

**Women Writers
and Detectives in
Nineteenth-Century
Crime Fiction**

**The Mothers of the
Mystery Genre**

Lucy Sussex

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The Mothers of the Mystery Genre

Lucy Sussex

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For Stephen Knight

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Contents

<i>List of Illustrations</i>	viii
<i>Foreword by Val McDermid</i>	ix
<i>Acknowledgements</i>	xi
Introduction: Look for the Women	1
1 'Origins are Multifarious and Unclean!': The Beginnings of Crime Fiction	6
2 Mrs Radcliffe as Conan Doyle?	26
3 'A Most Preposterous Organ of Wonder': Catherine Crowe	45
4 'I'm a Thief-Taker, Young Lady'	64
5 Getting Away with Murder: Mary Braddon	81
6 'Dead! And ... Never Called Me Mother': Ellen (Mrs Henry) Wood	101
7 The (Feminine) Eye of the Law: Mary Helena Fortune	120
8 A Jill-of-All-Writing-Trades: Metta Victoria Fuller Victor ('Seeley Register')	142
9 The Art of Murder: Anna Katharine Green	164
Conclusion: 'She Has Got a Murderess in Manuscript in her Bedroom'	183
<i>A Timeline of Early True Crime and its Fictions</i>	186
<i>Bibliography</i>	191
<i>Index</i>	206

List of Illustrations

1.1	<i>Newgate Calendar</i> (1780) depicting its female readership as the ideal, genteel, admonitory mother	9
1.2	The murder of Maria Marten caused a multimedia frenzy	16
2.1	Anna Dorothea Therbusch's 1777 self-portrait	27
2.2	Fanny Trollope, depicted as demure and feminine by Auguste Hervieu	38
3.1	The sensational murder scene from Catherine Crowe's <i>Lilly Dawson</i>	58
4.1	Harriet Prescott Spofford, the first American woman to write detective fiction	69
4.2	The titlepage of <i>Revelations of a Lady Detective</i>	73
5.1	Caricature of Mary Braddon from <i>Punch</i>	84
6.1	Ellen (Mrs Henry) Wood	104
7.1	The extensive police record of George Fortune	133
8.1	Metta Victor in 1857	143
9.1	Anna Katharine Green	172

Foreword

Val McDermid

These days, everybody wants to know about their ancestors. There are TV programmes, magazines and websites all dedicated to teasing out the mysteries of our lineage. As with life, so it is with literature. As a writer, I've always believed we need to have a firm grasp of what our predecessors have achieved so we can better see the way forward; as a reader, I take pleasure in identifying how writers have internalized their influences and applied the lessons of the past to their own work.

But as is often the way with women's history, so much of the past has been a blank page for us crime writers. The significance of contemporary women crime writers is inescapable – we share equal prominence in the bestseller lists with our male counterparts and equal esteem from our readers. And of course, whenever the so-called Golden Age of detective fiction is mentioned, the names associated with it are female – Agatha Christie, Dorothy L. Sayers, Margery Allingham, Ngaio Marsh. But try going further back than that, try finding the founding mothers of the genre to set alongside the founding fathers and, pretty soon, you're running into a brick wall.

If pushed, and sufficiently well versed in the history of the genre, we might have come up with Mary Roberts Rinehart, queen of the 'Had I but known' school of foreshadowing, and possibly Anna Katharine Green, author of the runaway bestseller *The Leavenworth Case*. Australians might have added Ellen Davitt, but only because of the awards given in her name by the Sisters in Crime organization. But beyond those vague namechecks, nothing. Nobody could be blamed for thinking women had avoided the genre altogether.

For anyone with even the faintest knowledge of women's place in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, it wouldn't seem an unreasonable assumption. This was an era when the public sphere was almost exclusively male. Women were either entombed in domesticity, engaged in menial work or occupied in satisfying the less savoury appetites of men with money to pay for their pleasure. They certainly were neither lawyers nor members of the fledgling police forces. So if we are to write about what we know about, we women would seem to have been automatically disqualified from the early flowering of the genre.

But writers have never stuck to that narrow recipe. From the earliest exemplars of the novel, we've leapt chasms of ignorance to write about

places and subjects and occupations we have no direct knowledge of. It's called imagination, and the reason we get away with it is that human beings act in pretty much the same way whether they're merchant bankers or frontiersmen. Human relations are identical, whether you're a duchess or a dumpster diver.

That conviction now has solid evidence to back it up. We owe a huge debt of gratitude to Lucy Sussex for this fascinating excursion into crime fiction's female line of descent. She has exhumed the buried history of the distaff side of the genre for our pleasure. It's as good a tale as those early detective novels, and it has a cast of characters that wouldn't be out of place in one of my own novels. This is a book for writers and readers alike, a joy for anyone who loves a mystery.

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Introduction: Look for the Women

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

'Cherchez la femme' is an oft-repeated phrase in mystery and detective fiction. It first appeared in Alexandre Dumas' 1854–7 novel *Les Mohicans de Paris* as 'Cherchons la femme', words spoken by M. Jackal, a police detective. The subsequent popular listings could fill a book: they range from James Ellroy's *The Black Dahlia* to Churchy La Femme in the comic *Pogo*. Typically the phrase has a function. It signals the entry of a female character – into a narrative previously masculine in content. The (male) detective has not solved a mystery, and the answer lies with a woman. 'Cherchez la femme', the search for her, re-genders the text.

The text under consideration in this book, to which the phrase 'cherchez la femme' will be applied, is the corpus of early crime and detective fiction. Today there is no need to search for women in today's crime fiction, and any reader can list examples: 'P. D. James, Sara Paretsky, Patricia Cornwell, etc. etc.' For the early twentieth century, the so-called Golden Age, Agatha Christie and Dorothy Sayers are famous. Yet for the nineteenth century, the period where crime fiction originated, readers will generally look blank. 'Edgar Allan Poe, Wilkie Collins, Conan Doyle ... but were there any women writers of crime, so far back?'

Generally, American Anna Katharine Green, author of the bestselling novel *The Leavenworth Case* (1878), has been cited as the first woman to venture into the detective genre. Yet bibliographies such as Allen J. Hubin's definitive *Crime Fiction* (1980 and subsequent updated editions) show Green was not isolated, and had female predecessors. To cite just one example, 'Seeley Regester's' 1866 *The Dead Letter* is the first

2 Women Writers and Detectives

American detective novel – irrespective of auctorial gender. Behind the pseudonym was New York writer and mother of nine Metta Victor.

If Green was not *the* founding mother of detective fiction, she is more properly regarded as an important founding femme, amongst various nineteenth-century and even eighteenth-century (m)others. The purpose of this book is to find them, and in so doing show that early detective writing was as much a feminine as it was a masculine domain, one that women helped significantly to create.

To do so is to revise both popular and critical accounts of crime fiction's origins. The popular view cites Poe in the 1840s, as the 'first' detective writer, of classic short stories. He was followed by Wilkie Collins with *The Woman in White* (1860) and *The Moonstone* (1868), a mystery and a detective novel respectively. In the late 1880s appeared Conan Doyle and his first Sherlock Holmes tales – just at the time when detective fiction became identifiable as a popular and wide-spread publishing category. By 1900 it had evolved into a literary genre, with its own set of conventions and codes.

This popular history of crime fiction's origins, with its 20-year intervals between the three canonical, founding fathers, is a progression that resembles three generations, a genealogy with no apparent maternal input. More specialist works, for the critics and the crime buffs, such as Ian Ousby's 1976 *Bloodhounds of Heaven: the Detective in English Fiction from Godwin to Doyle*, also tend to present a progressive model of origin, though they are inclusive of other, less famous names. The crime buff history usually begins with *Caleb Williams* (1794) by William Godwin, husband of Mary Wollstonecroft and father of Mary Shelley. His novel was at its publication and for decades afterwards variously categorized as a political or Gothic novel. Only retrospectively was it noticed that the title character was an amateur detective, perhaps the first in an English novel, a servant who suspects his master of murder. Godwin is followed by other less familiar names, not strictly Anglophone: Émile Gaboriau (1832–73), the most important French detective writer of the nineteenth century, who wrote the first *romans policiers* (police novels), from the 1860s. The genealogy is also not confined to the Northern hemisphere, with inclusion of the international bestseller *The Mystery of a Hansom Cab* (1886) by the antipodean Fergus Hume – which immediately preceded the publication of the first Sherlock Holmes stories. Yet the focus is similarly masculinist, with women authors being mentioned but not as a major focus of interest, incidental to this *history*.

Attempts at redressing this neglect have been made. Some early women writers of crime are included in feminist surveys such as Dilys

Winn's *Murderess Ink* (1979), Kathleen Gregory Klein's *Great Women Mystery Writers* (1994) and Jessica Mann's *Deadlier than the Male* (1981). These studies, however, list only the well-known figures, such as Green, and even then the discussion is brief. It is the early women fictional detectives, rather than the writers, who have received more attention, with works such as Klein's *The Woman Detective: Gender and Genre* (1995) and Joseph Kestner's *Sherlock's Sisters: the British Female Detective, 1864–1983* (2003).

Thus the female line of crime writing has never been traced back to its origins. An extensive examination of its founding mothers, their lives and literary crimes is long overdue. Without such a study, as presented here, our understanding of early crime writing is incomplete. In other areas of literature, such as the novel, and science fiction, the role of its early women has been known for decades. That something similar has not been done for crime is puzzling, given the genre's popularity and substantial female fan base.

A major problem with research is that the corpus of early crime fiction is vast. Hubin lists approximately 6000 titles published between 1800 and 1900. This figure refers only to novels published in English, although even in its early years crime writing was multinational. French writers were particularly active – and were read by their English-speaking counterparts. Moreover, the nineteenth century was a golden era for fiction journals, in which crime figured strongly, either in short story form or as serializations. Much of the crime writing found in journals of the period remains unexamined, although Poe, Collins and Conan Doyle all began their crime-writing careers with short magazine stories. Their periodical writings were reprinted in book form; but numerous other crime writers were not so lucky. Consider, for instance, the Canadian-Australian Mary Fortune (c. 1833–1909). She was the author of one published book but over 500 detective stories in magazines. Most were part of 'The Detective's Album', the longest-running early detective series worldwide, which she wrote for 40 years, from 1868 to 1908.

This study cannot claim to be utterly comprehensive, as in the course of research many early women crime authors were discovered, far more than there was space to discuss. Limits had to be imposed – thus the focus is on writers who had influence or who were significant innovators. Their many female followers deserve further attention. Also during research it became clear that the figure of the woman detective was far older and more varied than has been previously recognized. The female sleuth was a trope that expressed anxieties about women's

changing roles, and parallels could be drawn with the lives of the authors themselves. Both writer woman and woman written were intertwined.

There are pitfalls in studying the early history of a genre. Notable is the problem of definition – when does a crime story become generic crime fiction? Locating early examples of a genre can be a process of hair-splitting definitions, in which the final product is compared to its possibly dubious antecedents, in search of resemblances. Agatha Christie and Sara Paretsky can be categorically described as women detective writers; but can this also be said as easily of the nineteenth century's Ellen Wood or Caroline Clive? Other questions to bedevil the researcher into the genre's history include: When is a mystery not a mystery? Is a detective story without a detective a detective story?

Second is the problem of retrospective evaluation, of assessing early crime texts when informed by the more sophisticated works produced subsequently. A narrative may have been much admired in its time, but we will find its mystery 'obvious'. Therefore, early crime fiction will be discussed less in terms of literary merit (which is not necessarily an absolute) but in terms of its context, historical, social and political. It is not the intent to judge the pioneering writers as belonging to either good or bad literature, but by the effect they had. An influential text may now seem unmitigated pulp; or a writer dismissed as a hack in their lifetime can unexpectedly delight the modern reader. Such is the nature of literary reputations, which in crime fiction runs the gamut from pulp to works indistinguishable from 'high' literature. Part of the intent of the book is to show it was ever the case.

Yet, in talking about women writers of the preceding centuries, the lives they led are also important. The mothers of crime were constrained by their gender, in ways that in modern Western society seem unimaginable. They had limited access to education, and divorce, no contraception, and were denied access to most employment outside the menial and the seedy. Moreover, the professions most informative about crime matter, the law and the police, were closed to them. Nonetheless, the women in this book became successful writers. They were not scared of the racy or 'indelicate' subject matter of crime; with most, their knowledge of crime arose from personal experience. Some had lawyers for husbands or fathers; in some cases a close male relation skirting or on the wrong side of the law. Only one writer was, as far as is known, ever wanted by the police; yet in all cases their subject matter of criminal transgression echoed to some degree a personal revolt against Victorian notions of correct female behaviour. It may seem something of a miracle

that they wrote at all; but they also made important contributions to an emerging genre.

Whodunnit? Whose work helped shape and define the genre of crime fiction during the crucial years of its formation and codification? The usual suspects are Messrs Poe, Collins and Conan Doyle, with Anna Katharine Green as a belated founding foremother. But this book does not begin with Green, instead she ends it, behind a parade of unusual suspects in bonnets and crinolines. They include a Gothic novelist, a spiritualist, the wife of a policeman, a hunchback, an actress – and other women quite unexceptional except for their vivid imaginations. There are rather a lot of them.

'Cherchons la femme?'

No, *'Cherchons les femmes!'*

1

'Origins are Multifarious and Unclean!': The Beginnings of Crime Fiction

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

Janet Lafler

The beginning of what is variously termed crime/mystery/detective fiction is popularly regarded as monogenetic, the achievement of a single writer. As if depicted in a neoclassical portrait, the genre emerges in 1841, fully formed like the goddess Athena, from out of the febrile imagination of Edgar Allan Poe. 'The Murders in the Rue Morgue' was followed by 'The Mystery of Marie Roget' (1842) and 'The Purloined Letter' (1844), all starring the investigative figure of Chevalier Dupin.

