miller, D.A. *The Novel and the Police*. U of California P, 1988.
- Miller, Elizabeth Carolyn. *Framed: The New Woman Criminal in British Culture at the Fin de Siècle*. U of Michigan P, 2008.
- Nemesvari, Richard. "Queering the Sensation Novel." *The Cambridge Companion to Sensation Fiction*, edited by Andrew Mangham, Cambridge UP, 2013.

- “Penny dreadful, *Mysteries of London*.” *The British Library*, <https://www.bl.uk/collection-items/penny-dreadful-the-mysteries-of-london>. Accessed 29 Nov. 2021.
- Poovey, Mary. *Uneven Developments: The Ideological Work of Gender in Mid-Victorian England*. U of Chicago P, 1988.
- Radcliffe, Ann. *The Mysteries of Udolpho*. 1794. Penguin Books, 2001.
- Shpayer-Makov, Haia. *The Ascent of the Detective: Police Sleuths in Victorian and Edwardian England*. Oxford UP, 2011.
- Sparks, Tabitha. “Wilkie Collins’s *The Law and the Lady* and Feminine Reason: ‘Quite incredible, and nevertheless quite true!’ *CLUES: A Journal of Detection*, vol. 31, no. 2, 2013, pp. 46–55.
- Sutherland, John. Introduction. *The Woman in White*, by Wilkie Collins, Oxford UP, 1982, pp. vii–xxiv.
- Talairach-Vielmas, Laurence. “Sensation Fiction and the Gothic.” *The Cambridge Companion to Sensation Fiction*, edited by Andrew Mangham, Cambridge UP, 2013.
- Taylor, Jenny Bourne. “Introduction,” *The Law and the Lady* by Wilkie Collins. Oxford UP, 1992.
- White, Matthew. “The Enlightenment.” *The British Library*, 2018, <https://www.bl.uk/restoration-18th-century-literature/articles/the-enlightenment>. Accessed 20 Dec. 2021.
- Young, Arlene. “‘Petticoated police’: Propriety and the Lady Detective in Victorian Fiction.” *Clues*, vol. 26, no. 3, pp. 15–28.

CHAPTER THREE:
WILKIE COLLINS'S AMATEUR DETECTIVES

“A day of investigations and discoveries.”

—Wilkie Collins, *The Woman in White* (1860)

Though largely ignored by scholars until the second half of the twentieth century, Wilkie Collins was tremendously popular in his lifetime. The contemporary and bosom friend of Dickens, his early work appeared frequently in Dickens's *Household Words* to which he contributed. It was this friendship—which endured until Dickens's death in 1870—that, in part, propelled Collins's career. Collins's fifth novel, *The Woman in White* (1860), set the stage for sensation fiction, a genre favored throughout the 1860s and 1870s and which is instrumental in the development of the female detective. Published between November 1859 and August 1860 in Dickens's periodical magazine, *All the Year Round*, *The Woman in White* garnered Collins immense readership and, at the same time, admiration for its epistolary format, which critic and novelist Margaret Oliphant lauded as “*a new school in fiction*” (qtd. In Sutherland xi). Though perhaps an overstatement, *The Woman in White* is unique for its forensic approach in which narrative is compiled as if for a court, complete with footnotes explaining to the reader why diary passages have been omitted and names have been changed. It also received its share of unfavorable reviews on the grounds of vapidness—suspense without craft, made to be devoured and forgotten. Despite the lack of thorough critical success, however, Collins's novel inspired retail perfumes, cloaks and bonnets, themed waltzes, and otherwise “a sales mania and a franchise boom” (Sutherland vii). In short, “otherwise sensible Victorians lost their heads about it” (Sutherland vii). Though *The Moonstone* (1868) solidified his legacy in the detective fiction tradition,

Collins's depiction of the amateur detective in various texts, including two detectives I examine in this chapter, Marian Halcombe of *The Woman in White* and Valeria Brinton of *The Law and the Lady* (1875), makes him paramount to the female detective and to this dissertation.

Navigating mysteries and crimes that are inherently framed by social and legal understandings of mid-century womanhood, Marian and Valeria's successes are achieved through their status as outsiders. As amateur detectives and gender dissidents, their "disruptive power" (Milton 524) must be attributed to their respective disruption of midcentury conceptions of womanhood. Whereas *The Woman in White* radically collapses Marian's queer husbandry to Laura with the detective figure, *The Law and the Lady* seeks to reform Victorian womanhood rather than reject its categorization. The latter novel therefore gestures towards detective fiction's investment in reshaping womanhood to suit the modern age.

To understand the terrain in which the midcentury female detective treks, we must also attend to sensation fiction's dominance in the period. In his introduction to *The Woman in White*, John Sutherland notes that Wilkie Collins prefaced the first edition with a request that reviewers "not give away details of his plot" (vii), demonstrating the connective tissue between commercial success and sensational elements. Tamar Heller's work on Collins as a professional author amid the literary marketplace's transformation clarifies the tenuous position in which he worked:

With fiction no longer available only to an elite, the writer became more dependent on appealing to an audience than in the past, a dependency which the demands of serial publication only exacerbated. . . . The association of Victorian fiction with democratization . . . is countered by a critical discourse that uses aesthetic terms to condemn the content of fiction, particularly if that content is read as subversive. (85)

Midcentury novelists had to please their audiences while contending with their own social and economic positions. Heller concludes that while popular midcentury fiction is directed “toward ‘the people,’ the writer symbolically identifies with the proletariat by selling literature . . . to those who can afford to buy it” (Heller 77). Indeed, Mariaconcetta Costantini contends sensation novelists’ preoccupation with the diversity of the middle class—of which they were a part—nevertheless belies ideals of upward mobility, individualism, and morality. Because sensation novels were middle class in “their aspirations to wealth and recognition, these writers served an expanding literary market that brought them into contact with lower social strata” (Costantini). Like Heller, Costantini attributes this ambivalence to the writers’ unique position as rising professionals, thus maintaining conflicting class allegiances.

However, it is important to note that sensation fiction was written for a “largely female audience” (Allen 402) and, as such, Collins could not necessarily depend upon his readers to produce revenue. His widespread success aside, Collins (at least in *The Woman in White*) privileged the “two main elements,” as he identified them: curiosity and “the excitement of surprise” (*The Woman in White* 6). His emphasis on curiosity and suspense succinctly defines the primary characteristics of sensation fiction and its intertextual relationship with its readers. As the content of the sensation novel examines sexuality, it likewise induces shudders, sighs, and gasps in its readers—an affective response it uniquely encourages. Costantini points to working-class women and detectives as especially positioned within the conflict between class and sensation fiction’s transgressive content because they were at once respectively “associated with ideals of nurture and lawfulness” while being “embroiled in a capitalist system that tainted the symbolic integrity of their work.” It is this contradictory nature of the midcentury novel that

further problematizes its “revolutionary” status (Heller 87) and offers insight into why the female detective at once resists some dominant ideologies while enforcing others.

By the mid-nineteenth century, sensation fiction serialized the dark thrills that characterize it, straddling the middle ground between “highbrow” literature and the “lowbrow” literature. Contemporaneous reviewers of sensation fiction, according to Richard Nemesvari, were troubled by its challenge of “standard cultural exchanges of value,” as well as its disruption of “status quo discourses of propriety” and “instantiations of queerness.” Indeed, its harsher critics exemplify a larger concern regarding the genre, beyond the content of its pages: “The subtext of dismissals of the sensation novel as bad art is the fear that it encourages those who enjoy it to rebel against social restrictions” (Cvetkovich 22–23), often of a sexual nature, a component decidedly embedded within the genre. Sensation fiction’s ambiguation of gender definition—along with class miscegenation and moral ambivalence—made sensation fiction both widely read and hotly rejected by some critics.

In both novels, the female detective likewise resists dominant midcentury gender discourses through the novels’ sensational elements. Sensation fiction’s playful examination of gender emphasizes “the instability of identity, and to display the means by which social roles (particularly feminine ones) are shaped through the manipulation of cultural perceptions and codes” (Taylor vii–viii). Nemesvari contends sensation fiction—especially the “big three” of Collins, Mary Elizabeth Braddon (whose novel *Thou Art the Man* I consider in the next chapter), and Ellen Wood—implicitly explores queerness and gender performance:³²³

³³ Although not the subject of this dissertation, *The Moonstone* presents another important figure in the tradition of amateur queer detectives, Ezra Jennings, who remarks, “‘Physiology says, and says truly, that some men are born with female constitutions—and I am one of them!’” (Collins 327).

The disjunction between professed narrative/textual disapproval, and the pleasure queer characters take in their constructed perversity, makes the machinations of plot required to suppress and punish them appear excessive and unconvincing, resulting not in the undercutting of the non-normative, but in a questioning of the normative instead.

The mere presence of these characters, even if they die by the end, destabilizes the text and thus the reader's conception of gender (Nemesvari).

As a genre that invites a broader class of readers and intentional interaction, sensation fiction contests domestic fiction's gender politics while resituating Gothic plots within the space of England. With their shared emphasis on murder and madness, the Gothic's thematic influence on sensation fiction is obvious despite its bourgeois shield. In contrast to Gothic literature set in the Catholic south or Ireland, however, mid-nineteenth-century fiction largely locates its plots on English shores as an implicit critique of the state of Great Britain and its dominant discourses. Tied into this, moreover, is not simply anxieties surrounding criminality in England but pervasive corruption within English law itself. Indeed, the novels in this chapter acknowledge the futility of legislative reform. Instead, they are set within "an imagined society in which respectable citizens police[] each other" (Shpayer-Makov 232) through various means. D.A. Miller notes that *The Woman in White*'s characters "who rely on utterly illegal standards of evidence like intuition, coincidence, literary connotation get closer to what will eventually be revealed as the truth" (159). In *The Woman in White*, Count Fosco remarks to Marian that "English society . . . is as often the accomplice, as it is the enemy of crime. Yes! yes! Crime is in this country what crime is in other countries—a good friend to a man and to those about him as often as it is an enemy" (Collins 231). According to Heather Milton, sensation fiction responds to "anxiety about the middle-class family and corruption within," as well as the middle class's

perceived increase in crime and anxieties regarding “crime and contact with criminals as the population and urban space swelled dramatically and fears about cross-class contact intensified” (517). Criminality in these novels, Collins’s especially, often serves as a national critique. Along these lines, this conflict also elucidates the professional status (or lack thereof) of Collins’s female detectives. Marian and Valeria do not work in the same manner as the detectives in my previous chapter. As amateurs, they are driven by neither careers nor monetary gain. Yet, this helps legitimize their status as detectives in this era: The general mistrust of the police, which several of novels in my previous chapter hope to mitigate, combined with middle-class concerns of corruption and crime serve as the background context to the development of the amateur female detective. Marian and Valeria’s successes positioned against the ineffectuality of the law despite perceived widespread crime lend them credibility. They are heroines precisely *because* they succeed beyond the corrupted purview of the law. In future iterations of the figure, detectives like Sherlock Holmes often move beyond the law in order to close their case; rather than understanding that practice as corruption, these texts frame that movement as necessary and even heroic.

The novels in this chapter present an openness in the midcentury moment before the consolidation of detective fiction. Heralded by the female detective figure, these novels foster unity outside conventional heteronormative structure and offer a proliferation of models of practicing gender. I argue that even as the gender noose tightens over the course of this period, the novels Collins produces find new and innovative ways to elude and redefine Victorian constraints. Bookending this chapter with his early success and a late-career novel, I demonstrate how the female detective’s relationship to gender evolves over the course of Collins’s career. Marian Halcombe and Valeria Brinton, respectively of *The Woman in White* and *The Law and the*

Lady, resolutely elude the category of woman or redefine womanhood against the period's norms. Rather than the Victorian ideal of the angel in the house, the female detective is "an avenging angel" (Bredesen, "A Conformist Subversion" 23), countering patriarchal strictures such as marriage, domesticity, and femininity.

"The foresight and the resolution of a man": Marian Halcombe as Female Husband

Marian Halcombe, one of *The Woman in White*'s two primary narrators, may be credited as the first amateur female sleuth in British literature in a successful serialized novel. Though she sets the first investigation, the mystery of the eponymous woman in white's identity, into motion simply out of curiosity, Marian conducts her primary investigation out of necessity: to protect her half-sister, Laura, to whom she is utterly devoted. Marian's gender indeterminacy, characterized through her masculinity and husbandry to Laura, is central to her success as a detective. In competition with Walter Hartright for Laura's affection, Marian proves her worthiness to Laura through her role as a detective. I argue that Collins collapses the roles of the detective and the husband in *The Woman in White*. As such, investigation is paramount to Marian and Walter's securement of their shared roles as husband. Her detective work thus ultimately secures her position in the novel's queer triad. As a central figure in the development of the female detective, Marian is significant for her queerness's instrumental role in her investigative ability, as well as its driving force as the primary reason *to* investigate.

The Woman in White portrays a contestation of position in relation to Laura Fairlie, the heroine around whom the plot develops. That is, Marian and Walter compete for the role of Laura's "husband." Milton contends that the novel presents multiple male characters' attempts to "rein in the outspoken Marian Halcombe and end her role as detective," while Hartright is also

given the narrative power to structure the novel and “thereby frames the story and its interpretation” (521). As Heller likewise demonstrates in *Dead Secrets: Wilkie Collins and the Female Gothic*, the novel presents “the struggle for primacy between male and female voices” (103). Yet, *The Woman in White* resists a “battle of the sexes.” Despite her competition with Walter, Marian successfully secures her position in the triad through her investigations.

From her introduction, Marian’s defining characteristic is her masculinity, set in relief through her comparison with Laura. When she makes Walter’s acquaintance at Limmeridge, she defines herself against Laura: Laura is beautiful, and Marian is ugly and has a mustache; Laura is wealthy whereas Marian is poor; Laura is “sweet-tempered and charming,” but Marian is “crabbed and odd.” “In short,” Marian concludes, “she is an angel; and I am—” —something Marian does not voice (Collins 37). Invoking the “The Angel in the House,” an 1854 poem by Coventry Patmore that encompassed the Victorian ideal of womanhood, Marian sets herself against domestic femininity—physically and subjectively.

Whereas the novel’s primary narrators seem to understand gender in binary terms, even if they do not enact them as such, *The Woman in White* itself is invested in undoing those binaries. According to Laurel Erickson, “As an odd woman, Marian escapes the familiar role of the single-young-woman-trapped-in-the-body-of-a-marriage-plot. She is allowed instead to circulate in a narrative space that has not already been defined for her” (100). Marian consistently complains of her own womanhood and has a poor opinion of her own gender (Collins 36), a position she both jokes about at the beginning of the novel—“I will give you some tea to compose your spirits, and do all a woman can (which is very little, by the by) to hold my tongue” (Collins 36)—and comes to express with more frustration as the stakes increase: “Being, however, nothing but a woman, condemned to patience, propriety, and petticoats, for

life, I must . . . try to compose myself in some feeble and feminine way” (Collins 195). Marian’s diatribes against womanhood are complex: While she considers herself a woman (and, indeed, what little choice did she have in Victorian England, and how else could Collins write her?), her syntax and tone separates her from the category. Her digs at being “nothing but a woman,” are said with such disdain and are so performatively out of character as to remove her from the category. And, of course, Marian does not confine herself to patience, propriety, or even petticoats.

With her masculinity immediately established, *The Woman in White* further conflates her gender dissidence with her erotic attachment to Laura. To better understand Marian’s masculinity, I turn to *Female Masculinity* in which Jack Halberstam advocates for a nuanced appraisal of masculinity in women since the nineteenth century, which:

urges us to reconsider our most basic assumptions about the functions, forms, and representations of masculinity and forces us to ask why the bond between men and masculinity has remained relatively secure despite the continuous assaults made by feminists, gays, lesbians, and gender-queers on the naturalness of gender. (45)

Halberstam’s argument that modern masculinity was constructed “by and through women as well as men” in the nineteenth century demands that we “account for the ways in which female masculinity has been expelled and deliberately excluded from contemporary theories of masculinity” (46). While Halberstam rightly emphasizes female masculinity’s distinction from early forms of lesbianism because it would “hold female masculinity apart from the making of modern masculinity itself” (46), it is useful to examine Marian’s masculinity within both gender and sexual contexts that overlap and enforce one another. Lisa Hager’s incisive work on nineteenth-century female husbands, however, challenges Halberstam’s supposition that female

husbands belong to the “category of eighteenth- and nineteenth-century women who desired other women rather than the possibility that these individuals might be better described as transgender than lesbian” (42). Their analysis accordingly examines several female husbands whom Hager describes as “assigned-female-at-birth people who lived and married as men in England” (40). Because of the fraught definition of the female husband—who was labeled as such in a punitive manner by cultural, social, and legal communities (Hager 41)—and my examination of literature rather than Halberstam and Hager’s real cases, my use of the term considers Collins’s depiction of Marian as an “odd woman” whose gender is indefinite. Moreover, despite Sharon Marcus’s invaluable contributions on nineteenth-century relations between women, I wish to resist labeling Marian’s relationship to Laura as a “female marriage,” largely due to the centrality of Marian’s masculinity and rejection of womanhood. Thus, my use of the term “female husband” in this dissertation acknowledges *The Woman in White*’s disruption of a cis-heteronormative gender binary primarily through Marian and her relationship to Laura,³⁴ and seeks to hold in balance the potential of both Halberstam and Hager’s analyses.

Though evidenced throughout the novel, an early example of Marian’s attachment to her sister that I would like to consider positions her as a proto-husband. Of Laura’s impending marriage to Glyde, Marian writes in her diary: “Before another month is over our heads, she will be *his* Laura instead of mine! His Laura!” (Collins 182). Glyde’s legal marriage to Laura sublimates Marian’s position as a female husband, though she often draws similar parallels between herself and Glyde. In preparation for the marriage, for example, Marian pours “the profaning bitterness of this world’s wisdom into that pure heart and that innocent mind,” by explaining some harsh realities: “She has learnt her hard, inevitable lesson. The simple illusions

³⁴ Later in this section, I attend to Marian’s status as Laura’s half-sister and the taboo of incest my argument implies.

of her girlhood are gone; and my hand has stripped them off. Better mine than his—that is all my consolation—better mine than his” (Collins 183). Marian frames Laura as a girl entering womanhood and, within the context of her impending marriage, this passage reads as a pseudo sex talk, a metaphoric discussion of the wedding night. That Marian puts herself in the position of the husband—“better mine than his”—enforces her conception of her relation to Laura.

Marian’s sexuality has been the subject of much scholarship, often in the context of queerness but also through scholarship that adamantly resists that reading. Erickson, however, contends “that *not* to see a connection between Marian and current understandings of sexual identities is a misrepresentation of Collins’s text” (96) and postulates that while Miller identifies queer desire in *The Woman in White*, he, like many others, does not consider “Marian’s position as an ‘odd woman’” (96). Her status as an odd woman, Erickson posits, is a more suitable reading, as someone who is more “affably odd or eccentric” rather than a “demonized or pathologized” character (97). Erickson continues:

A ‘homosocial’ bond develops not between Marian and Laura but between odd Marian and her male rivals; Marian’s presence in Collins’s text is less apparitional than it is eccentric, and her physical appearance marks, *not a strictly androgynous man-trapped-in-a-woman’s body, but a strange hybridity that eludes any stable categorization*. (96; emphasis mine)

Erickson concludes that Marian is most accurately read as queer: “As queer subjects they elude categorization, dissolve boundaries, and rupture the seamlessness of a social body based upon sexual difference” (102). Marian specifically enacts this gender rupture through her investigation.

Over the course of Walter's first narration, Collins establishes Marian's masculinity, erotic attachment to Laura, as well as a drive toward investigation. These threads, however, are not pulled together until Marian is embroiled within a mystery and a plot against Laura's fortune. Contradicting Walter's opening line of the novel, which aligns resolution with men and endurance with women, Marian remarks to Walter, "I wish you had been a little more resolute about finding out her [the woman in white's] name. We must really clear up this mystery, in some way. . . . As for myself, I am all aflame with curiosity, and I devote my whole energies to the business of discovery from this moment" (Collins 39). Marian is the dominant investigator in the first mystery of Anne Catherick's identity: With her "penetrating eyes" (Collins 67), Marian rummages through her mother's notes—a practice reminiscent of Emily St. Aubert—for clues and later is accompanied by Walter with whom she asks questions in town, which turns out to be "useless investigations" (Collins 83). Before his departure for Central America, Walter tells Marian, "'These events have a meaning, these events must lead to a result. The mystery of Anne Catherick is *not* cleared up yet. She may never cross my path again; but if ever she crosses yours, make better use of the opportunity, Miss Halcombe, than I made of it'" (Collins 180). Heller incisively comments that in Collins's work, "the female perspective becomes central only when male vision fails" (95), positioning detection competitively. Leaving the mystery squarely in Marian's hands, Walter leaves the country—removing himself from the roles of detective and Laura's romantic interest.

Collins emphasizes Marian's masculinity through her investigations, beginning with the first epoch. Indeed, Count Fosco who "flatters [Marian's] vanity, by talking to [her] as seriously and sensibly as if [she] was a man" (Collins 218), rebukes Glyde for not taking Marian's investigations seriously: "'Can you look at Miss Halcombe, and not see that she has the foresight

and the resolution of a man?” (Collins 318). As Halberstam elucidates, masculinity has been historically “produced by and across both male and female bodies” (1–2) and indeed “becomes legible” as such “when it leaves the white male middle-class body. . . . it finds, ultimately, that the shapes and forms of modern masculinity are best showcased within female masculinity” (2–3). Fosco recognizes further masculine qualities: ““She is sharp enough to suspect something, and bold enough to come down stairs and listen, if she can get the chance”” (Collins 312). Marian’s angered response—her hopes to one day “cast” his words back, “one by one, in his teeth” (Collins 18)—further demonstrates her masculine sensibility, later barely restrained by her social position as woman: ““My hands tingled to strike him, as if I had been a man!”” (Collins 537). Perceptive of Glyde’s scheme without knowing its details, Marian’s “own convictions led [her] to believe that the hidden contents of the parchment concealed a transaction of the meanest and the most fraudulent kind” (Collins 247). Her investigations, which is how she terms them, includes explorations “in the library, on pretence of searching for a book” (Collins 260). Later, she searches the boathouse and the grounds on Glyde’s Blackwater estate, identifying “footsteps in the sand” and “detect[ing] the footsteps of two persons” (Collins 285). In a novel brimming with queer characters—in addition to Marian, Fosco, and Mr. Fairlie (Laura’s uncle), are among the most discernable—Collins crucially frames Marian’s masculinity within the context of her investigations.

It is precisely Marian’s queerness that helps her see through Glyde’s treachery. That is, Marian’s queerness is instrumental in her detective capacity. Haefele-Thomas contends that because she “exist[s] on the margins of mid-Victorian society” Marian can “see beyond the facades of ‘normal’ and ‘reality’ and instead perceive less conventional underlying truths” (Haefele-Thomas 12). When Fosco expounds upon Marian’s masculine traits, he does so within

the context of her devotion to Laura; without her devotion to a woman whose life is danger, Marian would not be bold enough to investigate. While female masculinity is not confined to lesbianism, Halberstam also notes that “female masculinity seems to be at its most threatening when coupled with lesbian desire” (28). Thus, at once Marian’s detection “represents the moment when she obtains knowledge of male oppression” (Heller 136) and positions her as a queer figure—not male in the sense of Hager’s female husbands nor in Halberstam’s framework of woman but a complex continuum between the masculine and feminine while eluding womanhood altogether.