Certainly Poe's three short stories fit the classic definition of crime writing, which can be as loosely expressed as: marked by the subject matter of crime and its solution; structured around the gradual revelation of criminous information (the mystery) of which detective fiction is a refinement; focussed on the detective as ratiocinator of the narrative. But Poe is not the sole point of origin. Monogenesis is generally not associated in nature with complex biological systems; and neither should it be associated with so complex an entity as the literary genre of crime fiction, with its multitude of creators and consumers.

It is more useful to take a polygenetic approach to the story of crime fiction's origins and its development in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. A various set of 'multifarious' origins can be posited for the detective genre, in which the literary evolution of a new type of writing takes place less via an individual genius than collectively,

even organically. Here, the school of literary criticism known as Russian formalism can be used, with its case for literary genres as systems, whose interaction forms new systems, new genres. These interactions took place largely in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, as elements from pre-existing and disparate literary genres promiscuously intermingled.

The development of the genre was not a straightforward progression. It was initially amorphous, lacking definition and even a name. The writers were numerous and usually non-canonical, even outright hacks. They worked largely in isolation and were geographically widespread. Thus crime fiction was a collectively developed construct. The codification of genre – not that anybody understood it as such – involved much trial and error over decades. Synchronicity often occurred, but there also existed a surprisingly effective dialogue of mutual influence, even across great distances: works such as Poe's were very quickly reprinted/translated/pirated in various literary markets.

Crime fiction's elements or components can be identified, as well as the conditions which caused them to coalesce. The first and oldest element is content, one of its most distinctive features. Crime is immemorial, present in oral and written storytelling from the beginnings of narrative. Genesis contains the murder of Abel by Cain, and legends or folktales are frequently violent. Yet these ancient stories are not otherwise recognizable as crime fiction. Plots are episodic, the story of an adventure rather than an investigation. There is no mystery as such, the story having a folk tradition so familiar the audience knows automatically 'whodunnit'. Fact and the fantastic are mingled, with gods and monsters appearing. And there is nothing resembling a detective.

The specialization that we now term 'true crime' – narratives of specific, recent misdemeanours – would not appear for centuries. With the development of the printing press from the fifteenth century and increased literacy, crime narratives became more topical. They also became a commodity which usually took the form of chapbooks, pamphlets and broadsheets, typically commemorating notorious cases in ballad and prose. Some were last words from the gallows, being (purportedly) confessions to prison chaplains, or the latter's moralistic sermons. Their relationship to their subjects was so close that they were often sold at public executions, like ghoulish programme notes. Judicial punishment as a spectacle had long had visceral entertainment value, a display of power and terror. Now a crime consumer like Samuel Pepys could attend an execution and buy a written souvenir, a murder ballad to add to his library.

Interestingly, co-existent with this true crime discourse was a fictional analogue: the picaresque, featuring likeable rogues. This literary form originated in sixteenth-century Spain, the word 'pícaro' itself being Spanish for knave. Some famous examples were Le Sage's *Gil Blas* (1715–35) and Defoe's *Moll Flanders* (1722). However, while the content of the picaresque was certainly criminal, its structure was biographical and episodic. The mystery narrative was absent, and the focus was on the villain. In subject matter the picaresque is crime, but other generic similarities are lacking.

The commodification of true crime texts was initially disorganized. In the eighteenth century private collections – such as Pepys' – became public, the work of a printer/publisher. Accounts of famous criminal trials were compiled and issued in book form, such as François Gayot de Pitaval's multi-volume *Causes Célèbres et Intéressants* (1735–9), which included the story of Martin Guerre. A parallel development in English was the *Newgate Calendar* (1728), which took its title from London's Newgate prison and its Calendar, that is, a list of prisoners awaiting trial. Pitaval and the *Newgate Calendar* were hugely popular, being reprinted or revised throughout the next two centuries, with new and updated villains (Figure 1.1).

One of the most famous cases, first appearing in the 1773 *Newgate Calendar*, was Eugene Aram. How his story was presented to the reader is indicative of how contemporary writers made use of crime matter: murderers' lives as dire examples, a narrative of moral decay. The narrative structure is fixed in the biographical, a rogue's progress from birth to death, usually on the gallows. So the *Newgate Calendar's* story of Aram begins by noting his birth in Yorkshire, 1704. He was a child prodigy, but with little chance of advancement worked as a schoolteacher. In 1745 he and Richard Houseman killed a Knaresborough neighbour, Daniel Clarke, the motive being money. The body was concealed and Clarke's disappearance barely investigated, despite some suspicious circumstances. Aram left Yorkshire, and also his wife. Fourteen years later, skeletal remains were found near Knaresborough, apparently recent. Clarke was recalled – and also hints dropped by Aram's deserted wife. Houseman, summoned to a coronial inquest, declared the bones were not Clarke's. He was so certain that he effectively implicated himself in the murder. To save himself, Houseman turned King's evidence. Aram was tried, convicted and hanged.

To a modern crime reader the *Calendar* does not fully exploit the inherent possibilities of the Aram story. Its narrative is simply chronological, without the withholding of crucial information for the sake of



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Figure 1.1 This edition of the *Newgate Calendar* (1780) depicts its female readership as the ideal, genteel, admonitory mother. In the background figure a hanged corpse, and a neoclassical image of Justice, typically depicted as female. The reality was that justice was administered by males exclusively, and the appeal of the *Calendar* cut across class, with women and men consuming its content salaciously.

suspense typical of the detective form. Another significant difference is the presence of the supernatural – as it is in much of the *Newgate Calendar*, in Christian form. The murdered make ghostly reappearance, or testify via superstitious forensics: Houseman was forced to handle the Knaresborough bones, a trial by ordeal. The belief was that a corpse would bleed to show its murderer – as happens in Shakespeare’s *Richard III*. Such is forensically unlikely, but it provided a means of terrifying a felon into confession. Even though Houseman had no reason to fear these bones, he still was sufficiently unnerved to implicate himself in the Clarke murder.

The circumstances that led to Aram’s conviction were not an investigation, rather a series of accidents in which divine intervention could be read. God acted as the detective. And indeed, in crime compilations

such as John Reynold's 1621 *The Triumph of God's Revenge, against the Crying, and Execrable Sinne of Murther*, as William Godwin recalled, 'the beam of the eye of Omniscience was represented as perpetually pursuing the guilty, and laying open his most hidden retreats to the light of day' (340).

By the end of the eighteenth century this attitude began to change, as the effects of the Enlightenment were felt, with its new emphasis on rationalism and perceptions of human, rather than divine, morality. Wrongdoing would no longer be simply ascribed to the devil, nor punishment be gratuitously brutal, a mundane version of the Last Judgement in which malefactors were tortured to death in front of a keen audience. Belief in the ultimate responsibility for detecting crime was moving from the sacred to the secular. Law and the supernatural were increasingly separated, leaving space for rationality or ratiocination to uncover criminals, with human agents of justice rather than the impersonal divine.

The genre of crime writing is philosophically a child of the Enlightenment with its enquiring zeitgeist, but practically also of an increasing sophistication in the responses to crime. During the eighteenth century the legal systems of Western Europe, England and its colonies underwent a major process of reform, as detailed by legal historians such as J. M. Beattie and John Langbein. To demonstrate these changes, consider again the case of Eugene Aram. He conducted his own defence. Nowhere in his *Newgate* narrative are lawyers mentioned, because for felonies the courtroom functioned without them. The victim of the crime or a relative could prosecute the offence, the accused respond. In this ancient, inquisitorial, model of justice, the judge controlled the trial, an active figure quizzing the accused and witnesses alike. In Europe the judge also had the option of torture as a tool of investigation, something that in the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries was gradually abolished. As Langbein has noted in his *Torture and the Law of Proof*, laws of evidence arose, through which criminal guilt was judiciously evaluated rather than imposed.

Part of this process involved the emerging science of forensics. A quarter century after the Aram trial, in Kirkudbrightshire, Scotland, the 1786 case of William Richardson was resolved by physical evidence. A young pregnant woman was murdered, with footprints being left in the soft soil of the crime scene. The impression was compared with the boots of the men attending the funeral: one pair matched perfectly and identified the murderer (Wills 252–7).

As the legal system changed, so did the narratives deriving from it, both true crime and fiction. The structure of the *Newgate Calendar's* Aram is biographical. It lacks what we know as generic crime narrative form: the discovery of a murder, followed by investigation into whodunnit, the discovery of the culprit and the motive. Two narratives are interwoven: the story of the crime, in the past, which is gradually uncovered by the story of the investigation, in the present. The text is structured as a puzzle, with information withheld or concealed from the reader in a fictional game of suspense and mystery, until the two plots merge at the conclusion, becoming one.

This narrative structure begins to appear in the eighteenth century, a dramatic change in the mode by which crime was told and retold. However, its precise originating system is a little unclear. Karen Halttunen has argued in *Murder Most Foul* that it arises from contemporary courtroom reforms, specifically the rise of the adversarial system in England and its colonies, the now familiar roles of defence vs prosecution lawyers. When lawyers came to dominate court proceedings, legal combat ensued, and also a theatre of narrative, the different accounts of how a crime had occurred.

It is certainly true that the inquisitorial system meant trials that were brief and undramatic, at worst what Langbein calls an 'unstructured bicker' (*The Origins of Adversary Criminal Trial* 259). In contrast the adversarial system placed emphasis on lawyers' storytelling abilities, with the jury and judge as a *tabula rasa* audience. Whether or not it created a new narrative form is arguable. Halttunen finds the first instance of what she terms 'the cultural construction of murder-as-mystery' in a 1786 American collection of execution sermons, *God Admonishing His People of Their Duty*, and the case of Hannah Ocuish, a 12-year-old Connecticut murderer (92). That same decade the first celebrity defence lawyer, William Garrow, began appearing in London courts. However, while the adversarial system arose in the 1730s, its penetration was gradual, in England only becoming obligatory with the Prisoners Counsel Act of 1836. Previously the presence of lawyers was by no means guaranteed, and depended upon the affluence of the accused.

Another difficulty with Halttunen's argument is that while modern crime fiction is well nigh universal, the adversarial system is not. Consider the case of Europe, specifically France and the German/Austrian states. Here, while prosecution and defence lawyers appear in the court, judges retain their active role, with the figure of the examining or investigative magistrate. The latter is probably most familiar to crime readers from the work of Georges Simenon, who has Inspector

Maigret but also the *jugé d'instruction*. Fiction presenting murder as a mystery appears in Europe from the 1820s, despite the less adversarial role of the lawyers. Examples include E. T. A. Hoffmann's 1820 'Mademoiselle de Scudéry', a fable of serial killings set in the Paris of Louis XIV; and Steen Steenson Blicher's 1829 'The Rector of Veilbye', a retelling of a murder case from the seventeenth century that is regarded as the first Danish crime novel(1a).

In any case, crime narrative form has an alternate source: newspaper reportage. Eighteenth-century newspapers varied between the staid and the sensational, some featuring foreign wars and shipping news; others finding gory murders far less censorable and contentious than contemporary politics. With crime, the case would be reported in the papers *as it happened*: a real-time process beginning with the discovery of a body, followed by the inquest, investigation, the discovery of the culprit, etc. Thus the temporal dislocation typical of the crime narrative appears and gains cultural familiarity. It can be seen, for example, emerging in Henry Fielding's 1752 newspaper, the *Covent-Garden Journal*. Fielding was a novelist, the author of *Tom Jones*, but also a London magistrate.

Now his court provided ready copy for his newspaper. In cases such as the highway robbery and murder of George Carey, Fielding ensured a continuing *Crimestoppers* coverage of events during late January and early February 1752, including descriptions of those wanted for the crime, rewards and his pre-trial (examinations of suspects). A serialized narrative of a crime and the judicial response was thus presented in instalments which the reader could follow, vicariously participating in a crime as it unfolded.

One case reported in the *Journal* shows rational deduction solving a crime, and would make a perfect detective short story. A trunk was stolen from a coach, containing papers vital to the East India Company and due to be sent on a ship sailing the next day. Fielding advised that the trunk be cried for (advertised). He also summoned Mr Bath, 'an old and experienced Thief-taker' – something which translates in our terms as bounty hunter/proto-detective, and survives in modern English usage for a policeman with 'high arrest rates but slightly dubious methods' (Horton 20).

The trunk had been last seen at then semi-rural Peckham, where Bath went:

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

off their Booty, as the Trunk was very large, but would endeavour to conceal it in some place till the Evening, he bethought himself of searching all the Ditches in the adjacent Fields, in one of which the lost Goods were soon found *in statu quo*. (*Covent-Garden Journal* 21 January 1752: 2)

Because the crime had been cried, when Bath and his companions carried the trunk to the nearest inn, they were immediately arrested for theft. After some difficulty they extricated themselves and the trunk departed to the East Indies as originally scheduled. On 25 January the *Covent-Garden Journal* proudly reported the thief-taker's reward (2).

The new crime narrative mode had initially a small audience. In 1783 there was 'one newspaper for every 300 inhabitants of the British Isles' (Smith 95). The literate population was limited, and production and postage costs put newspapers beyond the reach of the less than affluent. Yet it is indicative of the thirst for news that popular meeting places such as coffee-houses offered papers free to their customers. The Industrial Revolution's innovations in the areas of printing and paper-making made newspapers more profitable, and published more frequently. Gradually restrictions on the press, such as the British stamp tax, which had effectively acted to suppress revolutionary publications, were reduced. The arrival of the railway and the telegraph in the 1830s–1840s improved distribution and made communications more rapid. The news became hotter, costs went down and the papers reached a lower, and newly literate socio-economic.

Crime would become a staple of the popular press, particularly in mass-circulation papers such as the *British News of the World* (1843). They had strong competition, from pamphlets of trial proceedings, but also penny or halfpenny murder broadsheets, such as those published by James Catnach. These gory ephemera were sold by hawkers nicknamed Death Hunters and achieved extraordinary sales: the 1840 case of François Courvoisier sold over a million copies, and nine years later Maria and Frederick Manning sold two million (Mayhew 1: 284).