Marian’s gender dissidence comes to a head in her most cited example of investigation, and among the most examined and celebrated in all detective fiction, during which she spies on Glyde and Fosco. Determined to gather information on Glyde and Fosco’s plot, and having found legal means futile, Marian overhears the men discussing their conspiracy. To better hear them, “fortified in [her] resolution by the desperate nature of [their] situation” (Collins, *The Woman in White* 313), Marian realizes she must change her clothing in order to spy:

A complete change in my dress was imperatively necessary for many reasons. I took off my silk gown to begin with, because the slightest noise from it on that still night might have betrayed me. I next removed the white and cumbersome parts of my underclothing, and replaced them by a petticoat of dark flannel. Over this I put my black travelling cloak, and pulled the hood on to my head. In my ordinary evening costume I took up the room of three men at least. In my present dress, when it was held close about me, no man could have passed through the narrowest spaces more easily than I. The little breadth left on the roof of the verandah, between the flower-pots on one side and the wall and the windows of the house on the other, made this a serious consideration. If I knocked

anything down, if I made the least noise, who could say what the consequences might be?

(Collins, *The Woman in White* 313–14)

As we saw in chapter two, changing attire—stripping away cumbersome pieces or outright crossdressing—is a common practice among female detectives. Though Marian does not crossdress, she nevertheless eschews the “patience, propriety, and petticoats” (Collins 195) by which she defines womanhood and instead adopts the sharpness, boldness, and resolution “of a man” (Collins 318). Most crucially, Marian trades her femininity for masculinity through the literal practice of removing these markers of womanhood. Despite Marian’s disdain for femininity, she is neither representative of a transition from one binary to the next; she has equal disdain for men. She complains to Laura:

‘Men! They are our enemies of our innocence and our peace—they drag us away from our parents’ love and our sisters’ friendship—they take us body and soul to themselves, and fasten our helpless lives to theirs as they chain up a dog to his kennel. And what does the best of them give us in return?’ (Collins 176)

In short, Marian’s gender transgression consistently eludes womanhood *through* her continuum between the feminine and the masculine.

In the novel’s second and third parts, the roles of detective and “husband” collide. Throughout the second epoch (and into the third by the way of Walter’s retrospective narration), Marian takes up the mantle of detective to rescue her sister, displays her masculinity and intensifies her erotic attachment to Laura. Effectively drawing a connection between the detective and husband, Collins positions investigation as the manner by which Marian and Walter prove their worthiness to Laura and, ultimately, secure their shared roles as husband. This connection solidifies further when we consider that Walter in the first epoch is a poor and kind-

hearted but ineffectual drawing master whereas, in the third epoch, he returns from Central America—during which he has survived disease and violence—as a hardened detective. Heller cites “the rise of this figure for male detection, Collins’ most important narrative innovation” as an “attempt to reassert male authority by emphasizing men’s analytical power and their ability not only to be differentiated from, but also to read and control the feminine” (107). Claiming dominance as the triad’s patriarch through his return as primary narrator and through his investigations, it is only then that Walter can marry Laura. Yet, by this point in the novel, Marian has also proven herself a worthy detective and husband.

Marian’s subsequent sickness and metaphorical assault by Fosco induces much scholarship to overemphasize Marian’s failure to complete her investigation rather than understand it as an impediment that, though not ultimately resolved by Marian, is instrumental in the villains’ defeat. Even after Laura’s supposed death, Marian continues to investigate by visiting “Anne” at the asylum. Indeed, Marian’s rescue of Laura from the asylum is critically neglected, particularly within the context of her narrative struggle with Walter. Considering the failure of the law to secure Laura’s safety—“any attempt to identify Lady Glyde and to rescue her by legal means”—Marian “had determined to effect Lady Glyde’s escape privately” (Collins, *The Woman in White* 414–15). Despite Marian’s monumental effort to free Laura, Walter’s narration downplays the rescue and reasserts himself as the novel’s primary detective. Heller calls Fosco’s “colonization of Marian’s voice . . . particularly villainous,” but, she argues, “it is only a more obvious version of Hartright’s own strategy for containing Marian’s narrative energy” (134). Carol Margaret Davison concurs, “Masculinity is also of key concern being portrayed as embattled in *The Woman in White*” (135). The struggle, she continues, “occurs between the logical, masculine Marian Halcombe, a detective-in-training whose moustache

provides pseudo-scientific evidence of her gender transgression” and Walter, concluding that his marriage to Laura “puts Marian in her place” and rejects her as his equal (Davison 135). Most illustratively, as their investigation into Glyde’s history culminates, Marian’s “eyes fasten[] searchingly” on Walter: “‘I see!’ she said, in a low eager whisper. ‘You are trying the last chance to-night.’” She pleads, “Let me go with you. Don’t refuse me because I’m only a woman. I must go! I will go!” (Collins 572). Despite Walter’s absence from the narrative and inaction until the novel’s climax, he adopts the fruition of Marian’s successes and reasserts his position as the novel’s primary narrator, detective, and lover—statuses that collapse in *The Woman in White*.

Though scholars such as Ardel Haefele-Thomas and Tamar Heller argue that, despite its radical queer potential, *The Woman in White* reifies mid-Victorian gender ideologies through its elevation of heterosexual marriage, I contend that the novel uniquely maintains its queer potential through the end of the novel. In *Queer Others in Victorian Gothic: Transgressing Monstrosity*, Haefele-Thomas argues Collins lays a “subversive Gothic trap” (10) for his readers to fall into in *The Woman in White*, provoked by their contemporary fears of the queer and racialized other but ultimately uses these characters—Marian—as a mediator to the novel’s primary couple to reinforce heterosexual marriage. Unofficial or prototypical marriages between women in the nineteenth century were certainly not unheard of. Marcus demonstrates that “in Victorian England, female marriage, gender mobility, and women’s erotic fantasies about women were at the heart of normative institutions and discourses” (13). In *Between Women*, Marcus explores female friendship as a space in which women could engage in masculine activities (e.g., competition, appreciation of female beauty) and prepare them for more equitable marriage but which also reinforced gender and class roles. Victorian marriage, she argues, stimulated female friendship rather than suppressed it. Considering lesbian and feminist studies, Marcus

emphasizes, “social bonds overlap without becoming identical” (30). In her analysis of friendship in literature, she claims “authors openly represented relationships between women that involve friendship, desire, and marriage” (75). In fact, these bonds often do not pose a threat to the narrative conclusion of a heterosexual union but rather exist concurrently. While these friendships are not the locus of the plot, Marcus contends that they “sustain the reader’s interest and attention,” with the hope that it will remain stable (76). According to Marcus, sensation novels especially promote the power of female friendships.

While not discounting the incestuous ramifications of my argument, I also wish to briefly comment upon the eroticized use of sisterly affection in Victorian literature. Helena Michie has argued, “Sisterhood acts as a protecting framework within which women can fall and recover their way, a literary convention within which female sexuality can be explored and reabsorbed within the teleology of family” (404). That is, sisterhood provides a socially acceptable method of exploring women’s sexuality that was at once heralded by Victorian society that “often portrayed close affection between sisters as the highest form of friendship” (Haeefele-Thomas 23). Published only two years after *The Woman in White*, Christina Rossetti’s most celebrated poem “Goblin Market” (1862) similarly represents “alternative female erotics based on sisterhood, identity, and similarity” (Michie 417). I want to suggest that Collins’s depiction of Marian’s devotion to Laura is therefore a clever method of exploring transgressive female sexuality (particularly in light of the novel’s conclusion) through the guise of a normative connection.

By the end, Walter succeeds in removing Laura’s first husband and presenting himself as a worthy detective and therefore husband—but so has Marian. It is impossible to ignore Marian’s continued devotion to Laura and her success in maintaining that Laura is her own (at least, in

part), not “*his* Laura instead of mine!” (Collins 182). Laura too determines that Marian must “promise you will never marry, and leave me” (Collins 209). Though she loves Walter, she also loves Marian and figures her as a spouse: ““It is selfish to say so, but you are so much better off as a single woman—unless—unless you are fond of your husband—but you won’t be very fond of anybody but me, will you?”” (Collins 209) Despite the narrative competition that manifests throughout the course of the novel, *The Woman in White* concludes with a queer triad—a domestic union among three.

Laura and Walter’s marriage certainly secures bourgeois hierarchy and, after the birth of their child, ensures its lineage but, within the narrative, it also proffers a queer triad. Heller’s assertion that “for the Victorian bourgeoisie, gender and class identities wrote and reinforced each other, since middle-class identity is defined through the dependency of women and children of men” (128) is apt:

The uneasy marriage between the bourgeoisie and the gentry is predicated on a last confusion of gender roles: it is not Hartright who inherits Limmeridge House, but Laura. . . . Laura’s inheritance of Limmeridge also attests to the diffusion of the more radical elements of the novel’s feminist critique. The reparation of women’s disadvantaged legal and economic status only affects wealthy landowners, not working-class women. (139)

Through its depiction of the queer triad, *The Woman in White* also demonstrates Walter’s ascension to the bourgeoisie, from a drawing master to the patriarch of Limmeridge. Yet, Laura’s inheritance also signals a movement away from normative ideologies and patriarchal law that is amplified by Marian’s inclusion in the triad. Thus, Marian’s position in the triad that she has won herself at once demonstrates Marcus’s assertion that the Victorian gender system “provided women latitude through female friendships, giving them room to roam without radically

changing the normative rules governing gender difference” (27) and, at the same time, argues that normative marriages—and indeed the system itself when not contested by characters like the triumvirate—“are the central monstrosity in this Gothic novel” (Haeefe-Thomas 18). Haeefe-Thomas notes that women’s sexuality was, to Victorian ideology, invisible enough to ensure that characters like Marian and Laura may “stay together through the course of the novel—including through two of Laura’s marriages to men” (23). Walter and Laura’s marriage cannot be understood as a true institution of patriarchy when it serves to uphold the queer triad.

There is also the matter of Walter’s role as the patriarch in the queer triad, and, indeed, as a detective in his own right that I wish to trouble. I posit that we may understand him as a minor queer figure. Like Marian, Walter engages in characteristics considered masculine during his investigation, such as his proactive willingness to hunt down and fight Glyde. The distinction is that Marian’s are largely innate whereas Walter must go abroad to develop his masculinity. D.A. Miller’s reading of *The Woman in White* contends that the threat of gender slippage and homosexuality is largely pathologized and contained by the conclusion, though this reading flattens its nuanced gender politics. He argues that the novel’s female characters must be “enclos[ed] and seclud[ed]” in patriarchal institutions such as “marriage and madhouses” whereas men “must monitor and master what is fantasized as the ‘woman inside’ them” (155–56). Although Miller clearly criticizes this perceived binary in *The Woman in White* (at the same time holding it up), his contention fails to consider the implications of Walter’s initial femininity (or, at least, troubling lack of masculinity). Walter identifies this in himself: He “hope[s]” and “pray[s]” he will come back from Central America “a changed man,” writing, “In the stern school of extremity and danger my will had learnt to be strong, my heart to be resolute, my mind to rely on itself. I had gone out to fly from my own future. I came back to face it, as a man

should” (Collins 399). This pantomime of masculinity—his explicit yearning to become more masculine—demonstrates Walter’s construction of his gender. It is thoughtful and conscious and, as Miller points out in somewhat clumsy language, stems from the awareness of the “woman inside” him. As we have seen through Marian’s investigations, detection is a vehicle by which authors can explore the boundaries of gender. His accentuated masculinity is a tool by which he can solve the mystery and protect Laura, yet one is left to wonder whether that masculinity is a performance and whether the queer triad is a retreat into which Walter, like Marian and Laura, can coexist outside the strictures of society. Collins’s resistance to feminizing Walter as he undergoes his investigation suggests Collins’s adeptness: By not portraying the “opposite” of Marian (i.e., a man who becomes feminine), he resists upholding a gender binary. Though understudied as a queer character, Walter’s investigation and comparative role as a detective with Marian demonstrates the connective tissue between investigation and queerness in Collins’s work.

The Woman in White’s investments lie in a queer resistance to Victorian systems. Collins’s approach to Walter and Laura’s marriage, which is more subversive than it at first appears, is akin to his approach to these systems, particularly the law: No sweeping changes are made to patriarchal institutions in the novel. *The Woman in White* does not present a legal change to marriage; the characters have not reformed the system in any meaningful way. The characters have, however, revised the systems to their own desires in a most transgressive manner: “Given the fact that the ladies are half-sisters, incest mixes its illicit pleasures with the common-law bigamy. . . . To complicate things further, there are also some clear hints of an erotic relationship between Laura and Marian” (Sutherland x). Likewise, the corrupt nature of the law cannot be upturned but only evaded by the novel’s heroic amateur detectives. In *The Woman in White*,

gender and law fails its characters; it is up to them to upset the binaries and systems Victorian society presents them.

“Secret longings” in *The Law and the Lady*

With two of the most prominent novels in the history of detective fiction under his belt, *The Woman in White* and *The Moonstone*, Wilkie Collins returned to the amateur detective in 1875. Narrated by its heroine Valeria Brinton, *The Law and the Lady* integrates many of the female detective’s principal characteristics established over the past century. Compelled by a sense of justice, Valeria utilizes curiosity, sympathy, and affect to prove her husband innocent of murder after he receives the Scottish verdict, “Not Proven.” Published in the last years of sensation fiction’s prime, *The Law and the Lady* demonstrates the early consolidation of the female detective and her subsequent absorption into mainstream literature. I argue that despite the novel’s moments of radical potential, Collins figures Valeria’s investigation as a method of reformulating Victorian womanhood rather than as a rejection of categorization—an approach to the female detective that escalates in the 1890s. Collins presents a gender binary that can be reformed but not eluded by Valeria. Through her investigation, she seeks to modernize womanhood by stretching and revising characteristics and practices unacceptable for women by Victorian ideology. As such, Collins ultimately accepts a binary in contrast to *The Woman in White*, which rejects it altogether. *The Law and the Lady*, I conclude, gestures towards the *fin-de-siècle* New Woman detective novel’s investment in reshaping womanhood to suit the modern age.

Unlike Marian, who serves as *The Woman in White*’s secondary narrator, Valeria is *The Law and the Lady*’s sole storyteller and, as such, the novel offers unique insight into the amateur

female detective's conception of her investigations and position in Victorian society. *The Law and the Lady*'s marriage of sensation elements within a detective narrative, though not invented with this novel (indeed, *Lady Audley's Secret* [1862] can also be described in this manner), is significant for its centralization of a woman as narrator. Collins's late novel furthermore diverges from Forrester and Hayward's casebooks on the grounds of format as serialized novel and for, crucially, Valeria's amateur status.

Although *The Woman in White* and *The Moonstone*—and to a lesser degree, other novels such as *No Name* (1862) and *Armada* (1866)—fashioned Collins into one of the most prolific and widely-read authors of his time, *The Law and the Lady*, “one of Collins’ most aesthetically and ideologically complex mystery tales” (Heller 167), remains a largely unstudied novel. Like much of his work, it borrows from the Gothic tradition “in a narrative that rewrites the Radcliffian plot of the potentially murderous husband” (Heller 167) and hybridizes “sensational elements, detection and gothic themes and patterns” (Dupeyron-Lafay 142). Heller attributes the lack of critical attention—this “apparent outmodedness”—of Collins’s work to his “representation of themes of gender and sexuality through his characteristic, and sensational, version of female Gothic” that was revised by authors at the end of the century into a masculine-centric narrative (166). Published serially in the *Graphic* in 1875, *The Law and the Lady*, the magazine *Athenaeum* called the novel, “an outrageous burlesque upon himself” (qtd. in Taylor ix). It was later collected into three volumes by Chatto & Windus (Taylor ix). By 1875, Collins was commercially successful enough to negotiate with publishers, which resulted in a transference of all his novels’ copyrights to Chatto & Windus for whom *The Law and the Lady* was the first in a series of Collins’s novels, including earlier works (Taylor xii). His work after 1870 was serialized “in widely differing kinds of publication,” from respectable magazines to

illustrated and syndicated newspapers; “Collins’s willingness to publish in a range of different newspapers sprang from the need to hold his own in an expanding world of markets and readers” (Taylor xi). With the rapid transformation of his profession over the course of his career, Collins strived to maintain financial stability (successfully—this was the most financially stable decade of his career [Taylor ix]), popularity, and his own moral code. He successfully resisted *The Law and the Lady*’s censorship, which had been a problem for him in the past.³⁵ After the *Graphic*’s editor cut a scene without Collins’s knowledge in which a character makes a pass at Valeria, he overturned the editor’s insistence that the novel should ““give no offence to the family circle”” and the passage was restored (Collins, ““The Law and the Lady’: To the Editor” 415). *The Law and the Lady*, which “cuts right across conventional distinctions between high and popular literary forms” (Taylor xiii), is an excellent example of the professional and ideological complexities Collins balanced in this later stage of his career.

Assigning herself to the task of investigation, Valeria’s role as an amateur detective anticipates a pervasive approach to female detective fiction at *fin-de-siècle* in which the investigation emerges out of duty to her husband³⁶ and, in doing so, reroutes the female detective’s subversion of “woman” into the category’s redefinition. Though published prior to the first wave of feminism embodied by the New Woman, *The Law and the Lady* evinces many of the characteristics that its successors will take up, though it remains informed by its predecessors’ queer sensibilities. Indeed, though *The Law and the Lady* marks a significant shift in Collins’s portrayal of the female detective when compared to *The Woman in White*, it is nevertheless a thoroughly peculiar novel. Opening with her marriage to Eustace Woodville,

³⁵ Among Collins’s censored novels is *The New Magdalen* (1873), a novel about a fallen woman (Taylor xii).

³⁶ Love interest may be a more appropriate term when generalizing this particular strain of female detective fiction: Whereas Valeria is already married, in the next chapter Miss Cayley, for example, performs investigations for her fiancé.

narrator Valeria Brinton reflects on the strange circumstances of her engagement—Woodville’s mother opposed the marriage and others maintained a general reticence to explore his past. On their honeymoon, Valeria encounters his mother, who says she pities her, and becomes suspicious of her husband. Their landlady reveals to Valeria, after following Mrs. Woodville, that her husband has deceived her: they married under a false name; his real name is Macallan and he was tried for poisoning his first wife Sara at Gleninch with a Not Proven verdict in a Scottish court.

As in Marian and Walter’s case, the failure of the law instigates Valeria’s investigation. Collins frames Valeria’s investigation as a legitimization of her role as wife, collapsing her success as both: If Valeria is a triumphant detective, she thus secures her role as Eustace’s legitimate wife in the eyes of both the law and respectable society—an approach not unlike Marian’s. In response to her discovery of Eustace’s secret, she tells him, “‘What the Law has failed to do for you, your Wife must do for you’” (Collins 141). Collins’s decision to foreground Valeria’s narration, however, diverges from *The Woman in White*. In doing so, he contrasts dominant ideologies through men’s response to her decision to investigate, ranging from bewildered to hostile, with Valeria’s steadfastness, privileging the latter. When appraised of her decision, Valeria’s uncle calls her investigation “[a]n act of madness.” He continues, “‘you are conceited enough to think that you can succeed where the greatest lawyers in Scotland have failed. *They* couldn’t prove this man’s innocence, all working together. And *you* are going to prove it single-handed? Upon my word, you are a wonderful woman” (Collins 147). Emphasizing the absurdity of a woman contradicting the official jurisdiction, Valeria’s uncle represents a significant patriarchal figure in her life, second only to her husband. Valeria’s friend Benjamin’s more temperate response—“‘I never heard, Valeria, of a woman doing what you

propose to do” (Collins 143)—further illustrates her decision’s abnormality. Most notably, however, is Eustace’s response:

‘If you could control your curiosity,’ he answered, sternly, ‘we might live happily enough. I thought I had married a woman who was superior to the vulgar failings of her sex. A good wife should know better than to pry into affairs of her husband’s with which she had no concern.’ (Collins 67)

This passage succinctly outlines the dominant perception of women’s roles when they clash with investigation. A “good wife,” according to Eustace’s vocalization of Victorian ideology, does not investigate; she does not question her husband or know too much about his past; she does not make decisions which contradict his desires. Nevertheless, Valeria pursues her investigation. Distraught that his past has come to light, Eustace leaves to fight a war in Spain and, meanwhile, she determines to prove him innocent despite all the men’s discouragement.

When held in context of *The Law and the Lady*’s overarching narrative, this passage also distinguishes feminine modes of curiosity outlined in my first chapter (e.g., gossiping, snooping) from the traditionally masculine mode (e.g., use of empirical evidence and perception). The text ultimately aligns Valeria between these two modes; her own method of detection figures along the masculine-feminine continuum. Tabitha Sparks clarifies how Valeria’s investigation revises mid-Victorian conceptions of womanhood:

Valeria’s outsider status and the methods of reasoning it inspires are gendered feminine by way of their distance from legal, cultural, and intellectual hegemony. As her many detractors warn her, the ambition to vindicate Eustace and repair her broken marriage exceeds the influence that a (disenfranchised) wife, with no experience in law, can access. . . . the obstacles faced by Valeria are socially constructed and that there are no natural

determinations of her gender that impede her. Moreover, he suggests that the idea of “natural determinations of gender” is itself a social construct receptive to reinterpretation. (50–51)

When considering Eustace’s outraged response to Valeria’s investigation, Sparks’s analysis highlights Collins’s depiction of a cis-heteronormative gender binary that is enforced *and created* by hegemonic and societal constructions. The flimsiness of Valeria’s gendered characteristics suggests that they can be understood in a different light—that is, they can be remade to appropriately suit Valeria’s womanhood. Yet, it is a struggle to do so though it implicitly is what Valeria seeks to do in her investigation. Françoise Dupeyron-Lafay furthermore asserts that Valeria’s detection begins with “rational methods . . . (observation, induction, piecing together scattered elements, etc.) and restores the causal chain single-handedly until. . . the inquiry reaches a dead end” after which she engages in an “non-rational” mode of ‘gothic’ detection” in her interviews with Miserrimus Dexter, a decadent disabled man (Dupeyron-Lafay 142) and representative of the Gothic (Dupeyron-Lafay 147). According to Sparks, Valeria engages “a mode of reasoning that Collins characterizes as feminine: unconventional, dynamic, and exploratory” (47). In *The Law and the Lady*, Collins successfully combines rationality with feeling, or affect. No longer distinct, they work in tandem to aid Valeria in her investigation. This approach to investigation criticizes masculine logic “in favor of an alternative, feminized approach to the law” in the novel, culture, and in debates over women’s relationship to “the law in British politics” (Sparks 47). Dupeyron-Lafay concurs that the novel rejects male reason in favor of “other types of approaches to the truth” (144). Because Valeria investigates through social transgressions as a woman—namely, by “performing a male activity” (Dupeyron-Lafay 145) and conducting her work outside of the home by herself (and, indeed, penetrating others’

homes)—she “straddl[es] . . . conventionally incompatible positions” as a devoted wife and proto-feminist (Sparks 49). Valeria, finally, centers herself in the mystery:

Besides, who could say that the events of the future might not yet justify me—not only to myself, but to him? I might yet hear him say, ‘She was inquisitive when she had no business to inquire; she was obstinate when she ought to have listened to reason . . . but in the end she atoned for all—she turned out to be right!’ (Collins 386)

Her investigation thus puts at stake her own identity as well as her husband’s. Despite gender norms that teach women to not be inquisitive or obstinate, Valeria emerges triumphant. Eustace’s characterization of Valeria’s investigation is not only narratively disproven but serves as the ideological standpoint against which the novel rebuts and revises Victorian notions of womanhood.

By showcasing Valeria’s perspective, Collins also demonstrates her pull towards detection—it may begin out of a sense of duty but quickly becomes an opportunity for adventure and the satiation of her curiosity. Readers might expect that Valeria would struggle against Eustace’s condemnation of her curiosity in the aforementioned passage, but she instead feels provoked by his reaction: “It is true of me, that my husband’s terrible warning—all the more terrible in its mystery and its vagueness—produced no deterrent effect on my mind: it only stimulated my resolution to discover what he was hiding from me” (Collins 69). Indeed, Valeria’s curiosity compulsion augments over the course of her investigation until she complains, “‘How can I live, knowing what I know—and knowing no more? I would rather hear the most horrible thing you can tell me than be condemned (as I am now) to perpetual misgivings and perpetual suspense’” (Collins 78). Unable to rest until she reaches a conclusion, Valeria’s curiosity as much as her duty spurs her on. During her investigation, Valeria reads the transcript of Eustace’s trial

and learns he was in love with another woman Helena Beauvy, whom she believes to be the poisoner. However, Dexter soon becomes her primary suspect. When interviewing Dexter, Valeria states that her curiosity makes her “completely the obedient servant of his caprices” (Collins 283). In her introduction to *The Law and the Lady*, Jenny Bourne Taylor contends, “Connections between Valeria’s curiosity, her resolution, her femininity, and her transgression are set down in the opening few chapters of the novel, as ‘a strange condition—capricious, idle, inquisitive’” (Taylor xvi). Collins suggests that Valeria’s “strange condition” (33), which makes her so successful as a detective, may be innate; indeed, he seems to collapse womanhood—albeit a queer “gender curious” (Zigarovich 109) version of womanhood—with the characteristics that prime her for sleuthing. Perhaps, even, as Valeria jumps at the opportunity to investigate, her drive towards detection is simply unearthed when the correct circumstances arise.