How much the press was dependent upon crime reporting is shown by one of the more severe penalties French courts of the 1830s–1840s could impose on a wayward newspaper: to prohibit reportage of trials, 'which effectively deprived it of much of its potential copy' (Smith 112). However, further specialization had already occurred, as with the French *Gazette des Tribunaux*, a daily and topical Pitaval, founded in the 1820s (and of such influence as to be cited by Poe in 'The Murders in the Rue Morgue'). An English example, John Cleave's *Weekly Police*

Gazette (1834), mingled radical politics and crime so successfully it had a circulation of over 20,000 copies a week.

The newspaper whodunnit, whose potential Fielding had seen, had by the early nineteenth century become truly sensational: the reader would be first caught with the hookline of morbid curiosity, and then be increasingly involved in a true crime puzzle. The comment below comes from 1862, but is applicable much earlier:

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

Consider the case of François Courvoisier. This 1840 murder mystery comprised a genuine early Victorian media frenzy, reported both in the newspapers and soon after in book form, in *Chronicles of Crime; or, the New Newgate Calendar* (1841), by the pseudonymous 'Camden Pelham'. Both showed the murder mystery narrative model well established just prior to the publication of 'The Murders in the Rue Morgue'. Indeed, 'Pelham's' account gives a detailed and at times suspenseful description of the police investigation, something unknown in the old *Calendar*.

As reported in *The Times*, the case began on 7 May, when Lord William Russell was found in bed, with his throat cut. Valuables were missing, indicating a burglary, yet the three servants in the house had heard nothing. 'No clue is at present obtained of any person being implicated in the transaction', wrote *The Times*, before reporting the inquest, which occurred on the same day (7 May 140: 5). Here witnesses made depositions. The first real clue came from a police inspector, who opined that a door to the house had been forced *from the inside*; another policeman noted that a chisel he had found in a box belonging to the one male servant, a valet, matched marks on the door. The latter was questioned, without result, and the inquest jury's verdict was: wilful murder by someone as yet unknown. So ended the first day of coverage.

On 8 May, *The Times* had no fresh news, but made mention of the case, keeping interest warm. Next day a longer item appeared, noting crowds of spectators as Russell's house was exhaustively searched. Here, more definitely, the finger was pointed:

It is said that Courvoisier, the valet, on being told of the search which was making, manifested the greatest anxiety with respect to a

watercloset attached to the back parlour, and it was stated during the day that in this watercloset several articles of the missing property were found. (8 May 1840: 5)

On 11 May the paper stated that the murder had 'to a considerable extent' been successfully fixed 'upon the party to whom suspicion pointed from the first' (11 May 1840: 5). The 14–15 May issues continued the story, reporting on the victim's funeral. The 16 May report declared that Courvoisier still protested his innocence, though it added hopefully: 'It is, however, very currently stated in the neighbourhood that some article of attire belonging to Courvoisier has been found, which is spotted with blood' (16 May 1840: 7).

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

in rather a singular manner. It appeared that a paragraph respecting the plate [marked with Russell's family crest and missing since the murder] was copied into one of the French papers from a London newspaper, with a suggestion from the editor of the French journal that probably, as Courvoisier was a foreigner, the plate was deposited by him at some of the foreign hotels in London. The paragraph was seen by Mr Vincent, partner of the proprietor of the French hotel in Leicester-place ..., who communicated it to the mistress of the house, and she at once recollected that the prisoner, who had previously lived in the establishment as waiter, and was known by the name of John, had a short time previous to the murder left a brown paper parcel in her possession. (20 June 1840: 7)

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

As Richard Altick has shown in his *Victorian Studies in Scarlet*, crime became an obsession during the nineteenth century. It was not only expressed in written form, as with his example of the Red Barn, site of the 1827 murder of Maria Marten by William Corder (Figure 1.2). The case engendered a multimedia frenzy – but then it had been solved

GOD'S REVENGE AGAINST MURDER.

"WHOSO SHEDDETH MAN'S BLOOD, BY MAN SHALL HIS BLOOD BE SHED."

No. 6.

SATURDAY, JUNE 1, 1833.

PRICE ONE PENNY.



Corder burying the Body of Maria Marten.



The Arrest of Corder.

Figure 1.2 Women figured prominently in popular representations of nineteenth-century true crime, usually as victims. The case of Maria Marten caused a multi-media frenzy, including a melodrama which filled theatres for decades.

dramatically by a ghostly visitation in a dream. In real life the barn was nearly demolished by souvenir hunters, being surrounded by crowds and thematic representations that included a Methodist preacher, puppet shows and camera obscura displays. Furthermore the play, *Maria Marten; or, the Murder in the Red Barn*, would pack theatres throughout the nineteenth century. This bloodthirsty interest caused pious horror, with the respectable *Chambers's Edinburgh Journal* running an 1849 article on 'Murder-Mania'. It complained that 'the exciting and abhorrent details of slaughter offered by the public journals' made them 'accessories before the fact to three-fourths of the more extravagant murders that occur in England' (L. R. 209). Yet *Chambers's* seemed unaware of its own accessory status, for it was simultaneously running a detective fiction series.

The prevalence of true crime discourse led to Thomas De Quincey's idiosyncratic, sardonic theorization of criminality, 'On Murder Considered as One of the Fine Arts' (1827–54). It contains an extraordinary, if not strictly factual, recreation of the 1811 Ratcliffe Highway murders. In the most striking passage, Mary the servant girl returns to a household of the dead, with Williams the killer inside. She knocks on the door, but does not get an immediate reply:

Yes, now beyond a doubt there is coming an answer to her summons. What was it? On the stairs ... was heard a creaking sound. Next was heard most distinctly a footfall: one, two, three, four, five, stairs were slowly and distinctly descended. Then the dreadful footsteps were heard advancing along the little narrow passage to the door. The steps – oh heavens! *whose* steps? – have paused at the door. The very breathing can be heard of that dreadful being, who has silenced all breathing except his own in the house. There is but a door between him and Mary ... Now, suppose that he should suddenly open the door, and that incautiously in the dark Mary should rush in, and find herself in the arms of the murderer. Thus far the case is a possible one – that to a certainty, had this little trick been tried immediately upon Mary's return, it would have succeeded; had the door been opened suddenly upon her first tingle-tingle, headlong she would have tumbled in, and perished. But now Mary is on her guard. The unknown murderer and she have both their lips upon the door, listening, breathing hard; but luckily they are on different sides of the door; and upon the least indication of unlocking or unlatching, she would have recoiled into the asylum of general darkness. (13: 113–14)

This acute visualization and maintaining of suspense, the face-off between Williams and Mary only resolved when she hysterically rings

the bell, rousing the neighbours, shows the influence of more than true crime reportage. The almost filmic aesthetic – De Quincey envisaging the scene as if staged, the streetscape on one side of the door, on the other the house, bisected for the audience's view – derives from the theatre. A similar set was used in the enormously successful *Jonathan Bradford; or, The Murder at the Roadside Inn* (1833) by Edward Fitzball, which depicted the inn concerned as a dolls' house, cut-away with four rooms on two levels.

Jonathan Bradford is a melodrama, a form distinguished by gruesome content, black and white morality, and furious action. It arose in the 1790s, its key developer being the French playwright René Charles Guilbert de Pixérécourt (1773–1844). Melodrama was hugely popular throughout the nineteenth century, permeating all strata of society, via the established theatres, fairground tent shows and even puppetry – often using the same scripts, such as *Jonathan Bradford*. The source of the play was true crime: Fitzball had been advised to 'Look into the papers, incidents enough *invented* there!' (Disher 90). This process began very early; in 1817 George Ludlum turned the recent death of Mary Ashford into *The Mysterious Murder: or, What's the Clock?*

Yet melodrama partook of other forms than crime reportage, its initial inspiration being the contemporary publishing sensation of the Gothic novel: Pixérécourt adapted Ann Radcliffe's 1794 *The Mysteries of Udolpho* for the stage. The Gothic might seem remote from the sordid details of contemporary true crime, with its exotic/historic landscapes, swash-buckling villains and persecuted heroines. However, it was the Gothic that supplied the word 'mystery' to the crime genre. The term had a history of wandering between literary genres, denoting in medieval times a biblical play. By the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries it connoted the Gothic, frequently appearing in titles such as the aforementioned *The Mysteries of Udolpho*. During the nineteenth century the meaning of the word is various, *Les Mystères de Paris* (1842–3) by Eugène Sue, the unfinished *The Mystery of Edwin Drood* (1870) by Dickens and *The Mystery of a Hansom Cab* being three novels with similar titles but major differences. Only the last example is indisputably what we would term a modern mystery novel: structurally dominated by a crime and its solution.

The Gothic is a Pangea of genre literatures, containing within it the future continents of horror, science fiction (as with Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein*) and crime writing. Behind the romantic history, the Gothic novel in content is as bloodstained as any *Newgate Calendar* case – indeed, one early Gothic novelist, Charlotte Smith, translated

selected tales from Pitaval with the telling title of *The Romance of Real Life* (1787). Yet perhaps more crucial is what mystery involved in the Gothic context: the depiction of a sensational motif or incident, with its explanation being delayed until much later in the narrative. This narrative form first appeared in Radcliffe's *A Sicilian Romance* (1792), to become hugely popular two years later with *Udolpho*.

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

There is actually more mystery in *Udolpho* than in William Godwin's *Caleb Williams*, hailed as the first novel to feature a detective. Godwin's book appeared several weeks after *Udolpho*'s publication in May 1794 (R. Norton 93, 170, 278). Caleb is employed by Falkland, an Enlightenment gentleman who has murdered the violent landowner Tyrell. Caleb's curiosity about Falkland becomes obsessive, until the master realizes that his servant is investigating him. Falkland frames Caleb for theft, then a hanging offence, and the servant flees, pursued by Falkland and his hired thief-taker in the first notable chase sequence of the crime novel.

Godwin was a complex individual, famous not only for his wife and daughter, but as a radical philosopher and theorist of anarchy. The source matter informing *Caleb Williams* was similarly diverse: from the *Newgate Calendar* to contemporary political agitation. The novel can be regarded as social protest, a psychological study, an updated Revenger's Tragedy, as well as (retrospectively) crime. How it was produced was also radical: Godwin admitted in a later appendix to the novel that he had plotted his third, then second volumes before ending sequentially with the first. Only when this framework was in place did he begin writing chapter 1, a technique anticipatory of later practices in crime writing. Poe claimed Dickens told him it was writing a novel 'backwards' ('Philosophy' 13).

Caleb Williams had impact, being quickly adapted for the stage as *The Iron Chest; or, Murder Brought to Light* (1796) by George Colman, then translated for a Paris production as *Falkland* (1799). Yet De Quincey, that true crime enthusiast, dismissed the novel in his 1845 'Notes on Gilfillan's Literary Portraits'. He could see in it 'no merit', while perversely being able to write a detailed critique of it, from a 35-year-old

memory (11: 329). His plot summary picks out implausibilities, and he concludes his analysis with the words:

The interest from secret and vindictive murder, though coarse, is undoubtedly deep. What would make us thrill in real life, – the case, for instance, of a neighbour lying under the suspicion of such a murder, – would make us thrill in a novel. But then it must be managed with art, and covered with mystery. For a long time it must continue doubtful both as to the fact, and the circumstances, and the motive. Whereas, in the case of Mr Falkland, there is little mystery of any kind: not much, and only for a short time, to Caleb; and none at all to the reader, who could have relieved the curiosity of Mr Caleb from the first, if he were placed in communication with him. (11: 333)

The subsequent application of the word 'detective' to Caleb Williams is also a little problematic. The term, in the specific sense of criminal investigation, has its earliest example listed in the *OED* from 1843, the year after a small detective unit was inaugurated as part of the official police force (although the word appears in the *Times'* coverage of the 1840 Courvoisier case). It would not be used with reference to genre fiction until 1881 (*Graphic* 31 December 1881: 667).

The profession of detective only really arose with the development of modern, efficient policing in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. The resultant publicity via reportage would translate the detective into a fictional hero for the first time. Aram and the other *Newgate Calendar* narratives lack formal detection, something unnecessary in a largely rural society. In small communities the culprits were usually obvious, and in an era before mass mobility and the megalopolis, quickly apprehended. Justice was decentralized in parish units, investigation being limited to local coroners, magistrates and parish Constables. The latter were depicted rarely, and then as dunderheads, as with Constable Dogberry in Shakespeare's *Much Ado About Nothing*. Thus historical crime fiction, such as the *Cadfael* novels by 'Ellis Peters', impose the modern model of detection upon eras where it did not exist. More credibly Bruce Alexander and Deryn Lake's respective series (not to mention a John Creasey novel) feature Sir John Fielding, half-brother of Henry, and also a Bow Street magistrate. Both brothers were significant in organizing their local constabulary into an impartial and effective force, including a small group of specialist investigative officers, who would become known as the Bow Street Runners.

In the Runners, who lasted until 1839, can be seen the beginnings of professional detection in England, although most of their earnings came from bounty-hunting – which had possibilities of abuse. Yet they were daring and successful, attracting much attention. The first police detective to be a fictional protagonist appeared in the anonymous *Richmond: Or, Scenes in the Life of a Bow Street Officer, Drawn Up from His Private Memoranda* (1827). This work was not in structure a mystery; indeed the hero only becomes a Runner some 80 pages into the text. Thereafter, *Richmond* has a series of episodic adventures, with assorted villains. This section of the book might be described as the original police procedural.

Richmond was a book that though it had only one English printing, had a long-lasting influence. The same year it was pirated in New York, and its protagonist was mentioned in two important, and much later works of detective fiction, Hume's *The Mystery of a Hansom Cab* (19) and Anna Katharine Green's 1897 *That Affair Next Door*. In 1828, on the continent, two other significant crime works appeared. One was fiction, 'Der Kaliber', an accomplished novella regarded as the first detective fiction in the German language. Its author, Adolph Müllner (1774–1829), was a lawyer and successful playwright, and might have written more crime had he not died the following year. 'Der Kaliber' has a sleuth-narrator, an investigating magistrate, who is assisted by a defence lawyer in proving the innocence of Albus, a murder suspect. As the title indicates, the case is solved by forensic evidence, a bullet's calibre.