The Law and the Lady’s depiction of the female detective departs from its earlier portrayals in its shift away from elusion to the modernization of “woman.” Valeria clarifies her role as detective within the context of her role as a woman and wife:

My tranquility as a woman—perhaps my dearest interests as a wife—depended absolutely on penetrating the mystery of my mother-in-law’s conduct, and on discovering the true meaning of the wild words of penitence and self-reproach which my husband had addressed to me on our way home. (Collins 48)

The Law and the Lady is, in essence, a narrative in which Valeria consolidates her roles through “the process of detection and the process of reconstruction through which identities in the present are shaped and confirmed” (Taylor xiii). Milton contends that Valeria’s “legal and social position is insecure because her identity is contingent upon her husband’s assumed identity,” raising the possibility that the marriage is bigamous and that she may be a “kept woman” (Milton 525).

According to Milton, the novel's "real conflict . . . revolves around her and her ability to . . . solidify her own tenuous legal and social identity, which depends on that of her husband" (Milton 525). Not only does Valeria seek to present herself as a wife to an innocent man, but she also revises the Victorian ideological conception of the role in the process. Though Valeria extends the feminine-masculine continuum through her experience of curiosity in her investigation, *The Law and the Lady* represents a paramount change from previous iterations of the female detective. Whereas prior female detectives embody her respective novels' radical queer potential, Valeria "resituates her heteronormative female identity by reaffirming her marriage in the role of traditional wife and mother" (Zigarovich 109). Her desire to prove her husband's innocence is congruent with her "need to establish her own position as his legitimate wife—to provide herself with a full selfhood within . . . the Law" (Taylor xiv). Collins portrays other minor characters, like Dexter and his cousin and companion, Ariel, as more obviously queer as they "refuse to conform or choose a binary gender identity" (Zigarovich 109). Zigarovich examines the false identity trope in *The Law and the Lady* as an avenue for transgender possibilities. She argues Collins's novel disrupts cis-heteronormativity through its nonbinary characters, while simultaneously punishing or institutionalizing them. Collins, she contends, "first 'monstrosizes' then humanizes his nonbinary characters" (Zigarovich 103) so that, although they "cannot be fully accommodated by their narrative world" (Zigarovich 109) and die by the end of the novel, they offer a glimpse into gender dissidence and accepting nonconforming spaces.

Collins's heroine, however, does not simply hinder *The Law and the Lady*'s radical potential. A minor but interesting aspect of Valeria's investigation is her use of disguise. Unlike previous examples of female detectives' disguises, however, Valeria feminizes herself rather than

crossdressing or removing sartorial markers of her femininity. This is, nevertheless, an alternate version of drag than we see in the other novels I consider: In putting on makeup, Valeria feels that she “seemed in some strange way to have lost my ordinary identity—to have stepped out of my own character” (Collins 72). Indeed, makeup and physical feminization returns in Major Fitz-David, a friend of Eustace, who has “well-painted brows” (Collins 231) and, later, Dexter, who has eyes and hands like those “of a beautiful woman” (Collins 210) and who would look “effeminate, but for the manly proportions of his throat and chest” (Collins 210–11), suggesting that masculinity and femininity is malleable and, to some degree, artificial. The *Athenaeum* review of the novel as “an outrageous burlesque” (qtd. in Taylor ix) seems especially incisive within this context. In completing her costume, Valeria remarks, “I confess I have often fancied myself transformed into some other person, and have felt a certain pleasure in seeing myself in my new character” (Collins 268). In the introduction to the novel, Taylor states that the novel “investigates the significance of marriage as a legitimation of feminine identity that is founded, essentially, on masquerade” (ix). Marcus is again helpful to consider here, though, given that characters like Fitz-David and Dexter exhibit queerness and femininity but are not women, I wish to extend her argument beyond notions of womanhood to that of femininity. Marcus explains that such friendships “helped unite [a woman] to a beloved husband” (15). In nature, these relationships are queer but prepare her for heterosexual marriage. Valeria’s relationship to these characters demonstrates how queerness can, in certain cases, be a tool for heteropatriarchy—though one that perhaps loosens or revises the constraints of heterosexual institutions as we see in *The Law and the Lady*. In an obverse implication of makeup use, Sara Macallan, Eustace’s first wife, commits suicide through the ingestion of arsenic that she used cosmetically to improve her complexion. Makeup thus has the potential to be a destructive or

reparative force in heterosexual connections.³⁷ Mirroring this legal and social masquerade, womanhood in *The Law and the Lady* is a legal, social, and cosmetic performance.

Though Valeria represents a significant shift in the female detective's relationship to gender in her acceptance of a (revised) heteronormative binary, she does not excise queerness entirely. After Eustace is shot in Spain, Valeria regretfully withdraws from the investigation to meet him on the continent and reveals she is pregnant. Meanwhile, the lawyer Playmore and Benjamin search for and find a letter at Gleninch in which Sara tells Eustace of Dexter's affection for her and of his insistence Eustace hates her, inciting her to commit suicide. They return to England where they hear Dexter and Ariel have died. After the birth of their child, Eustace chooses not to clear his name out of respect for Sara's memory. Throughout the novel, Valeria recognizes her drive towards investigation as problematic—and not because of her husband or her uncle's opinions. Rather, Valeria's incessant curiosity compulsion risks the destruction of the very things her investigation hopes to consolidate:

I still felt secret longings, in those dangerous moments when I was left by myself, to know whether the search for the torn letter had or had not taken place. . . . With everything that a woman could want to make her happy, I was ready to put that happiness in peril rather than remain ignorant of what was going on at Gleninch! (Collins 453)

These "secret longings" Valeria experiences in "dangerous moments" indicate a lingering discomfort with her role as a wife and woman. While searching for clues, Valeria states, "My nerves were in fault again, I suppose. I shivered when I went back to the bookcase. My hands trembled: *I wondered what was the matter with me*" (Collins 105; emphasis mine). This moment of affective investigation primes the reader to Valeria's recognition of this sticky aspect of

³⁷ For more on the use of cosmetics in *The Law and the Lady*, see Aviva Briefel ("Cosmetic Tragedies: Failed Masquerade in Wilkie Collins's *The Law and the Lady*. *Victorian Literature and Culture*, vol. 37, 2009, pp. 463–81).

herself, the discomfort with her drive that is beyond the basic resistance to patriarchal strictures. This is not to imply that Valeria secretly desires to leave Eustace, but rather, I wish to suggest, that Valeria recognizes that a total modernization of “woman” she seeks to define is unattainable. Though Valeria ultimately untangles the mystery of her husband’s first wife, who poisoned herself, the “not proven” verdict remains. Zigarovich argues that “with the Scottish verdict remaining unresolved, perhaps Collins is metaphorically pointing to an acceptance of liminality” (Zigarovich 109). When considered in light of Taylor’s contention that the novel examines two primary questions: “What is the Law? What is a Lady?” we conclude in a somewhat ambiguous space; neither are given fully precise answers. Even as the mystery is solved, there are “no clear-cut moral polarities” (Dupeyron-Lafay 150). Valeria herself contends with question of morality, which she perceives as universally complex:

Is there a common fund of wickedness in us all? Is the suppression or the development of that wickedness a mere question of training and temptation? And is there something in our deeper sympathies which mutely acknowledges this when we feel for the wicked; when we crowd to a criminal trial; when we shake hands at parting . . . with the vilest monster that ever swung on a gallows? (Collins 399–400)

The novel supports this perspective across the board: Eustace’s flirtation with another woman and his general dismissal of Sara leads to her suicide; Valeria accepts her husband’s callousness; and Dexter, ostensibly the novel’s villain for having led Sara to believe Eustace was unfaithful to her because Dexter himself desired Sara, is nonetheless “ambiguous and multi-dimensional” (Dupeyron-Lafay 150). Taylor continues, “Valeria herself is an ambivalent figure, transgressing wifely roles to give her husband back his name; Eustace is unable to uphold the codes of patriarchal authority, indeed collapses into a ridiculous parody of masculinity in attempting to do

so” (xiv). The reversal of the spouses’ power “radically alters traditional gender roles, namely the identities of the protector and the protected” (Dupeyron-Lafay 151)³⁸ and “is formulated, at least morally, beyond the legal purview” (Sparks 54). Valeria’s concluding position as a mother and wife reveals Collins’s resistance to uniform conformity: If the verdict cannot be entirely resolved, neither can the redefinition of “lady.”

In the last pages of the novel, Eustace chooses not to read Sara’s suicide note out of atonement for “any pain [he] may have thoughtlessly caused her to suffer” (Collins 412). He makes this decision with Valeria’s approval, striving to “please” her: ““My darling, you will enchant me!”” she responds (Collins 412). Considered alongside Valeria and Eustace’s lack of resolution, their marriage by the end *The Law and the Lady* demonstrates reformed modern marriage through their power reversal. While Valeria no longer has no need to be a detective at this point, her empowered position as a wife and mother could not have been achieved without her successful investigation.

Valeria’s success through her investigative perseverance in the face of legal and social patriarchal strictures is an indictment of the gendered restrictions she faces. One character hits upon the novel’s contention when he comments, ““The light which the whole machinery of the Law was unable to throw on the poisoning case at Glenich has been accidentally let in on it by a Lady who refuses to listen to reason and who insists on having her own way”” (Collins 335–36). Although the law does not bend to Valeria’s investigation, she successfully consolidates her identity as a modern woman and modern wife. Through her investigation, she demonstrates that the strictures she faced are societally constructed and, therefore, they can be remade. While she may not have become a legitimate wife in the eyes of the law, and therefore failed in that

³⁸ Tabitha Sparks similarly calls the marriage “radically transformed” (54).

understanding of her investigation, *The Law and the Lady* brokers a more significant negotiation: Valeria does not elude womanhood (and nor does she try) but she is successful in modernizing the category of “woman” within a flimsy gender binary.

The Emergence of Detective Fiction

Wilkie Collins’s female detective novels are, at their heart, the congruent investigations of gender constraints and law. The failure of the latter gives way to unsettle the former, but it is only through investigation that his characters come to some resolution. Marian and Valeria’s status as amateur detectives allows them to gather clues and move through the mysteries in ways the law cannot. By eluding and reforming the societal strictures in which they live, they succeed in their investigations. Collins’s contributions to the female detective as heroine outsider helps to consolidate the amateur detective figure writ large as someone who does not necessarily uphold the law but rather resists it. He figures the law as not intrinsically good or correct, and thus reshapes the detective for the midcentury and, indeed, the rest of the nineteenth century. By centering female detectives in novels that condemn the corrupt nature of British society, he conflates its failures with the failures of a gender binary. *The Woman in White* and *The Law and the Lady* serve to critique these institutions. Moreover, they demonstrate Collins’s reevaluation of gender categories’ roles in modern society over the course of Collins’s career.

Detective fiction, as we have come to understand it today, would not exist without sensation fiction’s groundwork. Although not ideologically static across texts, the female detective figure presents an alternative sensibility that pushes against conventional mainstream values inherent to the modern gendered self. The longer trajectory, with its roots in the radical possibilities of the Gothic, belies a prevailing conservatism traditionally understood to be

central to detective fiction. Clare Clarke notes that *fin-de-siècle* detective stories “draw[] upon the established literary tradition of situation criminality behind respectable facades” developed in the Gothic and sensation fiction (20). Imbued with “an antiauthoritarian spirit,” the Gothic roots of female detective fiction contest the figure of the male detective, which Heller states is “Collins’ most important narrative innovation,” and “represents an attempt to reassert male authority by emphasizing men’s analytical power and their ability not only to be differentiated from, but also to read and control the feminine” (Heller 107). As Heller notes, however, Collins returns and returns to the question of the female detective in various novels and short stories. His preoccupation with the figure, and with her flexibility within the confines of gender, showcases the beginnings of the detective fiction genre. After Conan Doyle, whom Heller calls Collins’s “most important successor” (166), published the first Holmes collection *The Adventures of Sherlock Holmes* (1892), the female detective proliferated. As women enter the public sphere in the 1890s, female detective fiction reflects the new state of gender ideology at the end of the century.

WORKS CITED

- Allen, Emily. "Gender and Sensation." *A Companion to Sensation Fiction*, edited by Pamela K. Gilbert, Wiley-Blackwell, 2011, pp. 401–14.
- Clarke, Clare. *Late Victorian Crime Fiction in the Shadows of Sherlock*. Palgrave Macmillan, 2014.
- Collins, Wilkie. *The Law and the Lady*. 1875. Electric Book Co., 2001.
- . "'The Law and the Lady': To the Editor of The Word." *The Law and the Lady* by Wilkie Collins. Oxford UP, 1992. pp. 415–16.
- . *The Moonstone*. Dover Publications, Inc., 2002.
- . "The Unknown Public." *Household Words*, vol. 18, no. 439, 1858. *Dickens Journal Online*, <https://www.djo.org.uk/indexes/articles/the-unknown-public.html>. Accessed 3 Nov. 2021.
- . *The Woman in White*. Barnes & Noble Books, 2005.
- Dupeyron-Lafay, Françoise. "The Paradox of Gothic Detection in *The Law and the Lady* (1875) by Wilkie Collins." *Anglophonia/Caliban*, vol. 15, no. 1, 2004, pp. 141–52.
- Erickson, Laurel. "'In Short, She is an Angel; and I Am—': Odd Women and Same-Sex Desire in Wilkie Collins's *Woman in White*." *The Foreign Woman in British Literature: Exotics, Aliens, and Outsiders*, edited by Marilyn D. Button and Toni Reed, Praeger, 1999, pp. 95–116.
- Haefele-Thomas, Ardel. *Queer Others in Victorian Gothic: Transgressing Monstrosity*. U of Wales P, 2012.
- Hager, Lisa. "A Case for a Trans Studies Turn in Victorian Studies: 'Female Husbands' of the Nineteenth Century." *Victorian Review*, vol. 44, no. 1, 2018, pp. 37–54.
- Halberstam, Jack. *Female Masculinity*. Duke UP, 1998.
- Heller, Tamar. *Dead Secrets: Wilkie Collins and the Female Gothic*. Yale UP, 1992.
- Marcus, Sharon. *Between Women: Friendship, Desire, and Marriage in Victorian England*. Princeton UP, 1996.
- Michie, Helena. "'There is no Friend Like a Sister': Sisterhood as Sexual Difference." *ELH*, vol. 56, no. 2, 1989, pp. 401–21.
- Miller, D.A. *The Novel and the Police*. U of California P, 1988.

- Milton, Heather. "Sensation and Detection." *A Companion to Sensation Fiction*, edited by Pamela K. Gilbert, Blackwell Publishing Ltd., 2011, pp. 516–27.
- Sparks, Tabitha. "'Wilkie Collins's *The Law and the Lady* and Feminine Reason': Quite incredible, and nevertheless quite true!" *Clues: A Journal of Detection*, vol. 31, no. 2, 2013, pp. 46–55.
- Zigarovich, Jolene. "'A Strange and Startling Creature': Transgender Possibilities in Wilkie Collins's *The Law and the Lady*," *Victorian Review*, vol. 44, no. 1, 2018, pp. 99–112.

CHAPTER FOUR:
THE *FIN-DE-SIÈCLE* FEMALE DETECTIVE

“I prefer to take life in a spirit of pure enquiry. I put on my hat; I saunter where I choose,
so far as circumstances permit; and I wait to see what chance will bring me.”

—Grant Allen, *Miss Cayley's Adventures* (1899)

In December 1893, 20,000 readers of *The Strand Magazine* canceled their subscriptions overnight: Sherlock Holmes had fallen into a chasm, locked in a fatal embrace with his nemesis. He didn't resurface for seven years. Between his death and his return in 1903 with “The Adventure of the Empty House” (Conan Doyle), the female detective proliferated in popular literature.

Although she was established a century prior to Holmes, in light of Conan Doyle's immense popularity, the female detective in the late Victorian era is often incorrectly relegated to a previously avoided status: a gimmick. The escalation of female detective fiction—*Mr. Bazalgette's Agent* (1888), *Dorcas Dene, Detective: Her Adventures* (1897), *Hilda Wade* (1899), and *The Miss Florence Cusack Mysteries* (1900) among those texts beyond the scope of this dissertation—embodies the figure's consolidation in the detective fiction genre. In the 1890s, we recognize the female detective as culture imagines her today as an independent, often career or goal-driven, young woman. The increase in female detective stories in this period can no doubt be largely attributed to detective stories' generic popularity, thus riding the coattails of male figures in a way that earlier iterations of the female detective did not. Amid the canonization of the male detective, the female detective is thus positioned as the female version of the canonical figure—by both authors and critics, a position which scholarship has reinforced—rather than the

evolution of an extant figure. As the detective fiction genre takes off in a pronounced way at the *fin-de-siècle*, this chapter offers case studies of four examples to encompass the breadth of the female detective figure.

This period's female detective novels offer unique insight into the role of women in establishing the English national identity, often through the lens of the New Woman figure. The novels I examine in this chapter —*The Experiences of Loveday Brooke* (1894) by Catherine Louisa Pirkis, *Thou Art the Man* (1894) by Mary Elizabeth Braddon, *Miss Cayley's Adventures* (1899) by Grant Allen, and *Dracula* (1897) by Bram Stoker—all directly or implicitly engage with the New Woman detective. Although the late nineteenth century—specifically the 1890s, this chapter's period of focus—is an era commonly exalted for its radicalism in figures like the New Woman, the decade offers some of the most conservative iterations of the female detective showcased in this dissertation. The four novels I consider in this chapter, finally, represent a return to genres examined in previous chapters: a late sensation novel, two casebooks, and a Gothic revival novel. Though significant in their revision of their respective genres, the primary innovation at the *fin-de-siècle* lies in the shifts in the female detective herself as a modern gendered subject. With Atesede Makonnen's work on whiteness's ability to escape observation in mind, this chapter examines the role of the New Woman female detective in an imperial context. Specifically, I argue that the female detective's use of white womanhood polices national boundaries in order to promote sex-based rights. Thus, with the ideologically ambivalent exception of *Dracula*, the *fin-de-siècle* female detective does not break down binaries but instead reforms the category of woman for the modern period.

Although the degree of the novels' conservative impulses varies, I wish to foreground New Woman fiction's potential for complicity with Britain's imperial project. While it is true that

the New Woman often represents a threat to traditional Victorian womanhood (Crozier-De Rosa 418), I consider the figure in a different light in this chapter. As I demonstrated in my previous chapter, the mid-nineteenth century witnessed a shift in the female detective's gender subjectivity. Rather than elude the category of womanhood, she instead reshapes it to suit the modern age. The radical potential of the encounter between detection and gender dissidence diminishes over the course of the nineteenth century; the more the relationship between detection and gender is teased out and brought to light, the less subversive it becomes. As first-wave feminism brings women's issues to the forefront, authors seek to re-examine womanhood for the *fin-de-siècle*. Distinct from earlier iterations of the female detective in part due to what Crozier-De Rosa explains is the "extent of the social change which necessitated and accompanied her emergence, and the fervour of the controversy and discussion" surrounding her (419), the New Woman's emphasis on economic independence and sexual liberation as "both a woman's right and a pressing social necessity" (Jusová 4) leads to diverse and exciting literature at the end of the nineteenth century. According to Carol Senf, the New Woman novel:

introduced a number of new and interesting types of characters to fiction, and it broadened the range of possibilities for women characters. While not entirely eliminating old stereotypes, it opened the way for women in fiction to have careers as well as marriages; to argue with parents, husbands, and brothers; and to have intellectual aspirations and sexual desires ("Introduction" xvi).

The female detectives in this chapter certainly reflect the range of which Senf speaks. Included are a career detective, an aristocratic woman and her niece who investigate a murder, an adventurer, and a woman with a psychic connection to a vampire.

I maintain that the novels here repurpose New Woman fiction for imperial national ideology. Makonnen uses Victorian literature as a lens through which to amplify how whiteness has shaped “everything from governmental policy to literature” (255). In her essay, “Seeing Whiteness in the Nineteenth Century and Beyond,” she encourages scholars to consider “the meanings attached to white subjects” and therefore “the construction and power of race” (257). It is important to note that I do not broadly claim that the New Woman is ultimately a conservative figure. In *The New Woman and the Empire*, Iveta Jusová outlines “various subtle discursive strategies” that some New Women “devised to either express contempt for the colonial conquest or represent the idea of the colonial master and colonial appropriation as pathological” (6). To illustrate, regardless of the novel’s ideological complexity, Olive Schreiner’s *The Story of an African Farm* (1883) is an early New Woman novel invested in untangling the connections between patriarchy and imperialism in South Africa. However, in this chapter I examine the intersection of the detective and New Woman literature, a subsection that I do largely consider liberal—not progressive but *liberal* in its value of individualism, self-respect, and self-reliance (Harvie 69). That the novels in this chapter are preoccupied with delineating gender distinctions in an era of sexological upheaval suggests that their goal is not to blur boundaries but to revise them—to, in short, make sense out of chaos. The female detective in this chapter serve to reify a gender binary at a moment when gender—and particularly womanhood—is under the microscope. But rather than assert the ideological trappings of the traditional Victorian woman, the *fin-de-siècle* female detective seizes this moment’s opportunity to reform that binary for a modern age.

The New Woman’s queer potential, which Emma Heaney expounds in *The New Woman: Literary Modernism, Queer Theory, and the Trans Feminine*, is rerouted along a liberal tract in

the late Victorian female detective novel. Heaney analyzes the pathologized emergence of the trans feminine figure whose psychoanalytic understanding trickled down into author and theorist narratives “about gender, desire, and historical change” (5), and seeks to detangle the notion that trans people—and women, specifically—are inherently “trapped” in the wrong body by illuminating that the construction of gender and sex was made cis in the Modernist period.

Heaney writes:

In these appropriations the trans feminine emblemizes the degradation that defines the feminine in this era in which men are blighted by their association with the feminine (homosexuals) and women glimpse an avenue of escape from the feminine (New Women). Following Freud, this figure for castration helps us understand feminization as a process that is in intimate relation to the category of woman but is not reducible in its effects to people assigned female. (49)

She explains the conception of the trans woman by nineteenth-century sexologists as an extreme version of the effeminate invert, which early gay rights activists juxtaposed against the supposedly superior virile homosexual to “redefine the bounds of the normal” (Heaney 27).

Whereas Heaney’s apt conception of the New Woman opens new avenues for queer (and trans, specifically) studies’ relevance to the period, it is this latter tendency to “redefine the bounds of the normal” that I apply to the New Woman in the female detective novel.

The ennoblement of the New Woman detective represents a unique aspect of late nineteenth-century literature in which she at once contests patriarchal strictures (while keeping within a gender binary) *and* maintains women’s representation as the English national character.³⁹ The threat of the New Woman to destabilize gender and therefore the nation is

³⁹ All the female detectives in this dissertation are notably English; there are no Scottish, Welsh, or—in keeping with contemporary borders of Great Britain—Irish sleuths.

avoided through her role as a female detective. In such a role, she polices national boundaries, maintains the status of white womanhood in Britain, and achieves power to reform the category of womanhood. This exchange—her attainment of power for the reification of a gender binary—reduces the radical potential of the female detective. In doing so, these novels exemplify what Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak identifies as the imperial heart of white women's feminism.

Catherine Hall expounds: "family and empire . . . are proposed here as the constitutive agents in the construction of the female bourgeois subject, and it is the discourses of race which form the Western female as an agent of history, while the 'native' woman is excluded" (18). The image of the English woman, according to Mary Poovey, was "critical to the image of the English national character" and "helped legitimize both England's sense of moral superiority and the imperial ambitions this superiority underwrote" (9). Likewise, Ann Laura Stoler details the roles Victorian women were expected to play as citizens of an imperial power:

Bourgeois women in colony and metropole were cast as the custodians of morality, of their vulnerable men, and of national character. Parenting, and motherhood specifically, was a class obligation and a duty of empire. In short, the cultivations of bourgeois sensibilities were inextricable from the nationalist and racial underpinnings of them.

(135)

Tricia Lootens similarly concludes, "Scratch Victorian femininity, even in its most idealized, privatized form, and what one finds is thus likely to be intimate engagement with patriotic—and, indeed, imperial—narratives of moral triumph over transatlantic slavery" (39). The New Woman threatened this representation of the English woman as nation, for if divorce was made easier, women's sexual agency acknowledged, and suffrage granted, the ideal "on which so much depended" (Poovey 52) might ultimately be destabilized. However, it was also through

cartoonish representations of the New Woman that gender norms were conserved by way of contrast: “the introduction of split depictions of the middle-class domestic woman: the emergence of a mannish ‘new woman’ to stabilize representations of the feminine bourgeois woman” (Langland 234). Even in some depictions of the New Woman which are not cartoonish, as we will see in this chapter, they are nevertheless invested in maintaining a gender binary through their whiteness.

While all the female detectives in this chapter do not identify as New Women—and some actively resist the title—they all demonstrate characteristics of the figure and could not have existed without the New Woman and its resulting literature. I wish to pause here and emphasize this point: Some of the female detectives in this chapter are true New Women whereas others exhibit the figure’s characteristics and political investments, and all are examples of first-wave feminism. These detective novels furthermore make up a minority of the New Woman fiction yet represent the unique approach to feminism’s relationship to empire. As works by scholars such as Spivak, Hall, Poovey, Lootens, and Langland showcase, attention to white womanhood in Victorian studies has increased over the past couple decades. Their scholarship demonstrates the unique entanglement between womanhood and the British empire. Vron Ware moreover maintains that “‘feminist ideology and practice were shaped by the social, economic, and political forces of imperialism to a greater extent than has been acknowledged’” and that, accordingly, *fin-de-siècle* feminism “lacked ‘a vision of politics which would connect the struggle against patriarchy with the struggle against racist domination’” (qtd. in Jusová 6). Even ordinary “new women did hold . . . more influence or sway than first thought” over the state of the empire (Crozier De-Rosa 428). This influence is diverse. Yet, while radical imaginings of

feminist anti-imperialism are present in late Victorian New Woman literature, I conclude that they are not present in the novels I examine here.

In light of these scholars' work on the relationship between Victorian womanhood and whiteness, this chapter serves to underscore the entanglement between first-wave feminism's reform of a gender binary and imperialism. Whiteness, in these novels, is the tool by which the female detective polices her surroundings, serves as an arbiter of English national identity, and attain the power to reform the category of womanhood within a binary. In *Detecting the Nation*, Caroline Reitz states that detective fiction "refashioned Englishness"—and therefore whiteness—"as an imperial instead of insular identity" (xxv). While Reitz attends to the canonical texts of Dickens, Collins, and Conan Doyle, I wish to consider the role of English national identity and the construction of whiteness through the imperial project in the specifically female detective context. The confluence of empire and the New Woman in the 1890s implores us to consider their joint investments through the lens of a figure not often analyzed in this manner.

Working Women in *The Experiences of Loveday Brooke*

Published following Sherlock Holmes's demise in "The Final Problem" (1893), *The Experiences of Loveday Brooke* (1894), a casebook divided into seven mysteries, is the most Holmesian of all the female detectives in this dissertation, seeking to fill the gap Arthur Conan Doyle's detective left. Catherine Louisa Pirkis's casebook is remarkable not only for her shared attributes with Holmes, however, but moreover for its examination of working women. Unlike the other female detectives in this chapter, the New Woman Loveday has no romantic attachments, and she pursues private investigation as her chosen profession, making her one of the few detectives who

does not work for “acceptably feminine reasons” (Elizabeth Carolyn Miller 48). Despite the casebook’s progressive trappings, however, I argue that Loveday advances a defense of the reformed category of womanhood in which middle-class white women are equipped with patriarchal power through their work. *The Experiences of Loveday Brooke* conceptualizes women’s entrance into the workforce in a nondisruptive manner that accommodates shifts in gendered labor and therefore crucially reinforces a gender binary, succeeding due to her adoption of masculine investigative methods and her ties to the English national character. As such, *The Experiences of Loveday Brooke* is a superlative example of the white liberalism that defines the late-century female detective.

Critically and commercially successful, Pirkis’s work was “on par” with the Sherlock Holmes stories (Clarke, *British Detective Fiction* 9). *The Experiences of Loveday Brooke* analyzes Loveday’s “interactions with the male police force alongside the real late-Victorian trend for female private investigators many years before the appearance of the first Metropolitan Police female detective in 1922” (Clarke, *British Detective Fiction* 9). First published as stories over 1893 under the title *The Adventures of Loveday Brooke*, they were collected under its new title with an additional case, “Missing!”, in *Ludgate* in 1894 (Elizabeth Carolyn Miller 47). According to Clare Clarke, her appearance in *Ludgate* suggests a female readership, as the magazine was a female-oriented version of the *Strand*. It is therefore useful to consider *The Experiences of Loveday Brooke* as an early version of future female detective stories like *Nancy Drew* that were not only geared towards female audiences but indicative of the kinds of heroic characters girls and women were offered. Whereas the many of the novels in previous chapters of this dissertation were not written with female readers in mind, those like *The Experiences of Loveday Brooke* certainly were, an important distinction particularly for a period in which a

different set of possibilities were available for girls and women. While the two 1864 casebooks similarly present career female detectives, detective work was much more readily available to women in the 1890s. Loveday therefore represents a chance for such professional goals to be implemented.

Whereas traditional scholarship on detective fiction, particularly that of the *fin-de-siècle*, holistically paints the genre as conservative, examples like Pirkis's casebook demonstrate its liberal impulses. Elizabeth Carolyn Miller states, "The Loveday Brooke stories challenge conventional critical assumptions about turn-of-the-century detective fiction, mass culture, and gender roles, and invite a more balanced view of the volatile cultural and literary climate of 1890s England" (61). Detective fiction, as Clarke contends (*British Detective Fiction*), certainly is more ideologically diverse than is typically given credit, yet, as I argue in this chapter, it is nevertheless invested in sustaining a gender binary. Though Loveday herself is rebellious, the casebook at large is dedicated to reforming this binary.

Before I attend to the particulars of *The Experiences of Loveday Brooke*, it is helpful to consider the casebook in historical context with regards to class and work. Judith Walkowitz's *City of Dreadful Delight* tracks the emergence of women across classes into the public sphere through social structures such as shopping, philanthropy, and schooling. Men, in response, experienced a crisis of masculinity in which they viewed women infringing on their spaces; women's commercial work was considered a "'middle' ground of sexuality" (Walkowitz 46). As women made social and legal gains—excepting suffrage—various figures of the modern woman emerged, including the New Woman. Loveday shares many of the figure's characteristics and, importantly, is invested in her own career as a working woman. Miller contends that "Brooke's story thus resonates with late-Victorian understandings of both the 'odd woman' and the 'new

woman,” and has further implications for Loveday’s resistance to Victorian gender and sexual ideology (54). She points out that the female detective and sex worker “are subtly worked out through the Brooke stories, consequent to broader Victorian imaginings of the prostitute or sex worker as the consummate working woman, the logical extension of any woman’s participation in the labor market” (Elizabeth Carolyn Miller 55). Indeed, Walkowitz contends that the city center, which was “a place symbolically opposed to orderly domestic life,” was considered a “site of exchange and erotic activity” and therefore incongruent with traditional Victorian gender values (46). Although working was nothing new to women of the lower classes, by the late nineteenth-century, middle-class women began to seek out work. These women, often labeled New Women, were masculinized in popular culture and furthermore loosened themselves from the expectations of bourgeois womanhood:

Adopting the clothes and/or the life-style, work, mental disposition, or manner of the opposite sex was generally associated with female proletarian behavior, but it gained some devotees among the middle-class women bent on freeing themselves from the constraints of their own sex. (Walkowitz 62)

As we will see, Loveday’s detective career provides allowances for her behavior and position in British society as a middle-class woman. Although her profession was “understood in her time as male,” Loveday’s gender and whiteness cloak her investigations and provide opportunities otherwise unavailable to her (Elizabeth Carolyn Miller 49). Marrying her womanhood with male investigative methods, Loveday’s approach to her cases is indicative of the casebook’s liberal ideological stance.

Like the two 1864 casebooks, Loveday’s cases are neither tied to domesticity nor do they reject the importance of understanding domestic life. Most illustrative of *The Experiences of*

Loveday Brooke's relationship to working women are the missing person cases in which "Loveday's particularly female brand of detection is attuned to the signifiers of female work and class" (Clarke, *British Detective Fiction* 55). These cases demonstrate "a paid professional female detective" whose work represents "a more forceful challenge to established gender norms with regard to women's work" (Clarke, *British Detective Fiction* 45). In several of these cases, Loveday works closely with servants after the failure of the police:

In the collection, Brooke's working life is often marked by conflict with professional male rivals; the various members of Scotland Yard with whom the 'lady detective' works are frequently cast as lazy and incompetent officers whose cursory, inefficient investigations seem always to lead erroneously to the suspicion of a working-class, often young, often foreign, female. (Clarke, *British Detective Fiction* 48)

Dividing the official police from Loveday along gendered lines, *The Experiences of Loveday Brooke* suggests that women detectives are most successful when they adopt male forms of investigation but maintain their womanhood, which signifies their distinction from the boorish police. In the final case, "Missing!", Loveday investigates the disappearance of Irene Golding, a wealthy merchant's daughter. Loveday befriends the family's female servant who tells her what she was unwilling to tell the police, allowing Loveday to solve the mystery.

Loveday's ability to draw connections to servants and, furthermore, draw information from them occurs largely on the basis of her gender and her status as a detective independent of the (male) police force. Pirkis uses Loveday's resistance to male professionals as further evidence of the female detective's success: She solves crimes where the male force cannot. As a woman, Brooke can enter spaces invisibly due to her gender and whiteness, while concurrently employing male methods of investigation. This individual resistance to gender norms—though

importantly not eluding womanhood—aids her in her investigations but, like her peers in this era, she is not invested in deconstructing a binary. Pitting Brooke against male professionals, her success is predicated upon a reformed version of womanhood.

Loveday's investigative methods would undoubtedly have been read as male by contemporary readers and, I contend, show implicit support of imperialism. In addition to women's entrance into the work force (Walkowitz), Joseph Kestner details the circumstances under which the female detective gained popularity in the late Victorian era, such as distrust in the failed or corrupted police force and the emergence of the New Woman, which he calls "an ideology of female professional appropriation of power" (226). Kestner explains:

Identified as a profession involving reason, which was construed in the nineteenth century to be the province of men rather than women, the female detective is gender-bending in terms of patriarchal constructions of the feminine, since she is a woman empowered primarily through rationality. The female sleuth, therefore, is to varying degrees a threat to male empowerment and male-identified institutions such as the courts or the detective police. (229–30)

This appropriation coincides with the female detective's adoption of masculine methods of investigation; reason and rationality remain powerful tools for the female detective, though, significantly, most of the detectives in this chapter fail to engage with the sublime or extrarational as in earlier representations. They do not, in short, engage in the tension between the rational and extrarational that makes the Gothic female detective so radical and distinct. As a result, their employment of ratiocination frames their deductive methods as explicitly masculine—"unnaturally and unfemininely reasonable" (Allen 139)—of which the novels are in favor.

The casebook's resistance to patriarchy tends to occur in step with larger patriarchal institutions in *fin-de-siècle* detective fiction, including British imperialism. Miller argues that it may be "misguided to consider Brooke merely as a harbinger of stricter state control over the private sphere" due to her representation as a "cultural emblem of increasing rights and opportunities for unmarried women outside of the domestic realm" (54). However, its investments in a gender binary, which are held up through Loveday's individual resistance, are developed through Loveday's whiteness. Recalling Atesede Makonnen's work, it is important to consider such works within this context as it provides a fuller understanding of the text. Likewise, it is helpful to invoke Walkowitz who notes that *fin-de-siècle* literature often figured "the poor as a race apart, outside the national community" (19). Culturally, the bourgeois West End was contrasted with the "foreign" East End wherein "Victorian writers on the metropolis had imaginatively constructed to fix gender and class difference in the city" (Walkowitz 80). Walkowitz considers the perception of London as a bifurcated "world-city" (24) whose divisions map degrees of intellect, morality, and class, and in which women constitute a central dichotomy as endangered and dangerous. Loveday's role as a specifically white female private detective allows her to move through these dichotomies with ease and, in doing so, polices them. While individual cases demonstrate some empathy toward the working-class or characters of color, the casebook builds its foundation upon Loveday's appropriation of patriarchal power.

Even as Loveday's appropriation of masculine investigative methods appears to be a rejection of patriarchal binary characteristics, *The Experiences of Loveday Brooke* is more invested in updating the category of woman to include rationality, a tool strongly associated with the English national identity. Reitz considers the parallel shifts in the Victorian national identity of resistance to the detective figure to identification with him and, concurrently, the increasing

public interest in the imperial project. She contends that these parallels resulted in the literary detective's role as an extension of the English national identity (xiii), which is exercised through the detective's use of intellect. Loveday's characterization is obviously influenced by Sherlock Holmes,⁴⁰ that supreme rational mind of the late Victorian period. The first case, "The Black Bag Left on the Doorstep," offers much of Loveday's characterization that is consistent throughout. Loveday, in her 30s and unmarried, is a London detective who works for a private agency run by Ebenezer Dyer but who often works alongside the police. About five years prior to the beginning of the casebook, Loveday was penniless and "defied convention" to become a detective (Pirkis np); it is a chosen profession and one in that "though she may find pleasure in the thrill of her occupation, the primary motivation behind her detective work is to be paid" (Elizabeth Carolyn Miller 47). Much like Holmes, deductive reasoning governs Loveday's investigative method. She is extraordinarily rational, a central component in her masculinity, and whose "empirical professional methods employed by Sherlock Holmes in his detection" illustrate "the similarity between Loveday Brooke's work and the masculine" (Clarke, *British Detective Fiction* 46). Dyer expounds:

"I don't care twopence-halfpenny whether she is or is not a lady. I only know she is the most sensible and practical woman I ever met. In the first place, she has the faculty—so rare among women—of carrying out orders to the very letter: in the second place, she has a clear, shrewd brain, unhampered by any hard-and-fast theories; thirdly, and most important item of all, she has so much common sense that it amounts to genius—positively to genius, sir." (Pirkis np)

⁴⁰ Perhaps one of Brooke's clearest Holmesian trait is one in which she appears to be dozing while in fact concentrating: "her one noticeable trait was a habit she had, when absorbed in thought, of dropping her eyelids over her eyes till only a line of eyeball showed, and she appeared to be looking out at the world through a slit, instead of through a window" (Pirkis).

In this first story, Loveday connects a theft with a bag and (false) suicide note left on a doorstep. It ends in the criminal's arrest and Loveday's explanation of her investigation, solidifying her status as “one of the shrewdest and most clear-headed of . . . female detectives” (Pirkis np). Reitz argues that rational thought ensured that the detective was “uniquely” suited to assert “authority needed to maintain social order in a complex new imperial world” because “his authority stemmed from knowledge rather than force and because this knowledge promised mastery of a specifically imperial world” (xiv). Much of Loveday's ability to police rests upon her ability to employ ratiocination.

The Experiences of Loveday Brooke confirms women's space in professionalism through Loveday's ability to acclimate in a male-dominated field, though the text sometimes falters in its attempt to unify working bourgeois women with working-class and foreign women. Here, I wish to attend to one of Pirkis's most notable stories, “Drawn Daggers” to illustrate Loveday's use of gender and whiteness in her cases. The mystery of “Drawn Daggers” centralizes Loveday's ability to utilize her gender to enter spaces without suspicion and, concurrently, to parse the foreign from the English. In fact, Loveday's success in this case relies entirely on these two skills. Beginning with a debate between herself and her employer Mr. Dyer, who contends he knows the reasons behind a young lady's desire to “hush the matter up” of losing valuable jewelry (“the explanation is obvious”) (Pirkis np). Loveday, however, maintains “the explanation that is obvious is the one to be rejected, not accepted” (Pirkis np). “Drawn Daggers” presents threatening letters from Ireland and a missing necklace of Miss Monroe, an independent heiress returning from China. Initially set up through Loveday and Dyer's exchange, the many misunderstandings on the behalf of male professionals—also including the clergyman hosting the presumed Miss Monroe and the police who are not allowed to investigate—contrasts

Loveday as a professional whose insight into dynamics between women is paramount. Monroe has been sent over to his guardianship from Pekin by her father, Sir George Monroe, to get her out of the way of a troublesome and undesirable suitor,” Mr. Danvers (Pirkis np). To investigate the dual problems of the letters and necklace, Loveday disguises herself as a staff member and discovers Monroe is in fact a maid Mary O’Grady in the guise of the heiress, who offered her money to switch places after eloping with Danvers. Miller contends that Loveday “stabilizes the class system” (61) in “Drawn Daggers.” According to Miller, “By donning the ‘invisible woman’ costume of the domestic worker, however, Brooke can gain access to a private, privileged vantage point of surveillance” (59). Indeed, she soon learns that the daggers in the letters were communications between the women. Loveday takes the money back and admonishes O’Grady, returning to the status quo. Miller contends that in this story, “Brooke’s ability to see women’s domestic labor, a commodity usually fetishized into invisibility, accounts for her success” (Elizabeth Carolyn Miller 61). I would go further to suggest that it is not only her use of gender that allows Loveday to succeed but also her (specifically English) whiteness.

While several of Pirkis’s stories feature foreign women and non-Protestant religions, “Drawn Daggers” most clearly elucidates the power of Loveday’s whiteness in her investigations. She learns that Monroe’s Chinese servant left her in Malta after a bout of seasickness to return home—“I dare say you know the terror these Chinese have of being buried in foreign soil” (Pirkis np)—where in O’Grady exchanged positions with Monroe. Loveday reveals that a key clue she gathered while in disguise was a moment of O’Grady speaking, revealing her accent: “A fragment of conversation between your nephew and the supposed Miss Monroe fell upon my ear, and one word spoken by the young lady convinced me of her

nationality” (Pirkis). Combined with O’Grady’s neatness (a trait of servants, not heiresses), Loveday swiftly reveals the women’s plot.

Moreover, Loveday can effectively disguise herself as a staff member not only due to her gender but also her Englishness. Unlike O’Grady or Monroe’s Chinese servant, she has no accent or feature to reveal her identity. She is thus able to weaponize her whiteness in a way that O’Grady attempts but fails to—demonstrating that the power of middle-class womanhood is also contingent on whiteness. Clarke’s analysis of the casebook, which suggests that it is “one of the most progressive authors of the many ‘lady detective’ stories published at this time” (*British Detective Fiction* 58), stumbles when considered in this light. Like Holmes, Loveday seeks to navigate her investigations on an individual basis, often beyond the strict purview of British law, while maintaining broader power structures of policing.

Stories such as this further reveal *The Experiences of Loveday Brooke*’s liberal impulses in which cases center on property theft and return money to the rightful owners. When Loveday looks to the clergyman to determine whether to involve the police (she asserts that the “fraud . . . ought to land both of you in jail”), she hands her authority back to patriarchy and back to law enforcement. Loveday’s ultimate use of the working class in this manner solidifies the casebook’s liberal ideology; Pirkis is much more interested in presenting the individual woman rather than creating solidarity across class or national difference.

The Experiences of Loveday Brooke is illustrative of the future of female detective fiction in the twentieth century and, crucially, the ability of women to police. Although Loveday never steps abroad in the casebook, her navigation of London reflects a pseudo colonial venture in which she encounters foreign women and the working class, two groups who, Walkowitz reminds us, were often collapsed in this period. Her ability to police the groups—actively

contrasted with the inept male professionals, particularly the police—demonstrates not a progressive bent to Pirkis’s work but liberal ideals of “democratic” rule by a benevolent hand. Moreover, Loveday’s gender is imperative to her ability to police these groups; Pirkis writes that ““women detectives are more satisfactory than men, for they are less likely to attract attention” (Pirkis np). Loveday’s ability to enter spaces—either as a middle-class woman or in disguise as a working woman—alleviates suspicion due rarity of female detectives or, as in the case of “Drawn Daggers,” her disguise allows her to commune with fellow female staff and gain access to the eponymous daggers that are necessary in piecing together clues to solve the mystery. Pirkis seems to suggest that only in a middle-class woman’s hands can rationality be used for good. The implicit invocation of her whiteness, while not remarked upon in the casebook, is significant, especially in those cases which deal with working-class or foreign women (making up the majority cases). Loveday figures as a New Woman who, empowered with patriarchal and imperial authority, is proffered as the reformed category of woman. *The Experiences of Loveday Brooke* no doubt plays a hand in the overarching trend towards female detective’s consolidation in popular culture. Though Loveday is resistant to a gender binary on an individual basis, the casebook reifies a binary.

Detecting Degeneration in *Thou Art the Man*

Bridging the period between sensation fiction’s heyday and the *fin-de-siècle*, Mary Elizabeth Braddon’s 1894 novel *Thou Art the Man* adapts the midcentury genre to the end of an era. Encapsulating *fin-de-siècle* anxieties within a sensation plot, *Thou Art the Man* reasserts a gender binary through its resistance to contemporaneous discourses of degeneration and gender. Braddon subverts the Victorian scientific model, which argues women are evolutionarily inferior

to men, by depicting women whose investigations uncover male corruption (Talairach-Vielmas). In contrast, she frames the male characters as degenerate. In her introduction to the novel, Laurence Talairach-Vielmas states that because “the mysteries are male, and so are the criminals,” that the novel is distinct for its revision of *fin-de-siècle* science and gender in its depiction of female characters’ fears that “they might have inherited their fathers’ sinful nature” (Talairach-Vielmas xi). In doing so, I argue that the novel’s female detectives—Lady Sibyl Penrith and her New Woman niece Coralie Urquhart—reassert a gender binary in biological terms. Because the investigation positions men as biologically degenerative—in terms of ability and race—and women as policers of Englishness, the novel reifies a gender binary. When Sibyl reopens an investigation into the murder of a woman during her youth, she must navigate the biological degeneration that the novel’s men pose. Though she believes him to be innocent, her first love, colonial adventurer Brandon Mountford, is the primary suspect due to his epileptic seizures. Though Sibyl and Coralie are independent and intelligent characters with capable investigative skills, and therefore may be read as proto-feminist characters, *Thou Art the Man* uniquely affirms a binary through scientific discourse that is often predicated on imperial conceptions of race and ability. However, Braddon complicates her novel with the conclusion: Its ideological stance is muddled by its resistance to traditional Victorian womanhood yet ultimately privileges patriarchal systems enforced by its female detectives.

Although sensation fiction was in rapid decline in the 1890s, *Thou Art the Man* is a testament to its malleability. Talairach-Vielmas states that Braddon critiques “the genre even as she exploits it, debunking the stereotypes of her time and denouncing the fictions which branded women by reading and writing them as dangerous and degenerate” through her use of “intelligent and autonomous female sleuths, who can read, write and unmask the apes beneath civilized men”

(xxii). Revising popular themes proffered in sensation fiction to suit an analysis of gender and degeneration, it plays with ideas of midcentury biology—such as Darwin’s theory of evolution—to Max Nordau’s scientific theory. I contend Braddon’s novel highlights this era’s use of the female detective as a vehicle to claim for women an elevated position in a changing and increasingly globalized world, one which is contingent on her whiteness and ability.