In France, a real-life Richmond, one Eugène François Vidocq (1775–1857), was approaching retirement. Vidocq was colourful, a former criminal who became first an informer, then detective during a period when Napoleon's innovative Minister Joseph Fouché developed the police into an efficient and feared model. Vidocq became in 1812 chief of the Surêté, the detective division of the French police, and was later a private eye. *Richmond* may have come to the attention of Vidocq (or his publishers), for his *Mémoires* appeared in 1828. They sold well, quickly being translated as well as being pirated in America. Vidocq gained international fame, and inspired a number of characters, including M. Jackal of *Les Mohicans de Paris*. The expression 'Cherchez la femme', sometimes attributed to Fouché, thus originates with a version of Vidocq.

The *Mémoires* provide crime with authenticity, in a form rather more self-consciously literary than *Richmond*. At least two ghostwriters were involved. In the preface Vidocq complains that though the facts were mostly the same ('Sauf quelques altérations, les faits étaient bien les mêmes'), narrative causality had been imposed, with matter simply

fortuitous, involuntary and spontaneous ('moins tout ce qu'il y avait de fortuit, d'involuntaire, de spontane') made premonitory of future evil ('ne s'y presentait plus que comme une longue prémeditation de mal') (vol. 1, iv). It was clearly not thought sufficient to simply present a series of crime episodes: the narrative required further structural organization. The novelist's art is here evident, articulating a crime narrative from the bare bones of a policeman's procedures.

This development had been prefigured in the mid- to late eighteenth century, with the growing importance of intricately crafted plots to the novelist. Indeed, Henry Fothergill Chorley, in a review of Catherine Crowe's *Men and Women: or, Manorial Rights* (1843), cited not only Fielding but Jane Austen for using a technique now firmly identified with crime fiction: seeding the text with clues.

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

The word 'clue' is here used in its original sense, a ball of yarn (as used by Greek hero Theseus in the Labyrinth). But it also indicates an understanding of a narrative as complex construction, to which the novelist's clues function as guides – if the reader is sufficiently alert to spot them. The *OED's* first reference to clue specifically referring to detective fiction is from the 1880s and Hume's *The Mystery of a Hansom Cab*. Here its use was prescient: *Men and Women* was a murder mystery.

In the late eighteenth century and the early decades of the nineteenth century all the ingredients, or systems, were present for the creation of generic crime fiction. Writers recognized the avid interest in crime, and added it like a curry spice to some very diverse narratives. Among these authors was Sir Edward Bulwer Lytton, now largely famous for the eponymous bad prose contest. During a prolific and eminent literary career he wrote in various genres, including four novels concerning crime. They comprise an extended if intermittent experiment, in which Bulwer Lytton would prove crucial to the development of narrative form in the crime novel, the techniques involved in sustaining a mystery narrative at length.

His first effort was the hybrid or multi-genre novel *Pelham* (1828). Bulwer Lytton borrowed from melodrama by including a recent murder,

the 1824 Weare–Thurtell case, famously staged twice before the accused came to trial, one version allegedly featuring actual props from the killing (Egan; Altick 90). Other ingredients included romance, satire, high society (the sub-genre of the ‘silver fork’ novel) and low London life. Bulwer Lytton’s key narrative innovation in *Pelham* was to sustain mystery by keeping his crime content present but bubbling under for most of the action. It surfaces to dominate the last quarter of the book as the dilettante hero turns amateur sleuth and solves a murder.

Bulwer Lytton also revisited the *Newgate Calendar* in his *Eugene Aram* (1832), something which demonstrates the development in crime narrative between the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. His interest was sparked by learning his grandfather had employed Aram as a tutor, and he fictionally reopened the case. His novel depicted Aram ten years after the murder, with his doom creeping towards him (see Prefaces, *Eugene Aram* viii–xviii). Because the contemporary reader knew the Aram story and its ending, the opportunities for suspense were limited. Bulwer Lytton set out to create it, using a two-stranded plot, one featuring the criminal Aram and the other a detective, like Pelham a genteel amateur.

The landowning Lester family become friendly with rich, reclusive scholar Aram. They have a daughter with whom he falls in love and also a nephew, Walter, who is obsessed by his missing father. Walter goes in search of him, and in chapter 7, in a very clever plot device, discovers his father had an alias: Daniel Clarke. Walter continues, uncovering more information, until he gets to Knaresborough – where quite coincidentally he arrives on the day the bones are discovered. At which point Bulwer Lytton’s version of Aram seamlessly joins with the historical record.

Walter as detective benefits much from happy coincidence, rather than ratiocination. To a modern crime reader such might seem a plot fault, but at the time coincidences were commonplace in fiction: consider *Jane Eyre*, for instance. In the context of true crime they were regarded as proof of divine providence. Bulwer Lytton muses:

How singularly complete had been the train of circumstance, which, linking things seeming most trifling, most dissimilar, had lengthened into one continuous chain of evidence! The trivial incident that had led him to the saddler’s shop; the accident that brought the whip that had been his father’s to his eye; the account from Courtland ... and now the narrative of Elmore leading him to the spot, at which all enquiry seemed as yet to pause! (*Eugene Aram* 306)

The result was highly acclaimed: Godwin told Bulwer Lytton he had thought of novelizing Aram too, though what his 'dark and inquiring genius', in Bulwer Lytton's words (Prefaces, *Eugene Aram* xi), might have made of the story must remain conjectural. In a later edition, from 1849, Bulwer Lytton even introduced a new auctorial verdict: that Aram was innocent, an accomplice of Houseman's after the fact.

Other attempts to focus the contemporary murder-mania and make it the main subject of the text would result in a series of what might be regarded as false starts in genre. In England the Newgate novel became popular, picaresque stories of the criminal, such as the highwayman of Bulwer Lytton's *Paul Clifford* (1830); another example is Dickens' *Oliver Twist* (1838). Like the *Calendar* narratives, the structure was biographical rather than mysterious: solving a crime did not dominate the text. Furthermore the villain as hero meant a narrative closure of either reformation or the gallows. The Newgate novel essentially petered out, an intriguing but wrong direction towards genre crime.

A second interesting misstep was the enormously popular group of novels known as mysteries, the first two being Eugène Sue's *Les Mystères de Paris* (1842–3), followed by *The Mysteries of London* (1844–8) by the radical journalist and publisher G. W. M. Reynolds. The mysteries might best be termed urban Gothic; their melodrama and use of topical scandal also show the influence of the theatre and the popular press respectively. The publication form was as *feuilletons*, instalments, continuing interminably: Reynolds' work comprised 800,000 words. In Sue, disguised Prince Rodolphe wanders the streets of Paris, seeking his daughter; in Reynolds, two brothers are separated, one taking the path of virtue, one of vice. Characters can function as amateur detectives, but the real focus is the metropolis, depicted as complex and chaotic. So are the mysteries: Sue admitted to writing *Les Mystères* without preplotting, 'by instinct, with no idea where he was going' (Harvey and Heseltine 632), and the sheer weight of words often nigh overwhelms the narrative. Essentially the mysteries, as we now understand the term, are nothing of the sort.

Curiously, the year before the publication of Sue's novel had appeared a narrative, more or less its antithesis, brief, tightly plotted, with a detective solving a mystery: Poe's 'The Murders in the Rue Morgue'. As an acute critic and reviewer as well as writer, Poe could survey the existing literature, and recognize the growing synthesis that was producing crime fiction. From its wide polygenesis – the Gothic, melodrama, true crime – a literary form was emerging. Like Müllner, Poe strikingly anticipated the detective genre, particularly its short story form.

'The Murders' and its two successors were like nothing else appearing in contemporary short story form. Perhaps the closest was William E. Burton (founder of *Burton's Gentleman's Magazine*, for which Poe worked editorially), and his 1837 'Leaves from a Life in London' series. However, they were not so dominated by the crime solution plot.

Poe would in 1842 refer to 'that metaphysical art in which the souls of all *mysteries* lie' ('Dickens's' 64), but his artistry here was not recognized in his lifetime. He died in suitably mysterious circumstances in 1849, perhaps a crime victim himself. His work would circulate and gain in esteem, but would take decades before its full influence was felt. In the meantime, crime continued to be written, and avidly read.

This chapter ends with Poe, showing that crime did not begin with him. In establishing crime fiction's polygenesis, rather than Poe's virgin birth, space is opened up for other founding figures to be considered. That some of them might be women, the space created being a Woman's Room, has already been indicated: clues to the founding mothers have appeared in this chapter. The rest of the book will be devoted to them, in the context of a developing literary genre, to which they contributed.

2

Mrs Radcliffe as Conan Doyle?

Mrs Radcliffe was our Conan Doyle.

Eliza Lynn Linton, *My Literary Life* 87

In choosing the title ‘Mrs Radcliffe as Conan Doyle?’ provocation is intended. To a modern crime reader, the comparison seems at first unlikely; and from Linton it was not a feminist statement. She was a Victorian author whose youthful radicalism was abandoned for strident polemics against women’s rights, as in her famous essay ‘The Girl of the Period’. In the context of her memoir *My Literary Life* (1899) Linton is merely stating that Radcliffe and Conan Doyle were both popular and avidly read. But that she ranks the two as equivalent (the Sherlock Holmes series was just over a decade old, still in progress, not yet canonical), provides an intriguing line of speculation. Can a case be made for women, and Radcliffe, having major significance in early crime fiction, perhaps comparable to Conan Doyle?

No pictorial representations survive of Radcliffe, but if she is the counterpart of Conan Doyle, then an image exists comparable to Holmes with his magnifying glass. In 1777 the German artist Anna Dorothea Therbusch (1721–82) painted a self-portrait, in which she suspended a magnifying glass or monocle over one eye (Figure 2.1). Through it she gazes enquiringly, quizzically, not only into the mirror from which she worked, but also at the audience for the painting. If there is an image to represent the Mother of Crime Fiction, then this striking portrait of an individual and intelligent woman will more than suffice.

Up to this point relatively few women have appeared in the story of crime fiction. This chapter will begin to add them. ‘Cherchons la femme’, wrote Dumas, whose characters searched through the mean streets of Paris. Finding the women of early crime fiction involves rare bookshops



Figure 2.1 In 1777 Anna Dorothea Therbusch painted a self-portrait, as expressive of Enlightenment intelligence as Sherlock Holmes' magnifying glass.

and antiquarian catalogues. Via searching and serendipity, a number of significant early crime women authors can be identified. Not all – there is no doubt that many more remain unknown and unidentified. Some

are now utterly obscure, although once famous and widely read. Others are better known, but more commonly associated with other genres. All can be shown to have contributed to early crime writing.

The question arises: why should women be intrigued by crime in an era when they were excluded from the legal system and the emergent police forces? The ideology of the separate sphere – public for men, private for women – reigned. The ideal woman was ‘The Angel in the House’ as in Coventry Patmore’s famous poem; in French, a ‘fille publique’ signified a streetwalker. For a woman to transgress, enter the public realm via criminal acts, had an undeniable frisson. However, it was relatively rare, one statistic giving post-1850 England a female crime rate of over a fifth of convictions, as opposed to the modern rate, of an eighth (Zedner 1). Then, as now, women were the minority of criminal offenders, even when crimes caused by lack of effective contraception, such as infanticide, are factored in.

In Henry Mayhew’s *London Labour and the London Poor*, a Death Hunter is quoted on Maria Manning, hanged with her husband Frederick for the 1849 killing of her lover:

I patters hard on the women such times, as I points them out on my board in murders or any crimes. I says: ‘When there’s a mischief a woman’s always the first. Look at Mrs Manning there on that werry board – the work of one of the first artists in London – it’s a faithful likeness, taken from life at one of her examinations, look at *her*. She fires the pistol, as you can see, and her husband was her tool.’ ... The men likes it and the women doesn’t object, for they’ll say: ‘Well, when a woman is bad, she is bad, and is a disgrace to her sex.’ (1: 328)

Another Death Hunter told Mayhew: ‘Mostly all our customers is females. They are the chief dependence we have’ (1: 222–3).

Gory murder trials notoriously attracted women from all walks of society. Novelist Catherine Crowe wrote that ‘many ladies were present’ at the sensational 1848 French trial of Francis Bertrand, because of or despite the accused being a grave-robbing necrophiliac (Crowe, ‘Lycanthropy’ 124; Sigmond 584). Even if unable to attend the trial, women could participate via the newspaper. De Quincey had an eerie ability to analyse newspaper crime reports and correctly predict the murderer; but so did Ellen Wood, better known as the formidably respectable novelist Mrs Henry Wood (Japp 329; C. Wood, ‘Mrs Henry Wood’ 438). ‘Murder-Mania’, to use *Chambers*’s term, affected both men and women and part of its expression was in fiction.

An obvious place to look for women writing crime is in the Gothic, a genre that was not only bloody, but notable for female authors. Indeed, the Minerva Press, a publishing house set up in 1800, which strongly featured the Gothic, was not only female in its name but predominantly published women authors. The 'Queen' of Gothic, Ann Radcliffe (1764–1823), is listed in Hubin's bibliography. She was one of the most inventive and influential female authors, yet little is known about her. The only detailed account of Radcliffe is third-hand, by T. N. (Thomas Noon) Talfourd. He wrote after her death, from information supplied by her widower, William. Radcliffe is recorded as being:

a female of diffidence, approaching to shyness ... a scrupulous self-respect, almost too nice to be appreciated in these days, induced her sedulously to avoid the appearance of reception, on account of her literary fame ... she wanted that confidence which is necessary to mixed society, and which she could scarcely acquire, without losing something of the delicacy of feeling, which marked her character. (7, 13, 105)

With her female characters – abducted heroines, luckless wives and repentant nuns – it was male tyranny which shut them away, but Radcliffe's privacy was apparently a matter of choice. It initially enabled her to write, while William, a journalist, worked late. Talfourd claims that 'perhaps few distinguished authors have passed a life so blameless and so happy' (105). He does not elaborate on less happy facts: that Radcliffe was childless (a significant failure in her era), a chronic asthmatic and effectively ceased to write in her early thirties. Rumours circulated that Radcliffe was an inmate of a madhouse, a victim of her own Gothic imagination. But the only hint of mental instability occurred during her final illness, bronchitis. Talfourd: 'A few days before her death, an account, which she had accidentally read, of a shocking murder recently perpetrated, pressed upon her memory, and joined with the natural operation of the disease to produce a temporary delirium' (102). The 'accidentally' suggests that Radcliffe was no fan of true crime. If she read Pitaval – and she cited him as a 'source' in her novel *The Romance of the Forest* (1791) – it was probably only via Charlotte Smith's 1787 translation.