Though Braddon is best known for her midcentury sensation novels, she wrote consistently throughout her life until her final novel, *Beyond These Voices*, was published in 1910. In contrast to *Lady Audley’s Secret* (1862), *Thou Art the Man* “portrays women detecting male secrets” (Talairach-Vielmas x). When Sibyl, Lady Penrith receives a cryptic note reminiscent of a past love, Brandon Mountford, she investigates its source. Her devoted niece, “ugly and mannish” (Talairach-Vielmas xxi) Coralie, meanwhile spies on Sibyl. Her father, Hubert Urquhart—Sibyl’s brother-in-law—requests that Coralie keep a diary concerning Sibyl, which manifests occasionally as the novel’s narrative and is reminiscent of midcentury epistolary narratives, as seen in this dissertation in *The Woman in White* (1860). In her youth, Sibyl met Mountford at her home with her companion Marie Arnold. Though Sibyl and Mountford fell in love, he refused to marry her. Mountford, who suffered from epilepsy, worried his malady would trigger a murderous drive—“conscious of his criminal instincts, yet unable to conquer them, unable to save himself from his own insane longings” (Braddon 94). On the last night of his visit, he had an attack and, after coming to, discovered Marie’s bloody body. After Sibyl helps him escape, he is presumed dead at sea. Sibyl rebuffs Hubert and marries his brother, despite loving only Mountford. As Sibyl determines to discover Mountford, whom she believes is still alive, she must also unravel Arnold’s death and the seemingly accidental death of her husband as she pursues her investigation. When, at the end of the novel, Mountford is found alive, Sibyl

concludes that her brother-in-law Urquhart is responsible. Though the lovers reunite, Mountford soon dies, as does Urquhart who confesses to the death of Arnold but not his brother. The novel concludes with a postscript detailing Sibyl's marriage to a preacher and Coralie's to a man who fell "victim to her sharp tongue, neat figure, light hands, and good seat," remaining "an affectionate wife, a good friend, a bitter enemy, and without mercy for any pretty woman who misbehaves herself" (Braddon 329). While both become wives at the end, neither have children, a feature I will attend to later in this section. Their paths as wives also take different shapes: Whereas Sibyl is involved in "bitter battle[s]" of the capitalistic system and aiding the poor, Coralie, the mistress of her husband "and his estate," upholds the British aristocracy (Braddon 329).

Thou Art the Man, despite its significance as a late sensation novel, has not been widely considered in appraisals of *fin-de-siècle* fiction nor detective fiction. Sibyl and Coralie, however, are undeniably detectives and clear successors of their female detective antecedents. While Sibyl is the more significant detective to the novel's overarching mystery, Coralie's investigations are not to be overlooked, particularly considering the link she bears to early Gothic heroines and midcentury detectives. Connecting *Thou Art the Man*'s female detectives to the "prototypical Gothic heroine . . . who generally strives to read and interpret the unknown and mysterious world around her," Talairach-Vielmas states that Braddon "updates" the generic elements of sensation and Gothic fiction "into a Victorian female investigator" (xi). *Thou Art the Man*'s lineage is obvious particularly regarding the curiosity compulsion. Like so many detectives, Coralie is overcome by her curiosity on multiple occasions: "I contrived to suppress all demonstrations of vexation during that long, cold drive, with its circuitous extensions, but I could not quite restrain my curiosity" (Braddon 27); "I am devoured with curiosity" (Braddon 218). This curiosity is

explicitly tied to her desire to unravel Arnold's murder: "I cannot get the thought of that murdered girl out of my mind. . . I am first a woman; and I am devoured by morbid curiosity that must be satisfied" (Braddon 264). On the other hand, though Sibyl does not begin as a detective, in the face of Arnold's death she starts to take on the role. At first, she acts as an intermediary, pleading for Mountford to escape: "'Who knows if some new evidence may be found, when you are far away. The murderer may confess; some clue may be discovered, some link in the chain of circumstances which no one can foresee or imagine how'" (Braddon 133). As she comes to realize that justice may not be appropriately served to Mountford, she actively takes the law into her own hands:

But then came the thought of stern reality—the possible conviction—the possible gallows—the inscrutable perversity of Fate which sometimes dooms an innocent man to a disgraceful death, all for want of some little clue to thread that labyrinth of circumstantial evidence, and get at the core of truth hidden somewhere in the midst of it. Guiltless men have been hanged, even in this enlightened age, and to the end of time there will always be that cruel possibility of innocence paying the penalty intended for guilt. On the whole, therefore, Sibyl was thankful that she had helped to get Brandon Mountford out of the clutch of the law. (Braddon 149)

She is furthermore tasked by Mountford to solve the murder, "'the only thing you can do for me,'" he tells her, "'Sibyl. Find the motive and the murderer, if you can'" (Braddon 130). She is already primed to investigate: "'You know Marie Arnold's history, her friends, and enemies'" (Braddon 130). Though years go by, and Sibyl marries another man without discovering the truth, when she receives the note on the road, she is ready to investigate once more:

‘Let it [the case] be re-opened. I would risk that. Let him face the accusation, as he would have done in the beginning, but for me. I know that he was innocent—that it was another hand that killed my adopted sister. . . . New evidence would come to light perhaps—if the history of that night were gone into coldly, quietly, the facts sifted and weighed as they could not be a few hours after the tragedy, when everyone was bewildered with the horror of that poor girl’s death. I know that he was innocent.’

(Braddon 233)

Sibyl here actively positions herself as a detective. Like many of the female detectives in this chapter—as well as Valeria Brinton in *The Law and the Lady* (1875)—Sibyl investigates out of service to her romantic interest. Her status as detective revolves around a man and concludes when Mountford dies.

Before attending to investigation’s role in upholding a binary, I wish to first examine the foundation Braddon lays for a gender binary. *Thou Art the Man* is a novel preoccupied with evolutionary biology—particularly, humanity’s potential to degenerate—that is conceived through late Victorian notions of ability and race, and which Braddon uses to delineate a binary. According to Iveta Jusová, Victorian women at the *fin-de-siècle* “were considered nothing more and nothing less than the reproductive site of the species” (10). Sharon Crozier De-Rosa further clarifies that women who resisted traditional roles were considered “less ‘fit’” and “were seen to threaten the future of the empire, and castigated for” undermining the nation and its empire’s interests (420). While Braddon does not take such a stance, her novel is certainly concerned with the results of degenerative bloodlines. In particular, threats to ability and whiteness frame the mystery. These two factors, ability and race, are together symptomatic of degeneration and coalesce in Brandon Mountford, the novel’s tragic hero. He describes his epilepsy as his

“‘heritage,’” and “‘a malady which sets me apart from my fellow men’” (Braddon 98). Talairach-Vielmas contends that Braddon’s “revision of Gothic stereotypes,” so thoroughly taken up in sensation fiction, proffers a “‘degenerative’ . . . modern urban life” in which hereditary epilepsy is indicative of social conditions “responsible for the creation of biological anomalies which could in turn be passed on to succeeding generations” (xvi). Epilepsy in *Thou Art the Man* is figured as degenerative not only as a disease but as a source of danger and criminality. Mountford refuses to marry, “‘go[ing] down to my grave without wife or home’” (Braddon 98), out of fear that he will become violent during an epileptic attack. Indeed, upon Arnold’s death, Mountford is the primary suspect:

There was a general impression that Brandon Mountford was the murderer, and had been caught red-handed before he could withdraw the knife from his victim’s heart; and there were conflicting theories as to the motive of the murder. The most popular hypothesis was that he had pursued her with dishonourable proposals, and, finding himself scorned by her, had killed her in an access of blind fury—an act which he doubtless had repented as soon as the thing was done. That this quiet gentleman, who had won everybody’s good word, was a concealed lunatic, was now the general idea. (Braddon 120)

Coralie also later comments: “The horror of that murder haunts me—a young woman, young, and beautiful, full of the pride of life, caught like a hunted fawn in a wood, caught and slaughtered by a raging maniac—for the epilepsy that hungers for blood must be lunacy under its most revolting aspect” (Braddon 264). Though Mountford is innocent of murder, the prospect of epilepsy inducing such violence is never debunked.

Connected to Mountford’s suspicion of guilt is the correlation between his disability and his time spent in Africa. Mountford, who has “‘travelled and roughed it among savages’”

(Braddon 120) and written a book on Africa (Braddon 201) is predisposed to become ““half like a man that had gone silly”” (Braddon 120)—his epilepsy is directly linked to his life in Africa; ability is determined by late Victorian concerns about “going native.” Clarke highlights the imperial anxieties in mystery fiction at the *fin-de-siècle* in which the British are “just as likely to experience a moral decline while stationed in the outpost as to civilise the unregenerate natives with whom they are surrounded” (*Late Victorian Crime Fiction* 168). Of course, this anxiety is evident in fiction beyond the genres I analyze in this dissertation, most famously in *Heart of Darkness* (1902) by Joseph Conrad but is often taken up in Gothic novels such as *The Beetle* (1897) by Richard Marsh. Clarke, however, argues that detective fiction distinctively relates these imperial anxieties to criminality: “The worrying implication for the stories’ readers is that such characters are then free to travel to the imperial centre and to infect it with their criminality” (*Late Victorian Crime Fiction* 168). Talairach-Vielmas concurs that “Braddon’s portrait of her hero’s mental degeneration is heavily influenced . . . by contemporary theories of racial degeneration” (xvi–xvii). The novel’s representation of “a male character as an evolutionary throwback . . . relies heavily. . . on contemporary criminal anthropology . . . all of which often associate criminal suspects with ‘foreign territory in general and colonial subjects in particular’” (Talairach-Vielmas xix). Even after Arnold’s death, it is presumed by Coralie that Mountford returned to Africa. Despite his innocence, Mountford can never truly escape his association with the continent.

Braddon’s reversal of gender stereotypes is an explicit subversion of prevailing Victorian conceptions of women as evolutionarily inferior to men. Because imperialism was considered a male enterprise,⁴¹ Braddon use of this connotation—in which Mountford’s association with

⁴¹ Rudyard Kipling’s poem “The White Man’s Burden” encapsulates late Victorian imperial patriarchy, writing that white Englishmen must “search your manhood / Through all the thankless years.”

Africa implies his predisposal to degeneration—seeks to elevate women’s status in society not only as physical superiors to men but as arbiters of nation at home. In doing so, Braddon revises notions of womanhood specifically in contrast to Victorian ideology but nevertheless upholds a gender binary. Talairach-Vielmas elaborates on the implications of Braddon’s dichotomous analysis of gender in the novel:

As his mind is aligned with the African wilderness, Brandon Mountford exemplifies how his contact with Africa has released his own savage instincts. The male brain thus becomes the mysterious unknown territory that needs to be explored by the female anthropological investigators. . . . Yet, what these female sleuths discover are not the dangers of uninhibited female sexuality but the dangers of men’s uncontrolled murderous instincts. As Braddon’s female characters increasingly uncover the links between men and animals, the novel subverts evolutionary theory which defined woman as the “missing link” between man and the animal kingdom. (xx)

Tainted by experiences abroad, male corruption becomes the female detectives’ duty to expose. Such concerns of degeneration are not limited to Mountford. It is the novel’s villain Hubert Urquhart, whose degenerate criminality Sibyl must ultimately uncover. Her investigation into Arnold’s death climaxes in her accusation against Urquhart as ““twice a murderer”” (Braddon 301). Nevertheless, Urquhart never confesses to his brother’s murder:

In Hubert Urquhart’s confession of past guilt there had been no word of a still darker crime, a crime planned in cold blood, thought out, and slowly resolved upon, carried out with unwavering craft and purpose. . . . Of that crime, which Coralie knew, not one word had escaped the murderer on his death-bed; and the daughter’s knowledge of that dreadful secret remained unshared and unsuspected. (Braddon 326)

Kestner characterizes the role of the female detective as one that “rectify[es] some particular abuse of power,” often male: “the woman’s gaze facilitates the exposure of a criminal male and thereby indictment of the patriarchal institutions which unjustly participated in blaming another person . . . for the transgression” (21). Urquhart dies before his brother’s murder can be brought to light, but *Thou Art the Man* is less concerned with jurisdictional justice than it is with cleansing the narrative of corruption. When Sibyl discovers Mountford near the end of the novel, she searches for “a safe retreat for him, some secluded spot where he may be out of reach of the law” (Braddon 273). As in midcentury fiction, the British law cannot be trusted to provide justice. With Urquhart’s death—as well as Mountford’s—Braddon rids the novel of its degenerative characters. Unlike the casebooks in this dissertation, Braddon’s novel is like its sensation fiction peers in its approach to justice: *Thou Art the Man*, along with *The Woman in White* and *The Law and the Lady*, are keenly aware of the failure of the law. The female detectives in these novels do not ultimately expose the respective injustices but rather resolve them in their insular communities and conceal the results from the law. Sibyl and Coralie’s objective is not to achieve justice in traditional terms but rather to cleanse male degeneration and assert their positions as important women in their communities.

Thou Art the Man’s investment in a gender binary is finally enforced by its use of the New Woman. Talairach-Vielmas concludes that Coralie is “physically at the antipodes of the fair-haired angel Victorian society idolized” (xxi). However, although Coralie is emblematic of the connection between earlier forms of the female detective, especially her fellow masculine sleuth Marian Halcombe whose queerness I consider in chapter three, Coralie demonstrates how the New Woman can reinforce a binary rather than resist it. The New Woman was contemporaneously viewed as “biologically degenerate” (Jusová 2). Invoking Foucault’s work

on biopower, Jusová reminds us that anxieties around gender and sexuality were “frequently deployed . . . to rationalize and justify the existing gender-, class-, racial, and imperial status quo” (9). As such, “unfit” bodies—particularly those unable to or unsuited to procreation, according to a eugenics framework—posed a threat to the empire’s (and therefore nation’s) success (Jusová 9). Coralie begins *Thou Art the Man* in a similar vein to Marian (albeit somewhat stereotypically). Her New Womanhood is evinced through her taste for “cigarettes, and horsey talk . . . stables and kennels” and billiards, and her distaste for “embroidering window curtains and reading the last book of the Honourable Somebody’s travels in Tumbuctoo” (Braddon 8). She furthermore describes her relationship with men as one of the “‘jolly good fellow[s]’” (Braddon 8) despite her aunt’s advice that she “‘remember that you are a young lady’” (Braddon 8). Coralie sardonically complains that “She [woman] must accept her position as man’s inferior, and honour and revere her sultan” (21). Unlike Marian, however, Coralie marries at the end. *Thou Art the Man*’s presentation of gender becomes about the biological *distinction* between men and women. In order to survive male corruption and degeneration, Coralie must eventually forgo some of her New Woman qualities and assert a reformed mode of womanhood in which she may still be plain (“as good-looking as her horses”) but nevertheless concludes in a position that upholds patriarchal systems.

Thou Art the Man’s female characters fear that they will inherit their male relatives’ degenerate qualities. Braddon distinguishes spying from investigation. Coralie is tasked by her father with spying on Sibyl and keeping a journal on her, which she soon rebukes: “‘There can be no further doubt as to my position. . . . This is secret police work’” (Braddon 218). Whereas Coralie’s sleuthing is indicative of potential hereditary degeneration, Sibyl’s investigation reveals

male corruption.⁴² Coralie confesses to Sibyl, ““Ah, but I was tainted with his [her father’s] bad blood. . . . I compared our fortunes, and then the venom in my blood began to work. My nature could not escape the hereditary taint—if the modern craze about hereditary has any foundation. I was my father’s very daughter, and I accepted my office of spy”” (Braddon 312). For women to escape male corruption and degeneration, they must separate themselves from those affected. Coralie is forced to reject her father, telling him that she is ““leaving this house for ever”” and nothing can stop her, even ““bodily harm won’t make any difference in my plan of life”” (Braddon 307). Though Sibyl and Mountford reunite at the end of the novel, he and Sibyl notably do not marry; Mountford dies soon after. Sibyl’s marriage to someone other than the disabled Mountford is paramount: Crozier-De Rosa reminds us that traditional womanhood was vital to the empire and its “civilizing mission” due to its dependence on “the concept of the family remaining stable in the ‘Mother Country’” (417). Sibyl and Coralee’s marriages ensure that degeneration is not passed on, purifying the bloodline. The investigation is thus the method by which women—and therefore the nation—overcome degeneration and can settle into roles as modern women.

Thou Art the Man is not an ideologically cohesive novel. Sibyl and Coralie’s status as childless wives at the conclusion suggests lingering anxieties regarding their freedom from degeneration: Are they, the novel seems to ask, cleansed of all wrong? Or do their relationships with the degenerative men in the lives haunt them in some manner? After all, Coralie asserts that she ““was tainted with his [her father’s] bad blood”” (Braddon 312). *Thou Art the Man* is not unique in its depiction of child-free detectives—the only other mothers in this dissertation are

⁴² Contrast this with *Ruth the Betrayer* in which spying and investigation are collapsed, notably within the most violent of all the female detectives in this dissertation and whose end is an early example of degeneration in Victorian literature (see chapter 2).

Mina Harker and Valeria Brinton, though neither represent traditional Victorian womanhood either. As representatives of patriarchal instructions—Sibyl the capitalist and Coralie the aristocrat—I want to suggest that their authority in their respective realms takes precedent above potential motherhood. Perhaps in this way Braddon can have it both ways: precluded any degeneration from being passed on while also elevating women in positions of power as a result of their investigation. If womanhood at the *fin-de-siècle* is understood to be a vehicle for reproducing Englishness, and therefore securing the empire, Sibyl and Coralie fail. Nevertheless, it has only been *through* their use of whiteness that they achieve their authoritative and respected statuses at the conclusion. They are not Odd Women, but they are odd women with power—and in the realm of the female detective, that position is supreme.

Miss Cayley's Adventures's Colonial New Woman Detective

When Grant Allen's New Woman detective Lois Cayley declares, "I prefer to take life in a spirit of pure enquiry," (Allen 61) she proves her venture's success by renting a bicycle from her newfound pocket money. Her aimlessness—"I put on my hat; I saunter where I choose, so far as circumstances permit; and I wait to see what chance will bring me" (Allen 61)—proves fruitful: Chance holds, for the educated but prospectless Lois, a future in detection.

Although the New Woman pervades all the novels I examine in this chapter, the eponymous heroine of *Miss Cayley's Adventures* (1899) is a paragon, aptly representing the fusion of the figure with the female detective at the turn of the century. As the New Woman unsettled the white English woman's symbolic status as the representative of England in the 1890s, Lois offers a compromise. A traveler, self-proclaimed adventuress, and amateur detective, Lois uses her education, physicality, and politics to navigate her investigative work. Her

contextualization as a New Woman, rather than disrupts Britain's imperial designs, revises the role white English women may play as arbiters of nation when given the agency to do so. That is, I argue Lois polices colonized spaces *through* the trappings of the New Woman, and thereby asserts her position as a bourgeois modern woman in England.

Miss Cayley's Adventures's conflation of the adventuring New Woman with the detective results in global policing by the empowered Englishwoman. Grant Allen, a Canadian-born writer whose education and career brought him to Britain, died shortly before the publication of another female detective novel, *Hilda Wade*, that was completed by Conan Doyle and published in 1900—but none but *Miss Cayley's Adventures* so aptly depict the mutually beneficial relationship between the Victorian female detective and the British empire. In his examination of the female detective, Kestner notes that the *fin-de-siècle* figure's "striking independence" consciously coincides with the New Woman (95), which is achieved through her enforcement of the law (122). Kestner states that its depiction of women as "not only *subject* to the law but as an *enforcer* of the law. . . . reveals Allen's genuine ideological agenda" (122). Dedicated to the ideals of the New Woman (e.g., education, independence and agency, and work), Allen maintains an ideological stake in the progression of women's rights while concurrently—and, I argue, intrinsically—elevating Lois's imperial detection.

Taking her across countries and continents before returning to England to solve the novel's paramount crime, Lois's adventures are mysteries that can only be solved through the agency that New Women demanded. Kestner concurs that Lois exhibits New Woman characteristics "through the detectival element," specifically her "education, originality and freedom in a variety of circumstances—foreign travel, business relations, legal procedures" (135). Her cases cover, among other crimes, theft, kidnapping, and extortion, but Lois does not

seek out mysteries to solve but rather encounters them in her travels. Unlike Loveday Brooke or the two female detectives of the 1864 casebooks, investigation is not a calling so much as it is a matter of proving her independence and intelligence and enacting her keen sense of justice. As a detective, Lois exhibits many of the same traits that establish the late-century female detective; she is termed “unnaturally and unfemininely reasonable” (Allen 139) by her love interest Harold Tillington who jokes that she must have a text entitled “‘A System of Logic, Ratiocinative and Inductive, by Lois Cayley!’” (Allen 138). Although the cases throughout the novel often resemble adventure stories more than traditional crime narratives, it is important to however note that detective and adventure fiction share more attributes in common than is typically considered. Reitz states that the detective and imperial explorer, both of whom emphasize “the acquisition of local knowledge,” make “forays into the peripheries” to “redefine the center”—that is, the English nation (80). It is a mistake, according to *Detecting the Nation*, to altogether distinguish these genres from one another. Rather, we must recognize their shared objectives. They present “the same story about what authority can and should look like in an age of Empire” (Reitz 81). Lois’s status as a detective is undeniable, even before the final mystery in which she proves herself an admirable sleuth. Her methods of investigation are familiar to modern readers, particularly when she searches for clues: “However, I explored the ground on my hands and knees, and soon found marks of footsteps on the boggy patches, with scratches on the rock where he had leapt from point to point” (Allen 128). Though these characteristics are present in the female detectives I consider in this dissertation, Lois’s tone—the delight she (and Allen) takes in being not only independent but also defying gender norms—uniquely invokes the New Woman attitude.

To better understand the role that white women played within the British empire, I turn to the New Woman's threat to the pervasive representation of the Englishwoman as Britain that needed protection from foreign nations. I contend that Allen proffers her status as a white Englishwoman and, as such, protector of the empire, as central to Allen's depiction of the New Woman detective. The *fin-de-siècle* female detective consolidates her position through her ability to police an increasingly globalized world. While Heaney's important work demonstrates the New Woman's queer possibilities, my dissertation seeks to simultaneously underscore this potential with the figure's investments in whiteness. Informed by Queen Victoria's womanhood—contingent on her maternity and status as widow—it is vital to consider how the New Woman's fight for independence endangered this representation and its imperial implications. Stoler elucidates women's complicated positionality as citizens of an empire:

Many have argued that women's rights were restricted by the argument that motherhood was a "national service." It was also a heavily racialized one; as much as a rhetoric of a master race in peril forced middle-class women in Britain accept limits put on their civil rights, this same rhetoric of racial superiority served British women in India, American women in the Philippines, and Dutch women in the Indies, all of whom sought new ways to clarify their selfhood and assert their independence. (132)

Although the New Woman sought sexual freedom, and therefore increased agency in her decision when and if to become mothers, Victorian women also benefited from their whiteness and, by the *fin-de-siècle*, were able to employ it in their quest to shift gender norms and gain sex-based rights. Examples of real female detectives suggest they were more dedicated to individual agency than feminist reform. Dagni Bredesen notes that, despite the lack of official female police detectives, women worked as such not only in the metropole but in the colonies (e.g., India) as

well, as early as the 1850s (v). She concludes, “Victorian popular print suggests that women worked as detectives—both for the state and privately—long before they show up in official documents, even if that work was off the record and assigned on an ad hoc basis” (Bredesen vi). In such cases, women were tasked with detecting infanticide and abortion (Bredesen v)—crimes for which women are more likely than men to be arrested. In effect, though this dissertation is concerned with the ideological employment of fictional female detectives, these instances of real female detectives offer insight into the complex (and, often, self-serving) power exchange with which Allen and other authors engage in their novels. The compromise *Miss Cayley’s Adventures* offers between women’s rights and imperial investments is thus at once likely shaped by these real cases that were discussed in Victorian print culture *and* the fantasy of female empowerment Kestner proffers.