Nonetheless Radcliffe would be highly influential upon crime writing. She was the most successful exponent of what is generally termed Female Gothic (a style of writing not gender-prescriptive, for men could write in this mode too). At its centre was the female consciousness, frequently under trial. The young heroine often finds herself imprisoned

in a sinister castle, usually by a wicked male tyrant, but emerges at the end triumphant to marry her hero. The various elements of Female Gothic – such as its rational explanations of the supernatural, mysterious murders and hidden heroines – can be traced to earlier Gothic writers like Clara Reeve and Charlotte Smith. However, it was Radcliffe who codified the form. In 1794 *The Mysteries of Udolpho* made her the most popular and best-paid English writer of the eighteenth century.

Male Gothic, as typically expressed in *The Monk* (1796), written by Matthew Lewis in reaction to Radcliffe, has a different focus: the central figure is the dangerous male, the tyrant or rake. Thus Male Gothic can be arguably regarded as the link between the picaresque and the Newgate novel. It also represents the beginning of the psychothriller, with the excesses of Hannibal Lecter being (almost) equalled by those of Ambrosio the Monk, whose tastes run to black magic, rape, incest and murder. Yet, while bad boy Gothic contains crime, mystery and suspense, it is no place for the detective, for the villain is privileged. The bringing to justice of the Monk involves fate, the devil, but no central investigative figure. In addition, Male Gothic partakes of the supernatural, something at odds with the emerging detective genre. Mysteries abound here, but they are beyond human understanding; unlike simple murder cases, they can never be fully resolved. Thus, the logical, ratiocinative search for a criminal has no place in the Male Gothic.

Such is not the case with Female Gothic. From Radcliffe's Emily St Aubert to Sherlock Holmes may seem an abrupt leap, for Holmes is no poet, nor has he a heightened, trembling sensibility. Yet Radcliffe's universe is rationalistic, a product of the Enlightenment, with strong similarities to the world-view of Holmes. Much may seem supernatural and inexplicable, but by the end of *Udolpho* the ghosts have vanished with the mystery. Female Gothic is typified as 'uncanny', in its physical, logical explanations of phenomena – as distinct from the Male Gothic, which is 'marvellous', fully accepting the supernatural (Todorov, *The Fantastic* 41–2). Thus the Female Gothic arguably comprises the major 'system' in the creation of the new crime fiction genre, contributing the mystery, rationalism and also the role of the protagonist.

The narrative functions of the detective and the Female Gothic heroine have strong similarities, for Emily in *Udolpho* is a woman of reason, elucidating the mysteries of the castle. These women are not to be searched for, as in 'cherchez la femme' – they do the searching. In an important anticipation of the modern female detective, Emily and other Radcliffe heroines walk the mean passages of their various Gothic

castles very much by themselves. Their quest is accomplished alone (or with assistance from trusty female servants), without a square-jawed hero. With the Radcliffe heroine can be seen a narrative model emerging, of women versus crime, woman conquering and explicating crime – even if only briefly on the way to matrimony.

Tentative though this formation was, it had precedent in classical mythology: the justice goddess, the Greek Nemesis, or her Latin version Dea Vindex (Revenging Goddess). Allegorical representations of justice in painting or statuary were feminized, and commonly located at sites of legal authority, such as the Palais de Justice, Paris – the word justice indeed having the feminine gender in French. Nemesis and Dea Vindex recur in both the early depictions of the sleuthing female and its contemporary reviewing. The fictional case for an avenging or detecting female (a source of much anxiety, given the feminine ideal of passive decorum) is thus strengthened by learned allusions. Mary Braddon in her 1863 novel *Eleanor's Victory* describes her detecting heroine as a 'superb Nemesis in crinoline' (259).

There were also some true crime precedents. In England, prior to the development of the adversarial system and a national police force, a victim of crime could not only prosecute a case in court, but act as their own private investigator, if they were unable to afford the services of a thief-taker. A 1761 case from Surrey indicates the lengths to which a determined victim could go. A servant of Lord Winterton found his shoes missing. Suspecting the thief was a man who had recently travelled through Winterton's estate, the servant walked several miles to Godalming. He found his quarry had been locked up as a vagrant, and was wearing his shoes. To prove his ownership, the servant then walked to Northchapel, in Sussex, to find the shoemaker, whom he persuaded to accompany him back to Godalming. They found that the vagrant had been transferred to Guildford prison, but walked on the extra four miles undeterred. At Guildford, the shoemaker identified his work, and the guilty man confessed (Beattie 38).

In murder cases, kin would be the agents of justice. Consider the case of Anne Kidderminster, a seventeenth-century widow who doggedly solved the murder of her husband Thomas, despite being without monetary and legal power. Thomas Kidderminster was born a gentleman, but being cheated out of his inheritance, found work as a steward. Anne was a ladies' maid when they met and married in 1653, during the Commonwealth of Oliver Cromwell. The following year he disappeared. The pregnant Anne sought information about him, from such far-flung locales as Amsterdam and Barbados.

Her husband had in fact been murdered in Essex. His body lay for nearly a decade, while Commonwealth became Restoration, in the yard of the White Hart Inn, Chelmsford. The owners of the inn, the Sewells, had with their ostler Moses Drayne murdered Kidderminster for the £500–600 in gold he carried. He was only unearthed, an anonymous skeleton, during repairs conducted by Turner, the new proprietor.

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

Thomas' death had impoverished Anne – she had been forced to support her infant daughter by working as a wet-nurse. When she saw the advertisement, she was destitute 'both of Friends and Money'. Those she told about the Chelmsford discovery advised her not to pursue the case, but she was troubled by several visions of her husband, 'looking very sternly upon her'. At least one of these apparitions was when she was in bed, and can be regarded as a dream, but she also saw Thomas 'by day-light'. Resolved on justice, she walked from London to Chelmsford with a companion. Fortuitously they got lost and thus met in Romsford Mary Mattocks, a former Chelmsford townswoman. Mattocks had hearsay evidence about the murder and also told Anne that Drayne lived nearby (*A True Relation* 7).

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

This case shows that as far back as the seventeenth century a woman could act as private detective, despite her sex's exclusion from the legal

system. A 1688 pamphlet, *A True Relation of a Horrid Murder Committed Upon the Person of Thomas Kidderminster*, noted her initiative: 'You see what Pains, Trouble, and Expence [sic] she underwent in enquiry after her Husband, in tracing out the Murderers, and in the Prosecution of them, having little or no Assistance or Advice ...' However, the writer is working in a pre-Enlightenment context, where Anne Kidderminster's luck, intelligence and tenacity cannot possibly explain her success. For her to be solely the agent of justice is unthinkable. The sentence quoted above concludes: 'but the Divine Providence, which assisted and directed her in the whole series of this Affair' (19).

The Kidderminster story circulated in various printed forms over three centuries: the 1688 pamphlet; a 1745 article in the *Gentleman's Magazine* ('Strange Discovery'); and also in George Borrow's *Celebrated Trials, and Remarkable Cases of Criminal Jurisprudence* (1825). Of these three accounts, Anne Kidderminster's detective agency was most important in the 1688 text, and the longest. The least, with her relegated to being a witness only, occurred in that of 1745.

The case also probably recurred in nineteenth-century journals, with their appetite for true tales of crime. Its narrative sequence – of a woman bereft, resolving to solve the disappearance of a missing lover or male relative, visiting the murder site, interviewing witnesses, making fortuitous discoveries and ultimately succeeding in her quest for justice – would reappear in various crime fictions of the early nineteenth century. However, one instance does not necessarily create a narrative model. It is very likely other true life instances of female sleuthing occurred, and were retained in the public memory if not actual texts.

Such is indicated by two characters in James Hogg's novel *The Private Memoirs and Confessions of a Justified Sinner* (1824), which like the Kidderminster narrative begins in the seventeenth century, ending in the early eighteenth. Hogg (c. 1770–1837) was a Scottish farmer and poet, with a profound interest in folklore and the supernatural. The novel juggles rational and marvellous interpretations of events, as if mediating between Male and Female Gothic. *Justified Sinner* concerns the deadly rivalry between two brothers, George Colwan and Robert Wringhim, the latter being led by a mysterious shape-shifting stranger, an evil genius or devil, into a series of murders, starting with the fratricide of Colwan. The second half of the novel comprises Wringhim's 'confessions', but in the first half appear two women both called Arabella – Mrs Logan and Mrs Calvert – in their independence and initiative akin to Anne Kidderminster.

Unlike Radcliffe's Emily, the Arabellas are not romance heroines, a crucial distinction: their narrative fate will not conclude with marriage. In fact they are lower-class and disreputable. Arabella Logan is a housekeeper and de facto stepmother to George Colwan. She turns detective after his murder: 'she had hopes of having discovered a clue, which, if she could keep hold of the thread, would lead her through darkness toward the light of truth' (67). By chance she encounters the other Arabella, a prostitute, a witness to the killing. In order to make a positive identification, the Arabellas travel to visit Wringhim. The ID is not only made, the feisty pair fight with their suspect and tie him up with their garters, before going to the authorities, case solved. Though only a minor part of Hogg's dark and complex narrative, the Arabellas are, like Anne Kidderminster, female agents of justice who solve a murder.

Kidderminster was a real-life sleuth; Hogg's Arabellas likely had a similar source. All three appear in texts that are not crime fiction, yet strikingly anticipate a feature of the modern genre: the woman detective, a figure now popular and empowering for its female readership, offering a heroine not defined solely by the romance plot, but by work, and with an identity beyond the domestic helpmeet. However, it would not become a generic staple until the twentieth century, such was the force of conventional sex roles: women's workplace being overwhelmingly the home, as dependent wives, daughters and servants. They were also circumscribed by marriage, with their legal identity merged by coverture with their husband. A female detective was thus not realist – but it held an equivalent appeal, in terms of power fantasies, to the transgressive women featured by the Death Hunters.

Intimations of the modern female detective are found in fictions throughout the early nineteenth century. The prevailing form is the heroine-sleuth, young single gentlewomen such as Radcliffe's Emily, who detect only briefly on the way to the altar. Indeed more female detectives appear in early Victorian fiction than their male counterparts. Between Godwin and *Richmond*, investigative males in fiction, whether police or amateur, are relatively rare. Their most significant appearance is in the novels by Godwin's follower Charles Brockden Brown (1771–1810). Otherwise their presence is scant until 1849, with the advent of William Russell's 'Waters' series of short detective series in *Chambers's*. Even then the male detective does not become a substantial feature of the literary market until the 1860s.

In the decades following Radcliffe, the heroine-sleuth of the Female Gothic reappears across genres, in few texts that are indubitably crime. It comprises an organic and migrating formation, translated in its

entirety from one narrative to another. The heroine-sleuth infiltrates many early nineteenth-century literary forms, moving between realism, romance and many other genres, before finding its eventual home in crime fiction. The trope, against all expectations of contemporary maidenly behaviour, is persistent – narratives involving female detection are found throughout the nineteenth century, in texts ranging from the Gothic to the domestic or realist, to the polemical and even the frontier romance.

One example is Catherine Morland, in Jane Austen's *Northanger Abbey* (published 1818, though written in the early years of the century). The novel is an affectionate if satiric homage to the Female Gothic. It shows that the Gothic sleuthing heroine had become so familiar, a cliché even, that it could be parodied. Catherine, a Radcliffe fan, becomes convinced that General Tilney has either murdered or incarcerated his wife in Northanger Abbey, and searches for clues. Her snooping is brief and is brought to an end by Henry Tilney, whom she marries at the end of the book. Though Catherine seems something of a goose, regarding General Tilney her intuition is perfectly correct. The General is a domestic tyrant: her suspicions of murder and wife abuse, 'scarcely sinned against his character, or magnified his cruelty' (201).

Radcliffe's Emily in *Udolpho* is merely inquisitive. Her successors could subvert the male justice system – even if they conformed to female stereotypes by being more haphazard and intuitive than logical and deductive. Against the odds, these women are successful: they may be amateurs, but they are competent at detection. Sadly, they also tend to an ultimate impotence. A crucial difference emerges, to do with discipline and punishment. Emily has hair-raising adventures, trembles and faints – but quickly recovers. She is not mortified, like Catherine, when Henry discovers her sleuthing; nor humiliated by being packed off home by the General for being insufficiently wealthy. Emily is never forced to see the error of her ways, another reason why the Female Gothic can be read as empowering for women.

Austen, in her domestication of the Gothic, imports (and arguably internalizes) a trope from another literary tradition – the didactic novel, as written by popular eighteenth-century writers such as Fanny Burney and Maria Edgeworth. The heroines of these novels were typically naive and thoughtless, needing a sharp lesson (Spencer 168). All Austen's novels punish the heroine in some way before marriage and this didactic tradition is pervasive, repeatedly thwarting the female detective. Catherine suffers embarrassment; her successors were lucky to escape with a nervous breakdown, if not permanent incapacity.

It has been observed by modern critics that even now modern female detectives, such as Paretsky's V. I. Warshawski, are subjected to horror and brutality for the crime of their agency (Plain 148). These patriarchal and destructive forces are even more powerfully arrayed against Warshawski's forebears.

When nineteenth-century heroines detect, they tend to follow a formula, functioning structurally as part of the romance plot. As such, the heroine-sleuth can be identified as a motif, to use the terminology of Russian formalism: recurrent stock figures, as predictable in their narrative role as the impossible tasks set the hero of folktale before he can marry a princess. Similar to the Kidderminster case, the detection begins with a male (husband, lover or brother) vanishing (or being falsely accused), causing the heroine to investigate. Like Kidderminster and Emily, the detection will be short-lived. Unlike them the role of Nemesis, becoming an active and strong-minded woman (a pejorative term in the nineteenth century), will be savagely punished. After some effective work the heroine-sleuth usually collapses with stress or brain fever, reverting to passive femininity, and a happy marriage with the man she has saved. Thus the transgressive and fascinating depiction of the heroine-sleuth is rendered conventional and unexceptionable.

Even when the heroine-sleuth is not the lady of romance, the motif formula applies. Consider Elizabeth Gaskell (1810–65) and her first novel, *Mary Barton* (1848). The book is an Industrial novel, a Victorian sub-genre featuring social protest with a working-class setting. Although not generic crime, it includes a murder mystery in its plot structure. Gaskell knew true crime, even wrote it in the 1851 'Disappearances', where she recalls reading *Caleb Williams* (412). Through *Mary Barton* a potent true crime detail entered nineteenth-century literature. Gaskell had grown up in rural Cheshire, whose neighbouring county of Lancashire provided in 1794 the first known case of forensic ballistics. John Toms was convicted of the murder of Edward Culshaw in Prescott, through his using distinctive paper as wadding to pack a bullet in a muzzle-loading gun. The paper was torn from a broadsheet ballad, and was actually found in the fatal wound; it matched, like a jigsaw piece, the remainder of the ballad, which was found in Toms' pocket (Marriner 130). The case circulated through the popular press: one account appears in the *London Journal* (6 August 1864: 95). Gaskell fictionalized it, with the matching paper being a poem Mary has transcribed for her father, John Barton. Dickens then borrowed the notion of the fragmentary-text-as-evidence for his *Bleak House* (1852–3), where Inspector Bucket uses the jigsaw wadding

to find Hortense guilty. It reappears throughout the nineteenth century in various fictions, not all of them generic crime.

In her use of forensics, Gaskell borrows from true crime; and Mary is as working-class as Hogg's Arabellas. She is, however, the heroine, eligible for marriage. Even with a milliner as love interest and detective, Gaskell faithfully follows the narrative trajectory of the heroine-sleuth motif. Mary's secret lover Harry Carson is the son of a factory owner, to whom trade unionist John Barton is bitterly opposed. Carson is shot dead and Jem Wilson, his rival for Mary's love, is arrested for the crime. Chapter 22 is entitled: 'Mary's Efforts to Prove an Alibi', which she does, establishing Jem's innocence. She is more practical and streetwise than Catherine Morland, yet under pressure she displays a ladylike fragility, signs of mental distress. Gaskell does allow her certain abilities: 'with the call on her exertions, and her various qualities of judgement and discretion, came the answering consciousness of innate power to meet the emergency' (289). Mary discovers that a sailor can prove Jem's alibi, and instigates a thrilling nautical chase to find him.

Finally at the trial, while in the witness box, Mary sees the missing witness enter the courtroom. Mission accomplished, she loses her mind, in a sentence unfortunately quite bathetic: "'Oh, Jem! Jem! You're saved; and I *am* mad – " and was instantly seized with convulsions' (387). Mary has saved her man, but her achievement is followed by what we would term a nervous breakdown, as if she is being punished for her success. She recovers from her 'brain fever', and marries Jem. But her sleuthing days are over.

Another contemporary woman author wrestled with the notion of female sleuthing repeatedly, as part of a long career that dipped into crime matter almost as much as Bulwer Lytton. Frances (Fanny) Trollope (1776–1863) (Figure 2.2) is best known as the mother of Anthony. She travelled to America partly as vacation from a difficult marriage (to a lawyer) and partly to join a utopian colony. She took some of her children, and their tutor, artist Auguste Hervieu, who may or may not have been also her lover. After an unsuccessful business venture she returned to England with the matter for a caustic and controversial travelogue, *Domestic Manners of the Americans* (1831) – she generally thought they had *no* manners. It made her name and she henceforth supported her family by her pen. She was indomitable, going from the sickbed (her husband and all but two of her children predeceased her) to the writing desk; and it was from personal experience that she prescribed novel-writing as a cure for depression (Mullen 198).

The Refugee in America (1832), her second book and the first of many novels, essentially recycled her American experience in a fictional



Figure 2.2 Fanny Trollope, depicted as demure and feminine by Auguste Hervieu.

travelogue. Like the recent *Pelham*, it was multi-genre, casting its source net even more widely to include the Gothic, anti-slavery polemic, romance and crime. The hero, Edward, Lord Darcy, becomes a transatlantic refugee after a fight in which he has (with considerable provocation) stabbed Dally, a smuggler who is subsequently hidden by his family and reported dead. A plot is hatched by lawyer Nixon Oglander, a scheming relative of Darcy and next in line to inherit. He sends assassins (one of

them Dally) after Edward: should they fail, he will facilitate Darcy's trial in England, with a likely execution for murder.

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

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

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

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

Rather more successful than Burns are Trollope's two heroines, Eleanor, Countess of Darcy, the Earl's resourceful and intelligent mother; and his American sweetheart Emily Williams. Lady Darcy and the villainous Oglander travel to the site of the supposed murder, a coastal village, to investigate. There, 'she began to question her professional cousin with a clear coolness which surprised him, as to those parts of the evidence which he thought most open to doubt' (1: 269). Trollope's use of the word 'professional' is telling, as this woman may be an amateur, but she can ably interrogate the law. Next she changes clothes with her maid and goes sleuthing herself, questioning the villagers.

Lady Darcy is a mature widow; which does not stop her being an adventurous, Gothic heroine. Going in search of the picturesque (a common Gothic tourist destination) she climbs the cliffs, being no 'contemptible "cragswoman"' (2: 27). She locates Dally and his secret hiding place, but in her haste to bring the news, overstrains herself,

becoming 'overpowered by agitation and weariness' (2: 35). In this state it is easy for Oglander to argue she is out of her mind, particularly since Dally cannot be located. Realizing his perfidy, she suffers a 'violent phrenzy fever' (2: 49) as a result. Oglander, the Gothic male tyrant, is thus enabled to constrain and incarcerate her in remote Yorkshire.

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

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

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

The Refugee has undoubted significance as proto-crime, yet though spirited and vigorous, the work is too much of a first novel, and an experimental mix, to be wholly successful. Its anti-slavery rhetoric, for instance, was married to the melodramatic Gothic extreme, as in the scenes where an act of kindness towards Negroes results in their revealing Dally's hideout, where he is about to hang Darcy. The reviews were

generally unfavourable: the *Quarterly Review* termed it 'absurd nonsense from beginning to end' (Review 509). The *Westminster Review* also noted 'absurdities' re the legal content (Review 218) – something which suggests Frances had not consulted her husband while writing the book. However, despite the hostile press, Frances Trollope was not deterred from her auctorial career. Too much was at stake, not only her new identity as a successful writer, but the financial support of her family.

Her most substantial venture into mystery writing came 11 years and 20 novels later. The year 1843 saw her publish two novels exploring crime and its consequences. The first was *Hargrave; or the Adventures of a Man of Fashion*, a title deceptively suggestive of the silver fork. In the novel a romance plot is yoked to a crime mystery, for the eponymous Charles Hargrave, an Englishman based in Paris, will stop at nothing to conceal his debts and get his two daughters well married. This outwardly wealthy and charming man has already been supplementing his income by mugging successful gamblers; now he organizes a party with the twin objects of obtaining a princely marriage proposal for his daughter Sabina, and a fortune in someone else's diamonds.

Hargrave diffuses the role of the detective among many characters. On the side of justice are M. Collet, of the Parisian police; a spiteful family servant; and several noble amateurs, among them the sisters' suitors. On the side of obstructing justice is Hargrave's gallant and capable step-daughter, Adèle de Cordillac. Here Trollope probably draws on Hoffmann's 'Mademoiselle de Scudéry'. The title character was a real-life writer, and the story behind the murders is revealed as a series of characters, like witnesses at a trial, confess to her. Scudéry, though perceptive as a Marple, is not a detective, and actually conceals the identity of the murderer, one Cardillac. In this act she plays a narrative role similar to Adèle, who works both to protect her sister and clear Roger Humphries, a faithful family retainer accused of the muggings and also of abducting rich Madame Bertrand. Adèle organizes a midnight flit for the family, and, with Hargrave in a safe haven, returns to organize Humphries' defence. She can provide an alibi for him, but only at the risk of compromising her honour.

The novel is conventionally concerned that Adèle not appear in the courtroom as a witness, something neatly avoided by her marriage, whereupon she becomes legally subsumed by her husband, who provides the required testimony. Yet this attention to propriety conceals a quite outrageous attack on that sacred Victorian figure, the paterfamilias. Hargrave is a scoundrel, and Trollope fashions an entirely fitting punishment for him while acquitting Humphries. Trollope's biographer Teresa Ransom calls *Hargrave* 'one of the earliest known murder

mysteries' although this description is misleading: Madame Bertrand proves to be alive (v). It is more accurate to term the novel a crime romance – and a most skilful performance.

It can be argued that Trollope was perfectly aware of the narrative convention that the heroine-sleuth should be punished. Certainly she wrote around it in this novel. Emily and Adèle are not only successful but avoid the formulaic limitations, the brutal price demanded of the snooping spinster. But with Trollope's other novel of 1843, *Jessie Phillips: a Tale of the Present Day*, patriarchal forces powerfully operate against female agency.

Jessie Phillips was as multi-genre as *The Refugee*, being primarily a protest against the new Poor Laws, specifically the provisions regarding bastardy. To this basic theme Trollope added romance, and even sets up a detective plot in the last 80 pages of the book. The title character, a young village seamstress, is seduced with the promise of marriage by Frederic Dalton, a villainous young aristocrat. Through misadventure, Dalton has the opportunity to kill the child, and Jessie is charged with infanticide. The death attracts the attention of two young gentlewomen, Ellen Dalton, sister of Frederic, and her friend Martha Maxwell. Both know that Frederic is responsible for the pregnancy, and is anxious to preserve his reputation. Martha in particular has abilities suggestive of Miss Marple:

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

Both witness Frederic's display of guilt when the baby's body is found, yet their potential for female detection is not realized. Ellen immediately enters the breakdown stage of the heroine-sleuth motif, becoming dangerously ill at the thought of exposing her family to public shame. The observant Martha is mysteriously sidetracked. She succumbs to the authority of a pious clergyman, becoming convinced of Frederic's innocence – but only of infanticide, not of seduction. After an interview with Jessie, Martha becomes equally convinced that mother killed baby in a fit of madness.

It is the sick, in fact near-delirious Ellen who assumes the role of *Dea Vindex* and accuses Frederic, in a private interview at her sickbed. He, as

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

Sally, being an imbecile, has no awareness of her role in the death. Neither does Martha, and when Ellen recovers she can no longer remember accusing her brother. Thus Trollope avoids Ellen being aware of 'a truth which must have in some sort obscured the enjoyment of her virtues and happy existence' (351). Ignorance is bliss – the three women have no knowledge of their responsibility for Frederic's death, indirect and unintentional as their agency is. Trollope may have set up Ellen and Martha to act as detectives, but then retreats from any notion of female policing, preferring a passive, even accidental role for them in Frederic's fate. The mystery is ultimately secondary to the novel's political concerns, which pull in opposite artistic directions. As an exercise in detective fiction the novel is much inferior to *Hargrave*.

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

Certainly she wavered in her purpose re her female detectives. The matter of their investigation – seduction, illegitimacy, infanticide – were, said the reviewer in *John Bull*, ‘unfit materials’ for a woman writer, ‘repulsive in their character, and peculiarly so when made the subject of lengthened conversations between two young, artless, and inexperienced girls’. Indeed ‘Mrs Trollope has sinned grievously against good taste and decorum’ (Review 732). Martha’s acuity is downgraded in the course of the novel, she becoming ‘eccentric’, with an ‘inexperienced queer little head’ (*Jessie Phillips* 203). Trollope did maintain her polemic against the ‘bastardy clauses’, something which radicalizes Martha. Contemporary reviewers found the character ‘shocking and unfeminine’ (Heineman 102) for her attempt to shame or (near) blackmail Frederic. But she is not the first feminist detective, doing hardly any active sleuthing. By the novel’s end Martha and Ellen are happy, devoted wives, while the unfortunate Jessie has conveniently died in the dock upon being acquitted.

Frances Trollope represents an intriguing example of a woman writer returning to crime themes, particularly in her use of the female detective. Her work here was uneven but never dull. She produced two interesting if flawed (partial) genre novels in *The Refugee* and *Jessie Phillips*, and a far more assured performance in the mystery of *Hargrave*. There are also indications of a greater influence: French writer Paul Féval used the pseudonym ‘Sir Francis Trollope’ for his 1844 *Les Mystères de Londres*, which shows he read Trollope as well as Sue.

Trollope’s experiments in crime are indicative of how crime fiction was slowly coalescing during the early decades of the nineteenth century. The multi- or partial genre novel form of *Pelham*, *The Refugee in America* (and, for another example, Frenchwoman George Sand’s 1837 *Mauprat*) was gradually being replaced by narratives far more concentrated and controlled, their content dominated by crime, but with adroit use of the Gothic mystery plot. Poe may have exemplified the short detective narrative in the 1840s, but significant developments in the novel form were also occurring contemporaneously.

Yet Trollope was not the only woman writing detective fiction in that decade, nor the most precursive of later genre writing. That distinction belongs to an author who was perhaps the first to demonstrate how successfully murder, the mystery narrative and the sleuth (male and female) could combine in novel form. Her first novel appeared in 1841 and arguably was the first substantial work of crime writing by a woman. As such, she deserves the following chapter to herself.