Allen’s depiction of Lois as a New Woman centers around her independent adventures and her resistance to romance, though it is also bolstered by stereotypical tokens like the bicycle and typewriter. After graduating from college penniless, Lois decides to travel, asserting she is “going out, simply in search of adventure” (Allen 4) and later determines, “An adventuress I would be; for I loved adventure” (Allen 60). With little ahead of her, independent adventure offers a manner of life that is both appealing and necessary. Lois comments, “I went forth into the world to live my own life, partly because it was just then so fashionable, but mainly because fate had denied me the chance of living anybody else’s” (Allen 58). She meets Lady Georgina Fawley, an elderly woman to whom she becomes companion as they travel to Germany. On their journey, Lois prevents a count from stealing Lady Georgina’s jewel-case, though he escapes. In Germany, they meet Lady Georgina’s nephew, Harold, who soon proposes to her, but Lois refuses him and goes to Frankfort to study art. There, an American bicyclist, who later pays her

to race against men to advertise his bicycle design, follows her—she wins. Again, Lois refuses a proposal and bikes to Switzerland. Despite, however, Lois's refusal of Harold, Allen positions him as a suitable match for the feminist Lois:

“I think,” [Harold] said . . . “a man ought to wish the woman he loves to be a free agent, his equal in point of action, even as she is nobler and better than he in all spiritual matters. I think he ought to desire for her a life as high as she is capable of leading, with full scope for every faculty of her intellect or her emotional nature.” (49)

Aligning himself with “modern” over “mediaeval” sensibilities (Allen 42), Harold's views on gender and marriage are at once sufficiently enlightened for the New Woman—requiring that his partner have agency and be “his equal”—while maintaining vestiges of the Angel in the House ideal whose femininity ensures that she is “nobler and better than he in all spiritual matters.” That Lois does not contradict him tells us that this reformed—but not uprooted—conception of womanhood represents the novel's gender ideology.

Allen carefully builds the romance between Lois and Harold and, crucially, only unites them when Lois has undergone her share of adventuring. After a stint selling bicycles in Switzerland and solving a fraudulent claim by an extortionist (whom she lets go), Lois and Harold meet again when he falls while hiking, prompting her search for him. To rescue him, Lois climbs down the mountain. Again, he proposes; again, Lois refuses but this time admits her love. Describing herself as a “consistent socialist” (Allen 90) and “opposed on principle to excessive luxury” (Allen 94), Lois informs him, “But as long as you are rich and have prospects like yours, I could never marry you. My pride wouldn't let me” (Allen 124). Lois's resistance to Harold, framed through economic terms, suggests that to marry into financial security may diminish her independence. And, by the end of the novel, this proves true.

Though Lois maintains her New Woman politics throughout the novel, *Miss Cayley's Adventures* contributes to a *fin-de-siècle* trend in which an independent woman's subversive potential is neutralized by her marriage. In New Woman detective novels, this is amplified by cases which—like *The Law and the Lady* and *Thou Art the Man*—pivot around a male character, often a love interest. At the climax, after Harold is falsely accused of forgery and he is “poor, friendless, hunted,” Lois agrees to marry him in a Scotch marriage after which he plans to turn himself over to the police (Allen 286). Clarke characterizes New Woman detective fiction popular at the end of the century:

The majority of these “lady detectives” were New Women of one sort or another and undertook detective work in a casual way, as a means of adventure, or to clear the name of a wronged male relative or husband. At the end of twelve stories or thereabouts, they would usually retire from detecting in favour of marriage as soon as a husband was found or exonerated. In finishing off their lady detectives' adventures with the “happy ending” of marriage and maternity, such stories “betray a noticeable unease with th[e] subversion of established gender roles” that the figure of a working female detective represents and ultimately end up reinscribing, instead of unsettling, the gender status quo. (*British Detective Fiction* 40).

Even in examples in which the female detective does have a significant romantic interest, Allen intrinsically weaves Lois's relationship into the fabric of her investigation. Not only does Harold sporadically appear throughout the novel in Lois's cases, but he is the focus of her most important cases—and, indeed, the case that most resembles a traditional crime narrative.

Harold's depiction as a suitable match for C Lois ayley when she inevitably accepts him after her adventuring days are over is standard for the New Woman detective in this period—

except in one crucial aspect: Harold's racialization. Though Harold is white, Allen conflates his hero with the East. Lois initially describes Harold as "'A tall, languid young man; large, poetical eyes; an artistic mustache—just a trifle Oriental-looking'" (36). This "trifle" comes in handy when, near the end of *Miss Cayley's Adventures*, Harold has been accused of forgery. He disguises himself as the attendant of his friend from Oxford, the Maharajah, whom Lois met in India. While on her way to India, Lois had met Harold's cousin, Lord Southminster, who also proposed; she adamantly refused. To get back at Lois, Southminster accuses Harold of forging his uncle's will and is taken to court, where she testifies when she returns to London. The court finds in favor of Southminster and Harold disappears. He and Lois reunite, with him in Oriental disguise:

Then I stood away a little and gazed at him. Even at that crucial moment of doubt and fear, I could not help noticing how admirably he made up as a handsome young Rajput. Three years earlier, at Schlangenbad, I remembered he had struck me as strangely Oriental-looking: he had the features of a high-born Indian gentleman, without the complexion. His large, poetical eyes, his regular, oval face, his even teeth, his mouth and moustache, all vaguely recalled the highest type of the Eastern temperament. Now, he had blackened his face and hands with some permanent stain—Indian ink, I learned later—and the resemblance to a Rajput chief was positively startling. In his gold brocade and ample white turban, no passer-by, I felt sure, would ever have dreamt of doubting him. (Allen 285)

Harold's disguise complete—"I flattered myself I had transformed my face into the complete Indian," he says to which Lois responds, "'You are absolute Orient'" (Allen 285)—he, for the final time, requests that Lois marry him; she accepts. Telling her that he disappeared and

therefore allowed others to believe that he was guilty so that she keeps her word, he continues: ““You remember what you promised me? . . . If ever I were poor, friendless, hunted—you would marry me. Now the opportunity has come when we can both prove ourselves. . . . So I have come to claim you. I have come to ask you now, in this moment of despair, will you keep your promise?”” (Allen 286). A detective follows them on the way to Edinburgh, but they escape. After they marry (while Harold is still in disguise), he is arrested.

In light of Harold’s conflation with the East, Lois’s requisite marriage conditions are increasingly significant: Resistant to him until he is both disempowered and dependent on her, Lois’s relationship with Harold, I contend, demonstrates the power exchange that the New Woman detective maintains with the British empire. In short, Lois asserts her agency through her whiteness. Because her marriage to an English man would make her dependent upon him (economically and otherwise), *Miss Cayley’s Adventures* offers another route in which the power balance between Harold and Lois becomes level. The method by which Harold loses his power—accused of forgery and moving through society in a brownface disguise—gives Lois power she did not have before as his protector and wife. In effect, Harold’s disguise delegates him to second-class citizenship, as both criminal and (ostensibly) as an “Oriental” man. Exacting the same power that she exercises in her investigations abroad, Lois’s authority as a woman is attained through her role as a white detective.

While Lois is abroad, *Miss Cayley’s Adventures* performs liberal racism that is masked by its rejection of outright hate, largely through the Maharajah. When introduced to Lois, he explains that Harold was ““so good to me at Oxford.”” He continues, ““Miss Cayley, you are new to India, and therefore—as yet—no doubt unprejudiced. You treat a native gentleman, I see, like a human being. I hope you will not stop long enough in our country to get over that stage—as

happens to most of your countrymen and countrywomen. In England, a man like myself is an Indian prince; in India, to ninety-nine out of a hundred Europeans, he is just “a damned n*****” (231). Commenting explicitly on the violent racism endemic to the British in India, the Maharajah places Lois and Harold outside as “good” white people, assuring the reader their importance to the New Woman’s liberalism. Allen is competent in pointing out the common tracts of racism that Indians experienced as a result of British colonialism. In one instance, Lois’s narration states, “Indeed, most Anglo-Indians seem first to do their best to Anglicise the Hindoo, and then to laugh at him for aping the Englishman” (Allen 237). Later, when Harold is accused of forgery, the Maharajah returns to England to see him safely through his troubles. Lady Georgina gratefully says, ““He has stood by Harold—well, like a Christian!”” to which he replies: ‘Or a Hindoo,’ the Maharajah corrected, smiling” (Allen 257). Further contrasted with Southminster’s casual racism—he often calls the Marajah a “n*ggah” (the spelling attributed to Allen’s satirical take on aristocratic accents)—Lois and Harold are seeming paragons of antiracist virtue.

Although Lois’s marriage to Harold is the pinnacle of her use of whiteness in investigation, *Miss Cayley’s Adventures* takes pains to demonstrate its employment in her investigations throughout the novel. After her time in Florence as a typist, Lois then travels to Egypt as a journalist where she rescues an English woman (and her children) who was sold into marriage. While walking through a bazaar, Lois thinks “of nothing else now” and feels, “It was strange how this episode made us forget our selfish fears for our own safety. Even dear timid Elise [her friend] remembered only that an Englishwoman’s life and liberty were at stake” (Allen 192). Later, in India, when tiger hunting, Lois makes the kill shot despite the danger and her fear. And, on her leisurely voyage back to London, Lois travels to Singapore, Yokohama, Vancouver,

then Liverpool before arriving to the capital—though we are given little insight into these travels. In sum, Lois’s travels abroad prepare her to assert the same authority she has as a white New Woman in colonized spaces on British land.⁴³

When she returns to England and to Harold, Lois is positioned outside of social and legislative norms. This seeming disadvantage allows Lois to demonstrate her skills gained as a New Woman detective. Early in the novel, the police are termed ogres (Allen 64) and, later, Lois comments upon the British jury’s lack of imagination; according to her, “You can’t justify originality to a British jury” (Allen 270). She similarly realizes that her characterization as an adventuress gives her “not a leg left to stand upon before a British jury” (Allen 273). It is this very positioning, however, that gives Lois the skills necessary to solve the mystery, much in the same way that earlier iterations of the female detective’s status as an outsider gives her unique and incisive insight. *Miss Cayley’s Adventures* thus distinguishes Lois’s resistance to norms as a positive—one that facilitates her rescue of Harold.

Lois’s New Womanhood gives her success as a detective. Once back in England, she employs her investigative skills earned with practice abroad. Allen contrasts Lois with the inept police who, though “on his track” so that it is “expected an arrest would be made before evening at latest” (Allen 281), the “clue” that Lois derisively comments that Scotland Yard has, they suspect the wrong man. With Harold in disguise, they abscond to Scotland but not before they must evade the wrong-headed police:

Thus, putting together two and two, as a woman will, I came to the conclusion that the spy did not expect us to leave the train before we reached Edinburgh. . . . Most men trust much to just such vague expectations. They form a theory, and then neglect the adverse

⁴³ Lois’s travels that culminate in a successful investigation recall Walter Hartright’s time abroad in *The Woman in White* (1860), though Collins provides much less insight into Walter’s experiences.

chances. You can only get the better of a skilled detective by taking him thus, psychologically and humanly. (Allen 292)

Lois insists that her gender aids her investigation; as a man, Allen implies, she would be less innovative and insightful. Her gender—and specifically her status as a New Woman—helps her escape the police and solve the mystery herself.

Harold's case functions as the novel's climax not only because it is the last in the novel and which Lois spends the most time narrating but also because, through it, Lois must defend her whiteness as a New Woman and her role in the British empire. That is, Lois must prove herself as a white Englishwoman to British law that offers her "not a leg left to stand upon" (Allen 273). She explains that her escape with Harold makes her feel "almost like a criminal" and that, "Never in my life had danger loomed so near—not even when we returned with the Arabs from the oasis. For then we feared for our lives alone; now, we feared for our honour" (293). The allusion to her case in Egypt suggests that its danger has prepared her for a more troubling case in which British conceptions of "honour" are at stake. She continues, "All the way up to the train, whenever I was awake, an idea had been haunting me—a possible clue to this trickery ... Petty details cropped up and fell into their places. I began to unravel it all now. I had an inkling of a plan to set Harold right again" (Allen 304). Despite the trappings of her New Woman status that give the jury and the law pause, it is these very experiences that allow her to solve the mystery. Culminating in her exclamation, "I detect their trick!" (Allen 311), Lois discovers the true will locked in a desk, proving Southminster created the forgery and once again saving Harold.

Harold's case thus presents two primary conclusions regarding the New Woman detective in *Miss Cayley's Adventures*. First, as demonstrated by Harold's disguise as an "Oriental" that

represents his fallen status, the case gives Lois power over the white English man—thereby asserting the gender equality demanded by the New Woman. Second, this power is practiced, afforded, and sustained through her whiteness. Bringing her experience policing abroad back to England, Lois successfully demonstrates to British law that the New Woman is a capable enforcer of law when able to exercise her agency. In doing so, Lois represents the reformed category of woman in which she both promotes sex-based rights and serves as an arbiter of national identity. *Miss Cayley's Adventures* rejects traditional womanhood but embraces women's positions as symbols of Britain as long as they are afforded the power to, through that symbolism, achieve power through policing.

The ideological complexity of the female detective novel and its conservative impulses have been overlooked in favor of the radical potential of the New Woman. Although scholarship considers detective fiction generically conservative (Miller), the “profound fantasy of female empowerment” (Kestner 122) found in the female detective novel masks the underlying liberalism that seeks to reinstate a gender binary through women's involvement in the construction of English national identity. Clarke argues that a comprehensive analysis of detective fiction from this period reveals “the often overlooked ideological complexity of the burgeoning late Victorian detective fiction's themes of investigation and disorder onto wider interrogations of identity and construction and safety across personal, but also national and global boundaries” (*Late Victorian Crime Fiction* 156). More so than any female detective novels prior, those in this chapter center women's roles within Britain's nationalistic investments.

***Dracula*: The Gothic Heroine Returns**

Dracula (1897) by Bram Stoker is not typically classified as a detective novel despite its shared elements with the genre,⁴⁴ most significantly the characters' attempts to parse mysterious disappearances and illnesses in Whitby. This may be due to its lack of a central detective figure; Van Helsing is perhaps the most obvious candidate as a vampire hunter whose specialized knowledge aids the Crew of Light (as Christopher Craft dubs combined efforts of Jonathan Harker, Arthur Holmwood, Quincey Morris, Dr. John Seward, and Professor Van Helsing) in their triumph over Count Dracula, and he indeed deduces Dracula's return to Transylvania. Mina Harker, however, long conceived as a pseudo-secretary to the men (Auerbach 87), is instrumental in the novel's climatic chase near the end of the novel and the detective figure I examine here.

Revising the early Gothic's fear of the foreign other into imperial concerns, *Dracula* epitomizes the 1890s' Gothic revival by revising early elements of the genre into a late-Victorian examination of gender and imperialism. In a period of consolidated detectives (fictional and real) and imperial anxiety, *Dracula* is more ambiguous regarding its fear of the foreign—and more permeable—than its peers that may more suitably be categorized as detective fiction. Unlike the other novels in this chapter, *Dracula* luxuriates in its anxieties, presenting both the dangers and pleasures of the foreign exchange. Its emphasis on the psychological implications of Mina's connection with Dracula recalls the novels in the first chapter of this dissertation. As we will see, *Dracula* is an ideological outlier in this chapter, in large part due to its Gothic sensibilities.

Although the prevailing consensus argues that the novel seeks to calcify a modern ideal of womanhood at the *fin-de-siècle* through Mina, there has been little examination of her

⁴⁴ On *Dracula*'s convergence with late-Victorian detective fiction, Olivia Rutigliano writes, "These genres—detective and monstrous—share an investment: a concern with making known what is unknown." She also identifies Mina as the novel's "primary investigator."

character as a queer figure—not simply a woman with threatening sexual agency among a queer kinship of men (Craft) but a character, like her predecessors, who manifests an “androgynous compulsion” (Hoeveler 92) that is tied to her role as an amateur detective. I argue that she carries forward the radical queer potential established in Radcliffe and Sleath, standing as a unique figure in this chapter’s novels. I contend that Mina’s role as detective is the lens through which Stoker navigates collapsed anxieties regarding the English national identity and female sexuality. *Dracula*’s conservative impulses—specifically surrounding immigration and Britain’s faltering empire—may belie its radical potential but Mina’s role suggests a more complex ideology. *Dracula* emerges, finally, as ideologically ambivalent.

Dracula constructs Mina’s role as a detective against the backdrop through British nationalism. The novel’s preoccupations with the uncivilized east—culturally, racially, and religiously—draw a contrast between its British characters in the Crew of Light and Dracula and his minions. While Dracula hails from Romania rather than a country in Asia, Edward Said’s theory of Orientalism, which outlines how the West collapses all Eastern civilizations and cultures into a unified image of the other against which it has defined itself, is helpful to clarify *Dracula*’s Gothic lineage. Orientalism, Said argues, is the West’s institutional dominance over the Orient through productions of knowledge. Though the East seldom figures in early Gothic literature, a similar sentiment guides its novels and sets the stage for detective fiction’s enforcement of these boundaries. Said’s theory clarifies the West’s apprehension of the Orient as a tool to fortify itself: “European culture gained in strength and identity by setting itself off against the Orient as a sort of surrogate and even underground self” (3). In *Dracula*’s case, Said’s exploration of sexuality is particularly pertinent: “the Orient seems still to suggest not only fecundity but sexual promise (and threat), untiring sensuality, unlimited desire, deep generative

energies . . . the Orient was a place where one could look for sexual experience unobtainable in Europe” (188, 190). The novel’s twin anxieties regarding the loss of contained sexuality and national identity are investigated through Mina and her role as a detective.

Largely examined in scholarship through her tangential New Woman status, Mina demonstrates an interest in the professionalizing process and new technologies, revealing the secretarial nature of much detective work. Much like Loveday Brooke, Mina develops skillsets that exhibit the onset potential of female professionalization. Such work has not been considered secretarial—or, conversely, Mina’s secretarial work is not considered investigative in large part due to its gendered connotations. Reminiscent of *The Sign of Four*’s chase throughout the London streets and onto the Thames, the Crew of Light’s cross-country hunt is, in essence, the tracking down and apprehension of a criminal—one who just happens to be a vampire. Reminiscent of midcentury sensation fiction’s assertion that British law cannot be trusted to enact justice, justice in the form of Dracula’s death must be achieved by the novel’s protagonists rather than a court. If Dracula is Stoker’s criminal, Mina is the detective who tracks him. Her skills, demonstrated throughout the novel, magnify when combined with her psychic link to Dracula as she transforms into a vampire. This desubjectifying experience at once augments her role as detective *and* as arbiter of nation as she seeks to rid England of Dracula’s presence. Yet, unlike the other novels in this chapter, *Dracula* maintains ties with the queer and the foreign through the conclusion.

On its surface, *Dracula* seeks to reform a gender binary. Mina is positioned as proof “that modern women can combine the best of the traditional and the new” (Senf, *Dracula* 49). Indeed, it is a novel preoccupied with binaries: the masculine and the feminine, the East and the West, the modern and the barbaric, the rational and the supernatural. Stoker’s preferred notion of

modernity when it comes to womanhood is not Coventry Patmore's "The Angel in the House"; neither, however, is it the New Woman. By 1897, the New Woman was regularly satirized in Victorian print culture and "a subject of public controversy" (Senf, *Dracula* 35). The New Woman's "external and internal threats to empire and patriarchal social order" (Roth, Chambers, Walsh 366) as "an extremely subversive figure because she rejected motherhood . . . was unthinkable at a time when women were required to become 'mothers of the British Empire'" (Roth, Chambers, Walsh 369). Linked intimately with Britain's imperial project, English womanhood—and, by extension, motherhood—is at stake in *Dracula*. As we will see, the novel at once rejects New Womanhood's threat to Britain while borrowing extensively from its principles.

Mina's role as a tangential New Woman has long been established, though it is helpful to consider the distinct elements which the novel accepts and rejects. Many of Mina's attributes would identify her as a New Woman: her work as an assistant teacher (Roth, Chambers, Walsh 368), which provides her "with a responsible profession and a means of economic independence," and which "reveals that she is a modern woman, the product of intense struggles that took place during the nineteenth century—in short, the kind of woman who could not have existed much before the period in which Stoker wrote" (Senf, *Dracula* 45). However, Mina does not consider herself a New Woman and, in fact, distances herself from the title. Early in the novel, she comments in her journal—"I believe we should have shocked the 'New Woman' with our appetites. Men are more tolerant, bless them!" (Stoker 99)—do not suggest a rejection of New Woman principles or attitudes. Mina notably does not deride the New Woman, but neither is she uncritical or, in Carol A. Senf's words, "neutral," only suggesting that Mina is "is familiar with the New Woman's insistence on greater freedom and physical activity" (*Dracula* 35); rather,

her comment here personally resists the label. This moment is expressive of the novel's ideological ambivalence, particularly regarding gender wherein Stoker struggles to maintain a distinction between the ideal modern woman and the New Woman. Sexual agency heralded by the New Woman, for example, is not part of Stoker's apparent gender reform. Senf states that with her education and career, Mina "should be comfortable with certain qualities often associated with the New Woman" while uncomfortable with others, primarily "sexual openness" (*Dracula* 36). Lucy Westenra, among Dracula's first victims when he arrives in England, is notably distinct from Mina's idealized presentation of womanhood along sexual lines. Lucy complains, "Why can't they let a girl marry three men, or as many as want her, and save all this trouble?" (Stoker 67) and is later (jokingly) implicated in bigamy (Stoker 187)—suggesting Dracula's attack on her is not only warranted but invited. Comparatively, Mina jokes, "Some of the 'New Woman' writers will some day start an idea that men and women should be allowed to see each other asleep before proposing or accepting. But I suppose the New Woman won't condescend in future to accept; she will do the proposing herself" (Stoker 111). Senf elaborates that "by negating her sexuality . . . and by showing her decision to abide by the group's will instead of making an individual decision, he also reveals that she is not a New Woman" (*Dracula* 48). Whereas Mina is later assaulted, Lucy is seduced. The distinction informs Stoker's conception of womanhood that rejects women's sexual agency.

Nevertheless, I contend *Dracula* presents Mina as ambiguously gendered throughout the novel; both feminine and masculine, it is this confluence that aids her investigation. Though Senf maintains that Mina "adopt[s] a more traditional feminine role" (*Dracula* 48), I wish to emphasize the ways in which she embraces *and* resists femininity. Van Helsing exclaims, "Ah, that wonderful Madam Mina! She has a man's brain—a brain that a man should have were he

much gifted—and a woman’s heart” (Stoker 250). Despite her resistance to the term, Mina exhibits many of the New Woman’s characteristics; her “man’s brain” excels at technological skills like typewriting, memorization and organization, and even deduction. Like Collins before him, Stoker utilizes an epistolary format to convey *Dracula*’s narrative. In doing so, Mina’s typewriting skills are central to the Crew of Light’s records. Jill Galvan identifies Mina as “the most information and media savvy of her group,” elaborating that:

Her first encounter with Van Helsing highlights her knowledge of state-of-the-art inscriptive methods when she hands him two copies of her own diary—first the original in shorthand, then a typed one. Having transcribed Jonathan’s diary as well, Mina later has the bright idea of transcribing all the group’s diaries and correspondence for the purposes of their pursuit. (451)

In addition to her diary, which serves as a record of events (Lucy makes note of her friend’s habit, “I must imitate Mina, and keep writing things down” [Stoker 119]), Mina also typewrites Jonathan’s narrative: “If you will let me, I shall give you a paper to read. It is long, but I have typewritten it out. It will tell you my trouble and Jonathan’s. It is the copy of his journal when abroad, and all that happened” (Stoker 198–99). Mina furthermore collects data: “I shall try to do what I see lady journalists do: interviewing and writing descriptions and trying to remember conversations. I am told that, with a little practice, one can remember all that goes on or that one hears said during a day” (Stoker 78) and, at one point, works with her husband “knitting together in chronological order every scrap of evidence they have” (Stoker 233–34). When the Crew of Light track Dracula across countries, Mina makes it possible through her expert knowledge of train schedules: “At home in Exeter I always used to make up timetables, so as to be helpful to

my husband. I found it so useful sometimes, that I always make a study of the timetables now””
(Stoker 359). Finally, Mina not only records events but collects and deduces from them:

I remember how much the *Dailygraph* and the *Whitby Gazette*, of which I had made cuttings, *helped us to understand the terrible events at Whitby when Count Dracula landed*, so I shall look through the evening papers since then, and perhaps I shall get some new light. I am not sleepy, and the work will help to keep me quiet. (Stoker 239; emphasis mine)

Implicitly tied to her masculinity—her “man’s brain”—Mina’s skills are quintessentially investigative. These early examples in which she compiles information to unravel the mystery of the disappearances in Whitby are foundational to the Crew of Light’s success. Mina emphasizes that her cuttings “helped us to understand the terrible events at Whitby,” an act to which she returns when it becomes clear further investigation is demanded.

Perhaps, however, the passage most expressive of Mina’s role as detective is her memorandum (Stoker 373) in which she puzzles out Dracula’s return to Transylvania through a series of deductions. Beginning, “*Ground of inquiry*.—Count Dracula’s problem is to get back to his own place” (Stoker 373), Mina’s memorandum considers, point by point, the means by which Dracula will return to Transylvania and, therefore, how the Crew of Light may intervene. Examining the benefits and drawbacks of traveling by road, rail, and water from Dracula’s point of view—mimicking the detective’s usual practice of putting himself in the criminal’s shoes—Mina deduces that because “he evidently fears discovery or interference” (Stoker 373), that water is the safest. Following her conclusion, she narrows down which path he will take:

Firstly.—We must differentiate between what he did in London as part of his general plan of action, when he was pressed for moments and had to arrange as best he could.

Secondly we must see, as well as we can surmise it from the facts we know of, what he has done here. (Stoker 373)

In this passage, Mina explicitly compiles facts and employs investigative reasoning to draw conclusions about an unknown factor (i.e., Dracula's method of travel). In the first instance, Mina provides "proof"—"the letter of instructions sent to Immanuel Hildesheim to clear and take away the box *before sunrise*" as well as "the instruction to Petrof Skinsky" (Stoker 348)—of his actions in London, further extrapolating from the instructions to Skinsky, stating that though they can only be "guess[ed] at," that there is nevertheless sure to be "some letter or message, since Skinsky came to Hildesheim" (Stoker 348). Further reasoning, "Here, we ask why Skinsky was chosen at all to aid in the work?" (Stoker 348), Mina reaches a conclusion:

My surmise is, this: that in London the Count decided to get back to his castle by water, as the most safe and secret way. He was brought from the castle by Szgany, and probably they delivered their cargo to Slovaks who took the boxes to Varna, for there they were shipped for London. Thus the Count had knowledge of the persons who could arrange this service. When the box was on land, before sunrise or after sunset, he came out from his box, met Skinsky and instructed him what to do as to arranging the carriage of the box up some river. When this was done, and he knew that all was in train, he blotted out his traces, as he thought, by murdering his agent. *I have examined the map and find that the river most suitable* for the Slovaks to have ascended is either the Pruth or the Sereth. I read in the typescript that in my trance I heard crows low and water swirling level with my ears and the creaking of wood. The Count in his box, then, was on a river in an open boat—propelled probably either by oars or poles, for the banks are near and it is working against stream. There would be no such sound if floating down stream. Of course it may

not be either the Sereth or the Pruth, but *we may possibly investigate further*. Now of these two, the Pruth is the more easily navigated, but the Sereth is, at Fundu, joined by the Bistritza which runs up round the Borgo Pass. The loop it makes is manifestly as close to Dracula's castle as can be got by water. (Stoker 348; emphasis mine)

This deductive conclusion to Mina's memorandum demonstrates not only her capacity as a sleuth but its centrality to the narrative: Without Mina, the Crew of Light would likely never track down and destroy Dracula. The language used in the above passage, particularly in those sections I have emphasized, is reflective of any Victorian detective; Mina surmises, examines, and investigates. Though she does not term herself a detective, Mina functions as one; "the novel makes clear that Mina is not merely receiving information, she is processing it" (Kistler 394). Should there finally be any doubt that Mina ought to be considered among the nineteenth-century's prominent female detectives, her allusion to contemporary criminology puts the question to rest. She concludes, "'The Count is a criminal and a criminal type. Nordau and Lombroso would classify him, and *qua* criminal he is of imperfectly formed mind'" (363). Her investigations incite her to connect Dracula not to the supernatural but instead to the criminal, and, as such, with the foreign. Although *Dracula* as a whole conflates the criminal with the supernatural, Mina herself maintains largely rational conceptions of her enemy.

Thus ambiguously gendered by her masculine skills and "brain," Mina's assault near the novel's climax and its effect on her investigative skills further belie the novel's seeming goal to reform a gender binary. After Lucy's death, Dracula begins to prey on Mina, culminating in the assault. The metaphorical forced fellatio that Mina performs on Dracula—"forcing her face down on his bosom" (Stoker 300), sucking blood from his breast—results in the early stages of what the Crew of Light fears most: Mina's transformation into a vampire. However, it also creates an

unforeseen psychic connection between her and Dracula, which becomes essential to the Crew of Light's hunt for its enhancement of Mina's innate investigative skills. In her memorandum, Mina writes, "I read in the typescript that in my trance I heard cows low and water swirling level with my ears and the creaking of wood" (Stoker 394). Embedded in a passage that already demonstrates Mina's skills, this moment further highlights how she uses her psychic connection to augment her investigation. Paired with her deductions, Mina extrapolates from the vague information she receives during her trance. That is, it is important to note that Mina's psychic connection neither creates her skills nor does her trance provide her with easy answers; she must deduce from the facts of the case *and* infer from her trance. In short, Mina's skills as a detective, already established, are given further power through the collapse of her self with Dracula's.

Like her Gothic predecessors, Mina is more successful as a detective because she is open and permeable, able to see what others cannot, after she has an encounter with the sublime—that is, Dracula. In the first chapter of this dissertation, I considered the female detective's relationship to the sublime. As I have argued, the sublime experience is superbly suited to investigation. My first chapter contends that Ann Radcliffe's use of the sublime constructs the female detective's engorged curiosity in the face of obscurity, her desire to discover solutions and answers, and its terrifying pleasure. Like Radcliffe's Emily St. Aubert, Mina uses her rationality to govern her sublime experience while remaining permeable, "infinitely open" (Freeman 11). While in a trance, Mina does "not seem the same woman" (Stoker 311). Jonathan remarks, "There was a far-away look in her eyes, and her voice had a sad dreaminess which was new to me" (Stoker 311). Jonathan's narration of her trance demonstrates Mina's desubjectification as her own identity begins to merge with Dracula. The potential loss of self is evident: a "dangerous

loss of identity” (Kistler 379).⁴⁵ Mina, however, is ultimately the only character whose identity “remains stable, in spite of traumatic assault on her body and mind,” and despite both being “breached by Dracula” (Kistler 383). Like Emily St. Aubert, Mina emerges from her encounter with the sublime with her identity in-tact, while remaining permeable. Though shattered—or, in Jordan Kistler’s terms, breached—by Dracula, Mina manages her psychic response to Dracula through her rationality. As in *The Mysteries of Udolpho*, reason and the supernatural are held in intimate tension.

Dracula frames Mina’s sublime experience, specifically her psychic connection, as a mode of exaggerated sympathy, another central trait developed by the eighteenth-century female detectives. Mina, argues Kistler, manipulates her psychic connection (387) through the power of her sympathy (388), contending that Mina uniquely offers sympathy to Dracula, “which allows her to manipulate the psychic connection they share in the final third of the novel” (Kistler 370). Indeed, Mina tells Jonathan with “love and tenderness” that “That poor soul who has wrought all this misery is the saddest case of all” and implores him to “be pitiful to him, too, though it may not hold your hands from his destruction” (Stoker 308–09). Kistler points out that sympathy, as Mina experiences it, “is not just emotion or intuition, but a form of deductive reasoning” (395). When Mina is in her trance, Jonathan writes that “[her] answer came dreamily, but with intention; it were *as though she were interpreting something*. I have heard her use the same tone when reading her shorthand notes” (Stoker 312; emphasis mine). *Dracula* therefore combines central traits established by the early Gothic female detectives—reason and sympathy—in Mina and, in doing so, eludes a gender binary.

⁴⁵ Jordan Kistler cites Renfield as character who is destroyed by his over-identification with Dracula (382).

I argue that this results in Mina's reconstructed queer subjectivity that has undergone the shattering sublime encounter and allowed her to reassert her own androgynous identity. This relationship between the sublime and rationality—evinced by Mina's congruent employment of both—further unites masculine reason and feminine sensibility. The implications of the metaphorical rape as the vehicle for Mina's enhanced perception, however, must be considered within the context of this dissertation's argument that the sublime functions as a radical—that is, liberatory—desubjectifying force. Kistler contends that Mina's psychic connection is a means by which she may “regain power after a traumatic assault, and does so by employing nineteenth-century feminist rhetoric which presented telepathy as a powerful extension of women's natural faculty for sympathy” (367). Kistler elaborates that mesmerism and hypnotism were aligned with “with feminism, the New Woman, and inversions of gendered power” (367) in the nineteenth century, and further notes that Stoker employs the word “sympathy” frequently throughout the novel—a specifically feminine virtue. According to Kistler, closer inspection of Mina's psychic connection reveals that *Dracula* is “far more supportive of the late-Victorian feminist movement than is often allowed” (368). However, I contend that Mina's power is accepted only in so far as it does not taint her virtuous sexuality. Indeed, Mina's reaction to her steady transformation is far from positive: “‘Unclean! Unclean! Even the Almighty shuns my polluted flesh! I must bear this mark of shame upon my forehead until the Judgement Day’” (Stoker 298). In the world of *Dracula*, psychic abilities are tolerated and even celebrated, but female lasciviousness is nevertheless censored.

Dracula's attempt to reform a gender binary is most successful in Stoker's contrasting approach to Mina and Lucy's respective attacks. If *Dracula* conceptualizes Mina as the representation of reformed womanhood at the *fin-de-siècle*—even considering Kistler's argument

that Stoker is sympathetic to the New Woman who, through Mina, does not utterly reject the feminine—Lucy represents the dangerous radical, the lascivious woman whose sexual agency may lead to a crumbling empire. Patrick O'Malley notes that the “invocation of Catholic tyranny and vampiric bloodthirstiness, with a concomitant threat to sexual norms, suggests its symbolic genealogy in the tradition of Radcliffe's Gothic” (O'Malley 132). He elaborates:

Once the controversialists of the mid-century apply those Gothic tropes to domestic figures, they open the possibility that the supposedly foreign vices they are condemning can be native to Britain as well. The true Gothic anxiety by the end of the nineteenth century is that one might wake up to discover that the fantasized foreigner lives right at home, indistinguishable from the rest of the English citizenry. (O'Malley 93)

Like its predecessors, *Dracula* reviles the foreign. Though *Dracula* is technically Eastern European, Stoker makes it continuous with the East or “Orient,” opposing it to the West” (Galvan 435). Whereas late eighteenth-century Gothic novels fear the Catholic south, *Dracula* locates its anxieties in Eastern Europe and the broader context of Britain's tenuous empire.

Stoker affiliates women's sexual agency with the threat of foreignness, embodies in vampiric immigration and reverse colonization. The threat of *Dracula*'s seduction signifies reverse colonization (Arata)⁴⁶ via his control of women's bodies but which represents the larger “sense that the entire nation—as a race of people, as a political and imperial force, as a social and cultural power—was in irretrievable decline” (Arata 622). Vanquish the vampire, restore the symbol of England's national identity. Arata elaborates:

⁴⁶ Arata describes reverse colonization as “a terrifying reversal” in which the colonizer finds himself in the position of the colonized, the exploiter becomes exploited, the victimizer victimized. Such fears are linked to a perceived decline—racial, moral, spiritual—which makes the nation vulnerable to attack from more vigorous, ‘primitive’ peoples” (623).

Indeed, the Count can threaten the integrity of the nation precisely because of the nature of his threat to personal integrity. His attacks involve more than an assault on the isolated self, the subversion and loss of one's individual identity. . . . Dracula imperils not simply his victims' personal identities, but also their cultural, political, and racial selves. In *Dracula* vampirism designates a kind of colonization of the body. Horror arises not because Dracula destroys bodies, but because he appropriates and transforms them. (630)

As Craft similarly notes, a central anxiety regarding the collapse of the masculine and the feminine pervades the novel:

Indeed, Dracula's mission in England is the creation of a race of monstrous women, feminine demons equipped with masculine devices. This monstrous heterosexuality is apotropaic for two reasons: first, because it masks and deflects the anxiety consequent to a more direct representation of same sex eroticism; and second, because in imagining a sexually aggressive woman as a demonic penetrator, as a usurper of a prerogative belonging "naturally" to the other gender, it justifies, as we shall see later, a violent expulsion of this deformed femininity. (Craft 111)

This is the ultimate threat that Mina faces as a result of her assault—the development into a “sexually aggressive woman” whose traits, according to Victorian ideology, are innately attributed to men and, furthermore, which are tainted with foreignness. With such a risk, her status as a representation of Britain's national identity is at stake. Dracula himself clarifies his intention to command Britain through its women: ““Your girls that you all love are mine already; and through them you and others shall yet be mine—my creatures, to do my bidding and to be my jackals when I want to feed”” (Stoker 307). Thus, Mina's womanhood—and, by extension, England—is at stake.

Despite Dracula's death with Mina's help, however, she does not fully stamp out foreign bodies nor their effect on her. Rather, through her psychic link and the blood-exchange that endures in her son, she incorporates her experience in herself and manages it. Galvan, in an analysis of the Indian Rebellion's influence on *Dracula*, contends that "even as *Dracula* conjures ideas of British heroism, it also gently disconcerts them, pushing against the patina of Western superiority by insinuating the unplumbed depths of Eastern mystical powers" (Galvan 437).

Galvan surmises:

The novel does not follow through with a simple binaristic mapping of the world that sees the West as technologically and scientifically progressive and the East as mired in crude practices and systems of belief. Or more precisely, while much of the plot does confirm such a binary . . . simultaneously it assumes that the Orient harbors true, alternative forms of knowledge and communication, in relation to which Occidentals themselves sometimes occupy positions of ignorance and powerlessness. (450)

Dracula's examination of modernity, in large part contingent on "a conflict centered on information and information networks" illustrated by the West's technology and the East's occultism (Galvan 437) ends, as all else, ambivalently. Technology advances the Crew of Light, but so does the psychic link. Galvan notes that this "unresolved dialectic becomes most obvious when we focus on Mina Harker" (Galvan 450) whose psychic link demonstrates the power of telepathy over telegraphy (Galvan 453).

Although Dracula is killed, Harker's note at the end of the novel upturns the final chapter's seeming return to the status quo of comfortable binaries, which "does not neatly tie up questions of confused bloodlines and complicated kinship that messily challenge Victorian imperial patriarchy" (Roth, Chambers, Walsh 371). Craft further highlights the queerness

sustained through the Harkers' offspring, the "fantasy child of those sexual transfusions, son of an illicit and nearly invisible homosexual union" (129) from which "male fluids find a protected pooling place in the body of a woman" (128). The final note's apparent restoration, as Craft writes, of "'natural' order and especially the rectification of conventional gender roles (129) falters in light of the "libidinal bonding" (128) their son represents. Though it is tempting to read Mina as a mere vehicle—male bonds displaced into her "purer body" (129) and therefore congruent with Craft's argument that the queer is "always filtered through the mask of monstrous or demonic heterosexuality" (111) or Victorian sentiment that, as Senf points out, "'every good woman is by nature a mother' whose motherhood is 'the full realisation of woman's faculties'" (*Dracula* 41)—we must also consider Mina's own queer subjectivity as a mother. Queerness, I argue, is not antithetical to motherhood. Whereas Craft argues that queer desire in the novel is "always filtered," in which Dracula's assault on Mina conveys illicit homosociality through "demonic heterosexuality" (111), I maintain that Mina herself has not been given full consideration as a queer figure herself. In *Dracula*, Mina's motherhood is further evidence of her queerness and willingness to be permeable. Harker writes, "This boy will some day know what a brave and gallant woman his mother is. Already he knows her sweetness and loving care; later on he will understand how some men so loved her, that they did dare much for her sake" (402). The inclusion of "'brave and gallant'" has long served to complicate *Dracula's* insistence on a reformed gender binary. Mina is both maternal and feminine, gallant and masculine, English and foreign:

Thus, the hope for the future represented by Little Quincey's birth is one that quietly challenges the traditional monogamous patriarchal family structure in the same moment it seems to uphold it. Not only are the dichotomous power structures masculine/feminine,

maternal/paternal dissolved because of Dracula's ambiguous sex-gender role and Lucy's blood claim to the child, but so are imperial/peripheral, English/Other, and metropole/colony in ways that make the ending's meaning elusive. (Roth, Chambers, Walsh 371)

As all else in *Dracula*, Mina and her son bridge the gap between binaries, resulting in an ambivalent ideology—one that has radical potential and conservative impulses. The Crew of Light's return to Transylvania one year after Dracula's death suggests the impulsive need to return to the site of transgression rather than enforce borders (they are, after all, a cosmopolitan group comprised of an American and Dutchman). Binaries collapse and Stoker finally surrenders to ambiguity.

Conclusion: Sherlock Holmes's Domestic Masculinity

Although they are necessary complements to female detective novels, I have aimed to decenter canonical detective texts, such as the Sherlock Holmes stories by Arthur Conan Doyle (1892–1927), *Bleak House* by Charles Dickens (1853), *The Moonstone* (1868) by Wilkie Collins, and the Auguste Dupin stories (1841–44) by Edgar Allan Poe throughout this dissertation. My analysis of the female detective allows us to see the extent to which consolidated male detectives retain elements of the genre's early formulations. Despite scholarship's emphasis on masculine notions of ratiocination, I contend many popular male detectives retain vestiges of the female detective's contribution: specifically, the pleasure of investigation and the construction of alternate modes of gender. We must thus reconceive the trajectory of detective fiction and the overlooked, but crucial, discourses of gender with which it has always engaged. I therefore turn to Sherlock Holmes, to consider the intrinsic relationship between investigation and gender.

Although my argument focuses on the female detective's trajectory, its implications reveal the ideological nuance of what we traditionally consider the paragon of Victorian detective fiction and the cold-hearted logician at its center. Like the female detectives who came before him, Holmes's lineage finds its roots in the Gothic. According to Tamar Heller, Holmes emerges out of Wilkie Collins's transformation of the "Gothic into detective fiction" through *The Moonstone*, stating that "Collins left the task of developing that genre to those influenced by him—including his most important successor, Arthur Conan Doyle" (166). Like many female detectives I have examined in this dissertation, Holmes's self-serving nonconformity belies his position as unofficial police, a tension through which the Sherlock Holmes stories proffer ambivalent politics. Holmes's position in the periphery—inside and beyond the law—animates the Victorian reformations of domesticity he constructs in Baker Street after perceiving the London cosmopolis. His investigation of the transgressive elements of the city signals his investment in untraditional engagements and serve as the foundation for the cultivation of queerness within Baker Street.

The Sign of Four (1890), to illustrate, presents Holmes's negotiation of masculinity through the public and the domestic. The novella's complex politics manifest within this space of 221B Baker Street. Barry McCrea contends that "the legitimizing narrative clearinghouse for the tangled webs of metropolitan London is queer household" (85). 221B likewise must be additionally subject to analysis as a shared queer space in which, as Mary M. Alcaro's application of Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick's theory of homosociality points out, Holmes and Watson's domesticity appears increasingly spousal in *The Sign of Four*. Alcaro's emphasis on the domesticity of the Holmes-Watson relationship points to the larger significance of the queer household. However, previous readings have not identified the crucial link between the urban

and domestic space in which his activities outside permeate and constitute the inside. Baker Street Holmes centralizes his queerness, making the return of his urban spoils to his rooms necessary; this return to the queer space brings his pleasure to fruition. It is Holmes's criminal connoisseurship that is the critical factor that in fact queers the domestic space and from which the fraughtness of *The Sign of Four*'s politics stem, as Holmes challenges conventionality through this work but nevertheless remains complicit the London police. While both McCrea and Alcaro indicate the queerness at play in 221B Baker Street, this conclusion extends to an examination of Holmes's construction of a queer domestic space through the spoils of his pleasurable criminal engagements in the metropolis. *The Sign of Four* thus provides foundation for a radical rethinking of the ambivalent politics of Sherlock Holmes.

Throughout Conan Doyle's work, Holmes is dangerously immersed; always, there is the threat of his immersion being *too much*. The queer and affective impulses constructed by the female detective in the first half of the long nineteenth century are evident even in his character and, of course, he shares the careerism of characters like Mrs. Forrester, G, and Loveday Brooke. Like his female predecessors, Holmes's investigation allows for an engagement in the transgressive in order to construct a queer masculinity resistant to Victorian norms through the practice of pleasure. The work itself, Holmes insists, bears all the pleasure: "I am the last and highest court of appeal in detection. When police detectives Gregson, or Lestrade, or Athelney Jones, are out of their depths—which, by the way, is their normal state—the matter is laid before me," Holmes explains to Watson. "The work itself, *the pleasure of finding a field for my peculiar powers*, is my highest reward" (Conan Doyle, *The Sign of Four* 136–37 [emphasis mine]). According to this delineation, Holmes claims his purpose as a consulting detective—to

engage with criminality and to, crucially, problematize it—is neither to earn money nor apprehend criminals but to enjoy the art of problem-solving in its transgressive contexts.

Holmes designs 221B as the central space through which he cultivates his connoisseurship of the intangible and the tangible artifacts of the London cosmopolis. It is where he reads his clients and draws in the offenders when possible and catalogues London into documents and furnishings. It is the space in which he works, develops his engagements in criminality beyond the cosmopolis, and sustains his non-heteronormative kinship; it is, in short, the culminating space of his pleasure. Holmes does not maintain a structured distinction between his private domestic space and his public space of urban apprehension. This slippage is the crux of his queer masculinity: Not only does Holmes not attempt to distinguish Baker Street as a feminized heteronormative space, he instead calculatedly establishes it as homosocial, deeply imbued with the queer connotations of the transgressive engagements he cultivates throughout the London cosmopolis.

Holmes cultivates a distinctly homosocial space in which he sustains sexual and gendered ambiguity, rather than delimiting it by the bounds of the London cosmopolis. The absence of Holmes's retreat into the female-orientated space of the domestic highlights the queer nature of 221B Baker Street. Moreover, the bohemian lifestyle Watson evokes in his descriptions of Baker Street⁴⁷ significantly envelops their shared domestic space in a Decadent morality in contrast to Victorian traditionalism deeply imbued with queer implications. The shared rooms are, succinctly, the aesthetic manifestation of all of Holmes's peculiar engagements. Indeed, as we

⁴⁷ In "The Musgrave Ritual" (1893), Watson details the most overtly Decadent description of Baker Street's aestheticism: "when I find a man who keeps his cigars in the coal-scuttle, his tobacco in the toe end of a Persian slipper, and his unanswered correspondence transfixed by a jack-knife into the very centre of his wooden mantelpiece, then I begin to give myself virtuous airs" (Conan Doyle 95–96).

see in its nascent stages in *The Sign of Four*, Holmes's connoisseurship and investigative practices saturate the increasingly queer domestic space of 221B to the point of inseparability.