3

'A Most Preposterous Organ of Wonder': Catherine Crowe

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

Catherine Crowe, *Lilly Dawson* 183

No image of Catherine Crowe exists, despite a long life (1790–1872), a career encompassing various literary forms and also notoriety. All we have is her work. She wrote true crime articles, including the 1849 'Lycanthropy', which despite the title concerns the case of Francis Bertrand, a necrophiliac grave-robber. But her major achievement in crime writing was two novels significantly anticipating the full-blown genre.

Early crime fiction has a curious tendency to synchronicity, as with the 1827–8 nexus of *Richmond*, Bulwer Lytton's *Pelham*, Vidocq and 'Der Kaliber'. In the 1840s this synchronicity also involved fact, with authors actually anticipating the first detective unit being created as part of the London police, in 1842. Thus a general preoccupation with crime and its solutions was not only expressed in fiction, but also in deeds, policy.

In April 1841 Poe's 'The Murders in the Rue Morgue' was published in *Graham's Magazine*. Yet on 12 January that year had been published Edward Bulwer Lytton's accomplished inheritance mystery novel *Night and Morning*. Bulwer Lytton's publisher, Londoners Saunders and Otley, three days earlier had released a first novel, anonymous, but the work of Catherine Crowe. It was entitled the *Adventures of Susan Hopley; or Circumstantial Evidence*.

Poe read *Night and Morning*, which begins with a secret marriage, whose two products, Philip and Sydney, would inherit a fortune if they could prove their legitimacy. The mystery plot revolves around the proof of the marriage, and involves adventure, romance, the police (a Bow Street Runner, and a French detective clearly based on Vidocq) and much villainy. It is most comparable to Trollope's *Hargrave*, as a crime romance. Poe reviewed the novel, decrying the style but admiring the plotting – and in 'The Rue Morgue' he responded to it creatively. Both his critique and the story appear in the same issue of *Graham's Magazine*.

It is not known if Poe also read *Susan Hopley*, although he could hardly have been unaware of it as a bestseller and later popular play. The book is even more precursive of generic crime than *Night and Morning*, as its subtitle of 'Circumstantial Evidence' indicates – probably the first time this legal term was so featured in a novel. Subsequent editions were called *Susan Hopley, or the Adventures of a Maid Servant*, which downplays its major crime content. A murder and disappearance occur in the first few chapters and are solved at the novel's end. Moreover, the book is largely told through the experience of women, with three female detectives. All are effective amateur sleuths.

Another, and more influential reviewer did read both the Saunders and Otley novels. John Forster (1812–76) was a London man of letters, later to be Dickens' first biographer. He was a qualified lawyer, who had advised Bulwer Lytton on the legal accuracy of *Night and Morning* (and then reviewed it appreciatively in the *Examiner* of 17 January 1841, without apparent conflict of interest). In the 28 February issue of the magazine he gave *Susan Hopley* a review significant for the success of this new and unknown novelist. Unlike *Night and Morning*, the identity and gender of the author were unknown to him, so he discussed it as the work of a male. The novel puzzled him: 'We hardly know what to say of this book. It perplexes us extremely. It is powerful, beyond all question; but unsatisfactory [Yet] When we had read the first twenty pages, the book was not again laid down' (132).

Forster clearly struggles with how to describe the author's careful accumulation of clues:

His incidents, at first minute and carelessly thrown in, grow up by degrees into matters of great importance and elaborate art. Precisely as in real life, facts and recollections of apparently the most trivial kind, which have got remotely away in some inaccessible corner of the memory, come gradually out into more and more prominence,

until, some last link in a long chain of occurrences wanting, they suddenly and thoroughly supply it. The writer, in a word, has the art of *reality*. You are struck with the trifling minutenesses, yet find them not so trifling as you at first supposed.

Susan Hopley begins with two elderly people, Harry Leeson employer, Susan Hopley his companion-housekeeper, though they are more friends than anything else. They write their early lives, harking back to the eighteenth century, Harry being to a significant degree the amanuensis of Susan. As a heroine she is unusual, given that the narrative ignores the marriage-plot trajectory typical of contemporary novels. Susan may be a servant, but she is a professional, independent woman, practical and unflappable. The Scottish novelist Susan Ferrier (1782–1854) commented that her namesake was: ‘a very respectable woman (the only one in the book), who wears a brown gown and knits like me – but otherwise it is all full of bad deeds and bloody murders, so that I could not endure it to the end’ (qtd in Larken 111).

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

In possibly a deliberate gender reversal of Godwin’s man-servant Caleb Williams, Susan becomes a detective. ‘Through all the intricacies of the story, she winds her way with preternatural ease – the Dea Vindex, who unties all its knots,’ noted Thomas Kibble Hervey, in an *Athenaeum* review of the novel (94). Susan thus functions as an avenger and the principal detective of the text.

Here, the novel’s eighteenth-century background can be seen as a deliberate – and realist – choice by Crowe. Like Anne Kidderminster, Susan cannot afford a thief-taker, and there is no professional police force to detect for her. In setting her novel a century back, Crowe crucially enables Susan to investigate, though writing herself in a period where the rise of (male) detection excluded clever women amateur sleuths. Not until the early twentieth century could women for the first time vote, and become lawyers and police.

It is possible that Crowe knew of the Kidderminster case; and she may have encountered Hogg's *Justified Sinner* via Scottish literary circles. But it is rather more likely that both authors (and also Elizabeth Gaskell, with *Mary Barton*) knew of cases where women had, like Anne Kidderminster, acted as their own private eyes. Susan Hopley certainly begins like a modern detective, by inspecting the scene of the crime: 'She had a notion that she might make some discovery by examining the ground under the window of Andrew's room' (37). She finds significant evidence, but insufficient for her case. Besides, she has been sacked, so travels to London in search of work. There, she encounters more cases of Gaveston's perfidy, including Julia Clerk, a fallen woman with a small child.

The narrative technique of *Susan Hopley* switches between the viewpoints of Harry and Susan. Now in chapters 16–22 it tells the story of Julia's mother, Julie Le Moine. This character has 'the spirit of a heroine, the passions of a Medea and the temper of a vixen' (167). Her lover Valentine (the passion unrequited, for he loves another) is accused of attempted murder, which spurs Julie into action, certain that her rival will 'weep, but she'll do nothing' (137). Julie had been spying on Valentine on the night of the crime, and saw some suspicious characters in the vicinity. With the help of her maid, she cuts her hair, dresses as a page and tracks the real villains to their den.

Julie discovers important evidence – but is shut in a cellar with a corpse for her pains. It unnerves her: 'Many's the time that love has conquered fear, even in the most timid breasts, as it had thus done in poor Julie's – she must be forgiven if fear for a short time gained the ascendant and the heroine sunk into the woman' (141). Julie, when rescued by the police, has lost her voice permanently. She has proved Valentine innocent, and he marries her, from pity and duty. Unsurprisingly the marriage is unhappy. She reappears in the novel, mute but formidable, gaining a cold revenge by imprisoning in a cellar the same villains who had incarcerated her.

When the narrative returns to Susan, she moves from job to job, generally using her detective skills with efficient common sense. One female employer is accused of stealing lace from a shop – Susan proves her innocent. On a tour of the continent, Susan meets the missing servant Mabel, now the common-law wife of a French Duke. However, Mabel knows nothing of missing Andrew Hopley. The two women join forces against Gaveston, to uncover the mystery and find justice. Other detectives are in pursuit: Simpson, a clerk from Wentworth's firm, and the family lawyer, Olliphant. All partake in the chase, which culminates

in a climactic court scene. Most of the villains in the book prove to be Gaveston and his cronies under different names. At the end, Andrew Hopley, blamed for the murder of Wentworth, is found to have been murdered himself, and Susan is vindicated.

Susan Hopley is a triumph of multiple-storyline plotting, a woven design whose threads all come neatly together at the end. Forster noted: 'there is no end to the circumstantial plots and counterplots, of which [Susan] is first the unconscious and unhappy centre, and at last the quiet and triumphant unraveller' (although he felt too many plot threads had been broken for a final successful tapestry). Although it has an episodic plot, something foreign to the modern detective genre, it is significant as perhaps the first substantial crime novel by a woman, even without its female detectives: Susan, Julie and, to a lesser extent, Mabel.

Susan Hopley was successful across class, with a three-volume edition; weekly and subsequently monthly numbers; and a 'Cheap Genuine Edition'. It also had interference attributed to the hack-writer T. P. Prest (later responsible for *Sweeney Todd*), who published in 1842 *Susan Hopley, or the Trials and Vicissitudes of a Servant Girl* – which, title apart, had nothing to do with the original. Its popularity is shown by Dante Gabriel Rossetti making pen-drawings of 24 of the characters, including Julie Le Moine and Mabel, although his image of Susan seems to have been lost (Fredeman). The novel was also twice adapted for the stage, George Dibdin Pitt's version being first performed in London on 31 May 1841, to great success. 'She [*Susan Hopley* the play] has been applauded in London for upwards of three hundred nights, and in the provinces for about as many more. She has travelled to America and to Sydney and been kindly welcomed.' The play was still being performed in America as *The Lost Will* 20 years later (Remarks, *Cumberland's Minor Theatre* 8; Bordman 14).

The storyline of *Susan Hopley* was modified considerably for the stage. Pitt, needing to reduce the narrative to three acts, simplified the text, removing most of the detection and also Julie Le Moine, perhaps the most intriguing figure in the book. Thus the play version was essentially a melodrama, much less of a detective story than the original. Crowe had no say in the matter, for though dramatizations popularized novels, contemporary authors had no copyright control over, nor any monetary benefit from, what were essentially piracies.

At present, information on Crowe herself is limited. The only biography is Geoffrey Larken's 'The Ghost-Fancier – a Life of the Victorian Authoress, Mrs Catherine Crowe', which could not find a publisher. The manuscript is held in the Templeman Library, University of Kent

at Canterbury, along with Larken's research materials. The collection is substantial, for Crowe not only wrote, but was actively social. She figures in the diaries and letters of many significant writers, including Hans Christian Andersen and Ralph Waldo Emerson.

She was the only child of John Stevens and Mary Nash, her parents lower-class but with higher aspirations. John Stevens became a wealthy inn-keeper and wine-merchant (as is Wentworth in *Susan Hopley*): Stevens's Coffee House in London had customers including Lord Byron. The child Catherine was reared in rural, coastal Kent, which could have been for reasons of her health. Larken also suggests John Stevens had an ulterior motive. His stock in trade was luxuries, the port and champagnes whose import was risky, given the ongoing wars between England and first Revolutionary, then Napoleonic France. If he needed reasons to visit an area well known for smuggling, or 'Kentish Freetrading', then a daughter was a useful cover.

A child's view of a smuggling community was presented by Rudyard Kipling as jolly good fun in his poem 'A Smuggler's Song':

Running round the woodlump if you chance to find
 Little barrels, roped and tarred, all full of brandy-wine
 Don't you shout to come and look, nor use 'em for your play
 Pull the brushwood back again, and they'll be gone next day

The little girl in this poem is promised a French doll for keeping quiet about the smuggling. Catherine, when she wrote about smugglers in her 1847 novel *The Story of Lilly Dawson*, presented a darker view, in which the secrecy conceals brutality and murder. In this early experience of crime, she was unusual, as most women working in Victorian crime fiction tended to have a personal connection that was second-hand, usually through being the daughters or wives of lawyers.

Her abiding and also analytical interest in the subject is shown by the beginning of the short story 'The Morning Visitor':

One of the features of our time – as of all times, each of which is new in its generation – is the character of its crimes. Every phasis of human affairs, every advance in civilization, every shade of improvement in our material comforts and conveniences, gives rise to new modes and forms – nay, to actual new births – of crime, the germs of which were only waiting for a congenial soil to spring in; whilst others are but modifications of the old inventions, accommodated to new circumstances. (215)

The daughter of a self-made businessman would likely have received only the conventional and scanty female education. She was later to lament in *Lilly Dawson* that: 'six hours a-day at Latin and Greek are better than six hours a-day at worsted-work and embroidery; and time is better spent in acquiring a smattering of mathematics, than in strumming Hook's lessons on a bad pianoforte' (181). Little of her is known before her relatively late marriage to Brevet-Major John Crowe, a hero of Waterloo, which took place in Chichester Cathedral on 6 June 1822 (Larken 33).

The following year Catherine gave birth to a son, William; and two years later her husband officially retired from the army on half-pay. When living in Bristol, the Crowes met the wit and cleric Sydney Smith, who became great friends with Catherine. She would later recall that had she 'never known him, I should assuredly not have become an authoress – and I should have lost many pleasures if I had not' (qtd in Larken 75). When, in 1837, she left her husband for a new life in Edinburgh, the destination may have been Smith's suggestion. Nearly 40 years previously he had praised Edinburgh: 'for a literary man, by which I mean a man who is fond of letters, it is the most eligible situation in the land' (qtd in Bell 14–15). There he had helped found the *Edinburgh Review*; and the city became a hub of writing activity, with magazines such as *Blackwood's Magazine* and *Chambers's*. Crowe took with her letters of introduction from Smith to the *Edinburgh Review* founders, and also what was to be her first published work, the verse tragedy *Aristodemus* (1838).

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

Smith had described Edinburgh as congenial for the literary *man*; and it would prove likewise for Crowe. He wrote to her in early 1840, happy to hear that she was 'so comfortably arranged at Edinburgh' and 'intimate' with *Edinburgh Review* co-founder Lord Jeffrey (Holland 425). Crowe was not, by the standards of the time, young; she was financially independent but not wealthy; in the social scale she was no more than an army wife of humble origins – and nobody ever rhapsodized about her beauty. In 1853, when she was in her sixties, Thomas Carlyle wrote an unflattering description: 'an elderly fashionable Lady with one of her *eyes* [eyelids?] relaxed and hanging' (28: 58). Crowe clearly charmed

through personality and conversation; and her work impressed even more, being appreciated by notables including Baudelaire.