Holmes's drug use, introduced in this novella, further illustrates the centrality of pleasure—pleasure resituated within Baker Street. While Holmes does not present a stereotypically Decadent figure, echoes of the Decadent Orientalism he encounters in his investigation trace purposefully back into Baker Street, never more so than when Holmes reaches for his cocaine bottle from his Moroccan box. Framed throughout *The Sign of Four* as the creeping threat of reverse imperialism in Britain, the foreign—particularly the Oriental—is synonymous with the cosmopolitan sinister; it is the “wild, dark business” with which Watson juxtaposes against the “soothing ... glimpse of a tranquil English home” (Conan Doyle, *The Sign of Four* 182). Rather than divest London of the foreign, Holmes actively engages with it through his drug use. The scene which opens *The Sign of Four* highlights the trappings of a Decadent aesthete, Holmes's “long, white, nervous fingers” reaching for his syringe and cocaine bottle upon his mantle-piece (Conan Doyle, *The Sign of Four* 135). Listless and satisfied, Holmes explains to Watson that the injection of his seven percent solution replaces, when necessary, the pleasure of problem solving. The sensations triggered, according to Holmes, are alike:

‘I find [cocaine], however, so transcendently stimulating and clarifying to the mind that its secondary action is a matter of small moment. . . . Give me problems, give me work, give me the most abstruse cryptogram, or the most intricate analysis, and I am in my own proper atmosphere. I can dispense then with the artificial stimulants. But I abhor the dull routine of existence. I crave for mental exaltation.’ (Conan Doyle, *The Sign of Four* 136)

Though the novella seeks to excise this threat, the final loss of the Agra treasure in the Thames suggests a weak victory over the foreign: Though the criminals are dead or apprehended, the

treasure is dispersed across the river and settled into its foundation, irretrievable. Holmes's return to his cocaine bottle at the novel's conclusion, an action which bookends *The Sign of Four*, highlights the novella's resistance to vanquishing the foreign. Instead of the "wild, dark business" with which Watson juxtaposes against the "soothing ... glimpse of a tranquil English home," 221B is an extension of the "wild, dark business" (Conan Doyle 182).

It is furthermore notable that, before arriving at Baker Street, Holmes and Jones stop at the police station with the criminal Jonathan Small in tow to "report themselves ... along the way," making the somewhat inconvenient return to Baker Street all the more significant (Conan Doyle, *The Sign of Four* 228). Even Jones, who has gone along with Holmes since before their adventure on the Thames, states after Small concludes his recollection of the Agra treasure, "'Well, Holmes ... you are a man to be humoured, and we all know that you are a connoisseur of crime; but duty is duty, and I have gone rather far in doing what you and your friend asked me'" (Conan Doyle, *The Sign of Four* 251). Jones separates himself from Holmes on the basis of connoisseurship; the official police are merely lawmen whereas Holmes is an artist. The artistry of Holmes's connoisseurship is a crucial component of the perception he performs in his apprehension and cataloguing of the city. This artistry, which differentiates Holmes from the official police, furthermore is the framework through which queerness begins to prominently emerge.

Holmes and Watson's living space, 221B Baker Street, occupies a singular space in the imagination of readers and the Victorian canon, a location to which we return with nearly every Sherlock Holmes story. His rooms are, after all, the office through which he does all his business. The movement between the cosmopolitan and domestic throughout the novel is paramount to Holmes's cultivation of his alternative space in 221B Baker Street. Rather than utilizing the

private as a normative retreat, Holmes actively shapes Baker Street into an extension of the public space in *The Sign of Four*. While a return to the home may account for a significant portion of nineteenth-century literature, particularly after a disruptive foray into a criminal investigation in which gender is at stake, in *The Sign of Four* and indeed all Holmes stories, Baker Street represents something beyond the normative affirmation of gendered status quo that such a turn usually signals. His investigations cultivate the transgressive elements procured through his urban apprehension into the domestic space, collapsing his public and private spheres. This collapse yields complex political ramifications within the Holmes stories and, to a larger extent, detective fiction built on the foundation of Conan Doyle's work. The dichotomous Victorian structure of the public and the private falters in the construction of a queer space that borrows heavily from the public cosmopolis; the Holmes stories suggest the formation of queer masculinity necessitates the intersectional ambiguity of gender and sphere.

Finally, like his female predecessors, Holmes utilizes his career and relationship to the police to function as a liberal interlocuter. At once transgressive and protected by this relationship, Holmes easily dips between queer and respectable worlds in late-century London. For Graham Robb, "Holmes has a distinctly homosexual lifestyle" (264). In contrast to his contemporaries with similar queer engagements (e.g., *Dorian Gray*), I wish to emphasize the benefits of his association with the police and note the way it protects him. Holmes maintains a cunningly balanced position within and beyond the law through his connoisseurship, reaping the advantages of both sides: He may take what he desires from the cosmopolis without staining his reputation. His role as a consulting detective who often works with the police diminishes the threat to this character that his investigations represent but nevertheless provides a respectable rationale for such engagements in the first place. The purpose and the drive of the making of his

career, *in addition* to its enactment, is paramount: Much scholarship which has analyzed Holmes as rectifier considers foremost the progression to result—that is, the criminal apprehension or reinstatement of the status quo at the story’s conclusion—but has neglected the central role of pleasure to the Sherlock Holmes stories.

WORKS CITED

- Allen, Grant. *Miss Cayley's Adventures*. G. Richards, 1899.
- Arata, Stephen D. "The Occidental Tourist: *Dracula* and the Anxiety of Reverse Colonization." *Victorian Studies*, vol. 33, no. 4, 1990, pp. 621–45.
- Auerbach, Nina. *Our Vampires, Ourselves*. The U of Chicago P, 1995.
- Braddon, Mary Elizabeth. *Thou Art the Man*. 1894. Valancourt Books, 2008.
- Bredesen, Dagni. "Introduction: On the Trail of the First Professional Female Detectives in British Fiction." *The Female Detective. The First Female Detectives*, edited by Dagni Bredesen. Scholars' Facsimiles & Reprints, 2010, pp. i–xxviii.
- Clarke, Clare. *British Detective Fiction 1891–1901: The Successors to Sherlock Holmes*. Palgrave Macmillan, 2020.
- . *Late Victorian Crime Fiction in the Shadows of Sherlock*. Palgrave Macmillan, 2014.
- Conan Doyle, Arthur. "The Adventure of the Empty House." 1903. *The Return of Sherlock Holmes*, Penguin Publishing Group, 1982.
- . *The Sign of Four*. 1890. Berkley Publishing Corporation. 1975.
- . "The Musgrave Ritual." *The Complete Sherlock Holmes: Volume II*, Barnes & Noble Classics, 2003, pp. 461–75.
- Craft, Christopher. "Kiss Me with Those Red Lips: Gender and Inversion in Bram Stoker's *Dracula*." *Representations*, vol. 8, 1984, pp. 107–33.
- Crozier-De Rosa, Sharon. "Marie Corelli's British new woman: A threat to empire?" *History of the Family*, vol. 14, 2009, pp. 416–29.
- Galvan, Jill. "Occult Networks and the Legacy of the Indian Rebellion in Bram Stoker's *Dracula*." *History of Religions*, vol. 54, no.4, 2015, pp. 434–58.
- Hall, Catherine. *Civilising Subjects: Colony and Metropole in the English Imagination, 1830–1867*. U of Chicago P, 2002.
- Harvie, Christopher and H.C.G. Matthew. *Nineteenth-Century Britain: A Very Short Introduction*. Oxford UP, 2000.
- Heaney, Emma. *The New Woman: Literary Modernism, Queer Theory, and the Trans Feminine*. Northwestern UP, 2017.

- Hoeveler, Diane Long. *Gothic Feminism: The Professionalization of Gender from Charlotte Smith to the Brontës*. Penn State UP, 1998.
- Jusová, Iveta. *The New Woman and the Empire*. Ohio State UP, 2005.
- Kestner, Joseph A. *Sherlock's Sisters: The British Female Detective, 1864–1913*. Ashgate, 2013.
- Kipling, Rudyard. "White Man's Burden."
https://www.kiplingsociety.co.uk/poem/poems_burden.htm. Accessed 29 Apr. 2022.
- Kistler, Jordan. "Mesmeric rapport: The power of female sympathy in Bram Stoker's *Dracula*." *Journal of Victorian Culture*, 2008, vol. 23, no. 3, pp. 366–80.
- Langland, Elizabeth. *Nobody's Angels: Middle-Class Women and Domestic Ideology in Victorian Culture*, Cornell UP, 1995.
- Lootens, Tricia. *The Political Poetess: Victorian Femininity, Race, and the Legacy of Separate Spheres*. Princeton UP, 2017.
- Makonnen, Atesede. "Seeing Whiteness in the Nineteenth Century and Beyond." *Victorian Studies*, vol. 64, no. 2, 2022, pp. 254–58.
- McCrea, Barry. "Holmes at Home." *In the Company of Strangers: Family and Narrative in Dickens, Conan Doyle, Joyce, and Proust*. Columbia UP 2011, pp. 67–96.
- Miller, D.A. *The Novel and the Police*. U of California P, 1988.
- Miller, Elizabeth Carolyn. "Trouble with She-Dicks: Private Eyes and Public Women in 'The Adventures of Loveday Brooke, Lady Detective.'" *Victorian Literature and Culture*, vol. 33, no.1, 2005, pp. 47–65.
- O'Malley, Patrick R. *Catholicism, Sexual Deviance, and Victorian Gothic Culture*. Cambridge UP, 2006.
- Pirkis, Catherine Louisa. *The Experiences of Loveday Brooke, Lady Detective*. Hutchinson & Co., 1894.
- Poovey, Mary. *Uneven Developments: The Ideological Work of Gender in Mid-Victorian England*. U of Chicago P, 1988.
- Reitz, Caroline. *Detecting the Nation: Fictions of Detection and the Imperial Venture*. The Ohio State UP, 2004.
- Robb, Graham. "Heroes of Modern Life." *Strangers: Homosexual Love in the Nineteenth Century*, W. W. Norton & Company, 2005, pp. 253–70.

- Roth, Jenny, Lori Chambers and Dana Walsh. ““Your girls that you all love are mine already’: *Dracula*, Mormonism and New Women’s Degenerate Polygamy.” *Law, Culture, and the Humanities*, vol. 12, no. 2, 2016, pp. 353–72.
- Rutigliano, Olivia. “The Real Dracula Is a Detective Story—and an Incredibly Complex, Fascinating Mystery.” *CrimeReads*, 31 Oct. 2019. Accessed 15 Mar. 2022.
- Said, Edward. *Orientalism*. Vintage Books Edition, 1978.
- Senf, Carol A. “*Dracula*: Stoker’s Response to the New Woman.” *Victorian Studies*, vol. 26, no. 1, 1982, pp. 33–49.
- . “Introduction.” *The Heavenly Twins*, by Sarah Grand, U of Michigan P, 1993, pp. vii–xxxvii.
- Spivak, Gayatri Chakravorty. “Three Women’s Texts and a Critique of Imperialism.” *Critical Inquiry*, vol. 12, 1985, pp. 243–61.
- Stoker, Bram. *Dracula*. 2nd ed., Bedford/St. Martin’s, 2003.
- Stoler, Ann Laura. *Race and the Education of Desire: Foucault’s History of Sexuality and the Colonial Order of Things*. Duke UP, 1995.
- Talairach-Vielmas, Laurence. Introduction. *Thou Art the Man*, by Mary Elizabeth Braddon, Valancourt Books, 2008, pp. vii–xxv.
- Walkowitz, Judith R. *City of Dreadful Delight: Narratives of Sexual Danger in Late-Victorian London*. The U of Chicago P, 1992.

CONCLUSION

““You would have done great things in my profession, ma’am, if you had happened to be a man.””

— Wilkie Collins, *The Moonstone* (1868)

One of the most popular archetypes in fiction over the last two centuries, the detective figure is here to stay. Its evolution over time demonstrates not only the figure’s persistence but also its malleability in speaking to and resisting the times. While more research is published every year on the topic of the female detective, its emphasis on the police and late-period fiction prevents a thorough study. Reaching back to the long nineteenth century has shed light on the female detective’s birth, construction over time, and the innate entanglements with gender that she represents. There is still much to be done on this topic. Further consideration of the female detective’s unique role as an arbiter of nation and, additionally, the implications of her development before and alongside the canonical male detective are imperative. It is my hope that this dissertation has begun such conversations.

In this conclusion, I seek to account for the female detective’s ideological evolution by attending to historical cues throughout the long nineteenth century. Over the course of this dissertation, I have tracked the evolution of the female detective in nineteenth century British literature, demonstrating her progression from a subversive figure whose attempts to elude categories of gender sustain radical potential to, later, an enforcer of a gender binary. This shift in the figure—that is, the novels’ changing negotiations with gender subjectivity—may be attributed, upon closer inspection, to the historical developments over the long nineteenth century. In *Uneven Developments*, Mary Poovey contends that notions of biological sexuality,

sexual difference, and the social organization of sexual relations are social rather than natural, as assumed by Victorian ideology. These conceptions, she argues, “were intimately involved in the development of England’s characteristic social institutions, the organization of its most basic economic and legal relations, and in the rationalization of its imperial ambitions” (2). It is through this development that a gender binary was consolidated, which I have tracked through my analyses of female detective novels.

At the time the fledgling female detective emerged out of late eighteenth-century Gothic literature, Britain was busy redefining its values. While legal strictures enforced a gender binary in the second half of the eighteenth century, sexual and gender norms nevertheless were reconsidered in the Enlightenment’s aftermath. Revolutionary upset in the United States and France, combined with scientific discovery, led to such reexaminations and, as such, allowed authors to negotiate these changes. Therefore, at the same time that “the very being or legal existence of the woman is suspended during [] marriage” to be absorbed by her husband (qtd. in Hoeveler 6), womanhood was “persistently attacked, deconstructed, and dissolved” (Hoeveler 7). At this moment of disruption, “the Gothic illustrates that gender and sexuality are constantly negotiated” (Zigarovich 3). Diane Hoeveler states that:

The impulse to transmute rigid gender stereotypes was endemic throughout the late eighteenth and early nineteenth-centuries. The cultural attempt to create a new type of gendered being, a person who embodied the best stereotyped qualities of both sexes, recurs obsessively in the literature written by both men and women throughout this era. (Hoeveler 89–90)

Enlightenment gender norms were, at this time, malleable enough for the contemporaneous novels to affect the subjective space of gender even as the encroaching consolidation of women as moral beings who belong within the home began to manifest at the turn of the century.

As the eighteenth century turned into the nineteenth, capitalism's growth in Britain helped to reinforce a developing gender binary and its ascribed differences "came to dominate the functions of generation and genealogy" (Armstrong 19). Shifting from a largely agricultural nation to an industrial one, Britain saw its middle class emerge and, with it, separate spheres of work and gender:

At the same time that the economic pressure to work increased, the range of activities considered socially acceptable for middle-class women decreased; whereas in the 1790s, middle-class women had worked as jailors, plumbers, butchers, farmers, seedsmen, tailors, and saddlers, by the 1840s and the 1850s, dressmaking, millinery, and teaching far outstripped all other occupational activities. Of these occupations, private teaching was widely considered the most genteel, largely because the governess's work was so familiar to that of the female norm, the middle-class mother (Poovey 127)

This transition, simultaneous with the Gothic's depreciating position as a premiere form of popular literature, may speak to the lack of notable female detective literature in the first half of the century. Such revisions of women's work—and, indeed, the notion of work as a male enterprise for the middle class—likely hampered the development of the female detective at a time when male detectives in ephemeral literature such as penny dreadfuls began to materialize. Capitalism further enforced a gender binary through the notion of separate spheres in which domestic labor and moral instruction happening within the home (a core tenant ideal Victorian motherhood) was women's work whereas paid labor outside of the home was that of men

(Poovey 78). This mirrored the development of the individual, a subjective state which contrasts the fledgling female detective's shattered one in early Gothic novels. Amid the nation's shifting economics and gender ideology post-Enlightenment, the female detective took a back seat.

When the female detective returned in force in the mid-nineteenth century, Britain was again in a moment of upheaval. As I briefly consider in chapter two, reform acts expanded rights to working-class men and male property owners but not women (Harvie 72–73). Rising agitation for women's rights developed over this period, though did not reach the fervor that it would at the end of the century. And in the Indian Rebellion of 1857 incurred a wave of anxiety regarding Britain's imperial exploits, which were reflected in mid-century literature, particularly Wilkie Collins's detective novel *The Moonstone* (1868). Lauren Goodlad contends that while traditional scholarship argues Britain was “the scene of an insular and quiescent nation-bound culture,” authors like Collins were not only conscious of Britain's global position but engaged with it directly: “Opening in the aftermath of the Indian rebellion and closing with the emergence of the New Imperialism, this supposed age of equipoise was noteworthy for its reinvention of empire at a time when Britain was also reinventing itself as a mass democracy” (Goodlad 29). This era of negotiations within and beyond Britain's shores entrenched policing—domestically and abroad—as one of the core tenants of its democracy. The creation of the police detective rose out of this era of reform and rebellion, seeking to reign in change. The female detectives of this period exhibit a range of loyalty to this cause: In texts like the 1864 casebooks, the allegiance to institutional policing is palpable whereas Collins's amateur detectives stridently resist the state, identifying the corrupt nature of the law.

Prior to the *fin-de-siècle*, few examples of professional female detectives existed in British literature. The exceptions, which I outline in chapter two, represent a combination of

fantasy empowerment and the promotion of the Metropolitan Police. They—*The Female Detective* and *Revelations of a Lady Detective*—are early examples of what late-Victorian female police detective novels frequently achieve as police propaganda. In the last decade of the nineteenth century, the distinction between the amateur and the official police detective stabilizes. Whereas most of the nineteenth century saw female detectives who were solely amateur, the late period commonly presents police (and police-affiliated) detectives. I conceive of amateur detective fiction as the arena in which the early radical potential of the female detective tradition remains extant.

The question of womanhood—their roles, what defines a woman, and their position as face of the empire—was again taken up in the *fin-de-siècle*, a period of accelerated changes. Rather than the subversive figure she had been in the past, the female detective in the last decade of the century reflects a new gender ideology that embraces a binary in order to achieve individual power. One of the most significant advancements of this period was on the scientific front. Sherlock Holmes, who so heavily relies on anthropological classification in *The Sign of Four*, is the premiere late-Victorian detective not simply due to his popularity but also because of his application of “scientific vigor” (Vuohelainen vii) in his cases. Foucault reminds us that the Enlightenment, “which discovered the liberties, also invented the disciplines” (222). Indeed, the Enlightenment inaugurated the production of gender and racial types, making “human races an object of study, labouring to produce a schema out of the immense varieties of human life, within a context of relatively few physical variations” (Hall 17) that the nineteenth century embraced through modern science. Consequently, over the long nineteenth-century, the post-Enlightenment period began to develop English national identity as the British empire expanded and resisted revolutions’ mutual destruction of “the legitimacy of the divinely-ordained, hierarchal dynastic

realm (Anderson 6). The emergences of sexology, criminology, and degeneration theory synthesize in the 1890s to produce an era obsessed with taxonomy. Additional factors such as the British empire's employment of anthropological and biological racism, bolstered by Darwin's theory of evolution, converged to elevate binaries and distinctions among nuanced—and manmade—concepts of gender, sex, and race. English women's roles in this period served to elevate these distinctions. In particular, as I discuss in chapter four, the role of white womanhood as the face of Great Britain was a tool of the empire: "this image of woman was also critical to the image of the English national character, which helped legitimize both England's sense of moral superiority and the imperial ambitions this superiority underwrote" (Poovey 9). As such, it was important to define womanhood—otherwise, Britain's tenuous justifications of imperialism could crumble. Ann Stoler elaborates:

Bourgeois women in colony and metropole were cast as the custodians of morality, of their vulnerable men, and of national character. Parenting, and motherhood specifically, was a class obligation and a duty of empire. In short, the cultivations of bourgeois sensibilities were inextricable from the nationalist and racial underpinnings of them.

(135)

Stoler takes up Foucault's *History of Sexuality* with an attention to its analytical gaps in imperialism: "Why, for Foucault, colonial bodies never figure as a possible site of the articulation of nineteenth-century European sexuality?" She further considers the implications of his focus on the white bourgeoisie in the construction of self, sexuality and power. Stoler argues discourses of sexuality cannot be "charted in Europe alone" and that the racial and imperial discourses on sexuality do not solely affect the bourgeoisie in the colonies, but rather those in the

metropole as well (7). The tightening noose of sexual distinction emerged, in large part, out of the need to justify Britain's imperial interventions abroad.

The political upheaval of the *fin-de-siècle* threatened to upset these distinctions. The New Woman's feminist agitation, along with socialism and other late-Victorian radical ideologies and practices, presented the opportunity to "destabilize the ideal on which so much depended" (Poovey 52). The *fin-de-siècle* advanced radical potential in "a new politics of unlikely conjunction and conjecture according to which sexual dissidence, the struggle for animal rights . . . pro-suffrage activism and socialism could be each regarded as varieties of anti-imperialism" that held the "promise of ideal community, a utopian order of things" (Gandhi 7, 8). As we saw in chapter four, however, the New Woman was adopted by many of the female detective novelists and transformed into a tool of surveillance and binary enforcement.

The power women were afforded at this time, particularly their increasing integration into the police, at once pushed society to accept closer monitoring—a crucial maneuver during upheaval—and ensured that women could simultaneously break norms (e.g., having a career) while *performing the work of policing*. Female detective fiction, over the course of the nineteenth century, demonstrates this progression from subversive resistance to the consolidation of gender norms and taxonomical sexual difference that has widespread, community-based potential to the individuated rights attained on a case-by-case basis. The institutional binds of the police detective whose ideologies are wrapped up with surveillance and monitoring, anti-queer law, and imperialism, among other reactionary politics and practices, cannot hope to proffer the same gender exploration of the Gothic and sensation novels I consider in this dissertation.

This dissertation has sought to establish a trajectory of the female detective's development over the course of the long nineteenth century in order to demonstrate her early

presence in the British novel and, crucially, detection's inherent entanglement with dominant gender ideologies. This work's significance, however, is not only to establish this literary history but to highlight the exchanges of power within that history as well as authors' consistent interests in examining, subverting, and propping up categories of gender. As many of these texts were written by women or for predominantly for female audiences, and, furthermore, due to the nuanced exploration of gender, these novels have largely been unconsidered in this light. By attending to the nineteenth-century female detective in British literature, we may more fully understand the era's broader relations between gender, queer subjectivity, and policing.

WORKS CITED

- Collins, Wilkie. *The Moonstone*. 1868. Dover Publications, Inc., 2002.
- Foucault, Michel. *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison*. Vintage Books, 1979.
- Gandhi, Leela. *Affective Communities: Anticolonial Thought, Fin-de-Siècle Radicalism, and the Politics of Friendship*. Duke UP, 2006.
- Goodlad, Lauren M.E. *The Victorian Geopolitical Aesthetic: Realism, Sovereignty, and Transnational Experience*. Oxford UP, 2015.
- Hall, Catherine. *Civilising Subjects: Colony and Metropole in the English Imagination, 1830–1867*. U of Chicago P, 2002.
- Harvie, Christopher and H.C.G. Matthew. *Nineteenth-Century Britain: A Very Short Introduction*. Oxford UP, 2000.
- Hoeveler, Diane Long. *Gothic Feminism: The Professionalization of Gender from Charlotte Smith to the Brontës*. Penn State UP, 1998.
- Poovey, Mary. *Uneven Developments: The Ideological Work of Gender in Mid-Victorian England*. U of Chicago P, 1988.
- Stoler, Ann Laura. *Race and the Education of Desire: Foucault's History of Sexuality and the Colonial Order of Things*. Duke UP, 1995.
- Vuohelainen, Minna. Introduction. *The Complete Judith Lee Stories*, by Richard Marsh, Valancourt Books, 2016, pp. vii–xxv.
- Zigarovich, Jolene. "Introduction: Transing the Gothic." *TransGothic in Literature and Culture*, edited by Jolene Zigarovich, Routledge, 2018, pp. 1–22.
- . "Transgothic Desire in Charlotte Dacre's *Zofloya*." *TransGothic in Literature and Culture*, edited by Jolene Zigarovich, Routledge, 2018, pp. 77–96.