Part of her success was as the hostess of select salon supper-parties, recalled by David Masson as:

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

This aspect of Crowe has caused some writers to depict her as no more than a socialite, to the detriment of her literary reputation. Juliet Barker notes that Crowe was one of a group of female writers invited by Thackeray to a disastrous evening with Charlotte Brontë, whom she terms: 'society women, mere dabblers in the world of literature' (644). A career lasting 20 years is hardly 'dabbling'.

From the many accounts of Crowe emerges a portrait of a woman as supreme networker, not afraid to display her intellect and be unconventional. Many early Victorians were intrigued by popular pseudosciences such as mesmerism (hypnotism) and phrenology, which inferred character traits from 'bumps', the shape of the skull. Few women, though, would have brought a Negro, a Dr Lewis, to perform mesmerism at the home of founder phrenologist George Combe – it is hardly surprising that Combe told actress Fanny Kemble that Crowe's skull displayed 'a most preposterous organ of wonder' (Kemble 231, 233).

She undoubtedly had a certain oddity: author Camilla Toulmin Crosland found her 'an eccentric woman, not particularly refined, but at any rate she had the courage of her opinions' (88). But amongst the Edinburgh intellectual milieu, Crowe was in similar and good company. One of her friends was Dr James Young Simpson, discoverer of chloroform. Simpson used himself as an experimental subject, as well as the children of his friend, magazine publisher Robert Chambers – Bulwer Lytton also used to practise mesmerism on this hapless brood (Lehmann 126). One night in 1847, when famous children's author Hans Christian Andersen came to dinner with Simpson, the menu included ether. A bemused Andersen recorded in his diary:

Dinner at Dr Simpson's, where Miss Crowe and yet another authoress drank ether; I had a feeling of being with two mad people, they

laughed with open, dead, eyes. There is something uncanny about this; I find it wonderful for an operation, but not as a way of tempting God. (Qtd in Bredsdorff 194)

Crowe could not only forge a social identity but also a career path very much on her own terms. The play *Aristodemus* was published first but never produced. Her first few years in Edinburgh were spent on *Susan Hopley*. Her reputation made, she then forged a relationship with *Chambers's*. The magazine had from its first issue in 1832 featured the 'nice amusing tale', specifically excluding the Gothic (Chambers 1). Crowe wrote to Robert Chambers, criticizing this editorial policy:

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

Larken notes on his transcript of the letter that Crowe had a story accepted by the magazine by this date (April 1841), hence her confidence in hectoring her prospective editor. On 8 May an extract from *Susan Hopley* appeared in *Chambers's*, prefaced by a brief review, noting the book was: 'marked by a quiet kind of talent, singularly free from

literary affectation, and indeed all traces of the profession of letters' (*Chambers's*, 8 May 1841: 123–5). It reads like a backhanded compliment, especially since Crowe's profession *was* letters. She did not fit Chambers' idea of the ideal feminine – his daughter Nina wrote that 'He does not admire women with minds' (Lehmann 136). Nonetheless she became part of his family circle.

Chambers had a secret: he was author of an anonymous scientific cause célèbre, *Vestiges of the Natural History of Creation* (1844). The book was an important if wrong-headed precursor of Darwin's *On the Origin of Species*, attributed to clever individuals as diverse as Ada Lovelace and Prince Albert. Crowe was also suspected of being the author, even at Chambers' dinner table. She responded to the accusation by laughing and saying nothing (Ireland xx–xxi; he does not name her, but the identification is made by Secord 376, 379, 375).

The association with Chambers was fruitful for Crowe. In the 22 May issue of *Chambers's* appeared her 'Frank Hepburn: a Tale of Tale-bearing'. Young Frank is employed in a draper's shop, and overhears another employee boast of cheating the owner. He watches the offender, but is himself framed in an elaborate fake robbery. This story could have been read as a domestic or moral tale – Frank is at the end found innocent – but its content was indubitably crime. It reads like a slice of life, or true crime. Unlike *Susan Hopley*, it lacks any detection.

She continued to write regularly for *Chambers's*, in a variety of genres. Her major project, though, was the crime novel *Men and Women or Manorial Rights*, which would be published in 1843, again anonymously. *Men and Women* also had a theme of circumstantial evidence, though with a tighter structure. Crowe had claimed to Robert Chambers in her letter of April 1841 that 'when I write, I do not form a plan – I could not – my story works itself, and my people talk for themselves'. Yet *Men and Women* could not have been written without pre-plotting: Sir John Eastlake is found shot dead, and three suspects are, one after the other, accused of the crime. As a reviewer noted:

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

extends, and the murderer is enmeshed. (*Examiner* 16 December 1843: 788)

Larken missed the significance of *Susan Hopley* for early detective fiction. For *Men and Women*, with its more generic plot structure, he claimed:

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

Men and Women alone among Crowe's novels had only one edition. Such may explain the text's neglect, despite its controlled crime plot and critique of class/gender relations. The motive for the murder revolves around the titular manorial rights: Eastlake preys on his female servants and tenants. He lures young Lucy Graham into a tryst – where he is shot. 'There lay Sir John Eastlake, stiff and cold, partly glued to the earth by the blood which had now dried' (1: 242–3).

Several immediate suspects are Lucy's soldier sweetheart William Bell and her brother Leonard, both of whom were nearby at the time. As in Müllner's 'Der Kaliber', ballistics is significant in eliminating suspects. A pistol borrowed by Leonard is found not to have been fired: 'The charge, which had been drawn from the pistol, was then produced and Duke [the owner of the weapon] recognized it to be the one he had himself put in: the paper with which he had rammed it down, being part of a memorandum of the quantity of corn brought to the mill that week, written by his own hand' (2: 167). Here Crowe cleverly makes use of forensic physical matching (linking evidence found at a crime scene with the murderer), but negatively, to prove innocence rather than guilt.

Crowe now casts suspicion on Mr Rivers, heir to the Baron's title and property. Lady Eastlake, the bereaved mother, has 'the determination of detecting what everybody else seemed resolved not to detect', that Rivers was guilty of the murder (2: 173). Nelly, her old servant, assists in the investigation. Lady Eastlake interviews Lucy, coming to share her conviction of William Bell's innocence. At the time of the murder, Rivers' whereabouts and what he was doing were unknown: 'If we only knew that, it might furnish a clue to track him by' (2: 175). In fact, Rivers was armed and in the vicinity, having come to ask Sir John for money. If unsuccessful, he intended to shoot himself.

It is ballistics that indeed solves the case, and a gun with the Eastlake crest seen in a pawnbrokers and found in the Baron's park the day of the murder: 'he [the murderer] hid the gun; and the gun rose up and bore witness against him' (3: 159). The pawnner, a dismissed gamekeeper, also has motive to kill Eastlake but can implicate another party, previously unsuspected. He dies, but is found to have been poisoned with arsenic. A furious chase ensues – and the (double) murderer proves to be Groves, Eastlake's manservant and procurer, avenging the ruin of his sister, the clue to which is hidden adroitly in the second volume. The final lines in the book are: 'And let those who do not scruple to employ their retainers and dependants in services that debase their minds and corrupt their morals, beware, lest their instruments should better their instructions, and in some shape or other return to their own lips the "poisoned chalice" they have learned to drug for others' (3: 60).

Men and Women has a police detective, Scroggs, a Bow Street Runner, who makes a brief appearance towards the end. The real sleuthing is done by amateurs: Nelly and Lady Eastlake; William Bell the deserter; Lucy; and others including a Catholic priest, and the suitors for Rivers' daughters. The novel lacks the figure of a principal detective, such as Susan, yet does not need one – the investigation is combined, switching between characters and viewpoints in a complex yet controlled plot. Its structure is that of a mystery, one which interposes a second villain with multiple identities (as in *Susan Hopley*) throughout the book, and introduces a second murder and its investigation in the third volume. Only when the two villains meet is capture and closure effected.

What inspired Crowe to write two early crime novels? She certainly knew major writers with similar interests: Bulwer Lytton, a friend of the Chambers'; Dickens; and, later, the young Wilkie Collins. More significant was her friendship with Thomas De Quincey, the only contemporary author who not only critically analysed the nascent crime fiction genre (as did Poe) but also theorized true crime in 'On Murder Considered as One of the Fine Arts'. He respected Crowe, according her the unique distinction of being the only woman outside his family he called by her Christian name (Japp 310). John Ritchie Findlay recalled De Quincey's opinion: 'Of Mrs Crowe as a writer he expressed great admiration, especially as to her power in arranging plots. Her machinery was coarse – a murder – but the ingenuity with which in *Men and Women* she distributes the suspicion of the murder between four or five persons was most masterly' (51).

Yet it should not be assumed that De Quincey was sole inspiration for Crowe, though he no doubt encouraged and possibly critiqued her. He was the less effective as a crime fiction practitioner; Crowe in her

novels showed more technical understanding of the crime narrative form than he did in his short fictions, such as the 1833 'Klosterheim'. In addition his 1845 critique of *Caleb Williams*, as cited in Chapter 1 above, was likely informed by reading Crowe's two novels. If so, then Crowe's work is the measure by which De Quincey finds Godwin wanting.

Others admired *Men and Women*. Author Geraldine Jewsbury wrote to Jane Carlyle that she found it:

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

Forster and Jewsbury both acknowledged Crowe's powers of narrative. No other early crime novelist allowed so few digressions to get in the way of her crime plot, allowing it to dominate the book. The reactions of her readers were precursive of modern crime reading practice.

Subsequently, Crowe's interest in crime continued, but she no longer wrote novels so generic in form. *Lilly Dawson* followed in 1847, the story of a lost heiress raised by smugglers, yet with the crime and mystery narrative structure less dominant. The ending, like *Susan Hopley's*, is unconventional in terms of romance expectations, for Lilly chooses not to live as a fine lady, and elopes with a humble-born sweetheart. As with her earlier novels, Crowe respects working-class people and their lives. She might be described as having radical sympathies in her politics, and is even more radical in her expression of proto-feminism. *Lilly Dawson* contains four pages on women's rights, highly critical of contemporary gender roles. Although Crowe did declare women to be men's intellectual inferiors, she supported their right to education and work, and the moves in Switzerland and America to give them greater rights. Here she was again anticipatory, for in the following year was held the first convention on women's rights, at Seneca Falls in the USA.

Like *Susan Hopley*, the novel was dramatized as *Lilly Dawson, or, a Poor Girl's Story! A Domestic Drama* by Edward Stirling. It was hugely successful, not least for the scene in which the villainous Luke Littenhaus stabs his sleeping sister Charlotte in bed, in mistake for



Figure 3.1 The sensational murder scene from Catherine Crowe's *Lilly Dawson*, in which Luke Littenhaus stabs his sister in mistake for Lilly, as dramatized by Edward Stirling. From *Duncombe's Acting Edition of the British Theatre* (Stirling [1847]).

Lilly. In Duncombe's edition of the playscript, this thrilling moment is illustrated as the frontispiece, showing Lilly cowering behind the bed-curtains (Figure 3.1).

Lilly Dawson also advertised a new direction for Crowe: Spiritualism, a sensation of the age, the inverse of Victorian scientific progress and rationalism. Already by 1845 Crowe was familiar with the continental debate on the subject, and published a translation from the German of Justinus Kerner's *The Seeress of Prevorst*, an account of a noted clairvoyant. In the novel, Crowe writes that ghostly experiences should be 'examined in that truly philosophical and liberal spirit, which can alone elicit truth'.

She proposed to do just that, as Spiritualist literature in England was 'scanty' (*Lilly Dawson* 224). The following year appeared her *The*

Night Side of Nature (1848), an original, pioneering and clear-eyed investigation of psychic phenomena. In its Introduction she declared her belief that the supernatural would eventually come 'within the bounds of science' (17). Here she applied the analytical intelligence shown in her crime writing to the supernatural, as part of a serious scientific enquiry.

The work was read avidly and widely. It figures, to name just one instance, in the famous 1859 ghost story 'What Was It?' by the Irish-American writer Fitzjames O'Brien. In the story, a haunted boarding house contains a reading group of Crowe fans:

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

The popularity of *The Night Side*, still regarded as an important text by Spiritualists, obscures Crowe's day side, her significance as a fiction writer. Moreover, her interest in the paranormal was ultimately to lead to a scandal in February 1854 which damaged her literary reputation. At the time she was stressed and ill, but still ready to spend a night of psychic experimentation in a haunted Edinburgh house. Crowe collected a small party of investigators, and also a girl, a medium when hypnotized. The expedition was organized carefully to prevent any fraud, with the medium unaware of the destination. Inside the empty house she was put into a trance, and asked if it should be leased: 'She shuddered and said "No; that two people had been murdered there, and we should be *troubled*."'

The medium claimed to see lights:

'If Mrs Crowe would take hold of my hand, I think she might see them,' she suggested.

I did so; and then at intervals of a few seconds, I saw thrown up, apparently from the floor, waves of white lights, faint, but perfectly distinct and visible. In order that I might know whether our perceptions of this phenomenon were simultaneous, I desired her, without speaking, to press my hand every time she saw it, which she did, and every time I distinctly saw the wave of white light.

Crowe wrote:

You see our results were not great, but the visit was not wholly barren to me. Of course many wise people will say, I did not see the lights, but that they were the offspring of my excited imagination. But I beg to say that my imagination was by no means excited.

Indeed, Crowe's account is calm, noting that: 'we did not follow up the experiment by the others taking [the medium's] hand, which we should have done' (*Ghosts and Family Legends* 139–42). But she does not allow the possibility that she could have been in a suggestible state – and Crowe knew about the powers of suggestion from mesmerism. The incident indeed 'troubled' her, to the extent of triggering a nervous breakdown, with appalling consequences.

Charles Dickens wrote to a correspondent on 7 March 1854:

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

The story sounds unlikely, given Edinburgh winter weather, when even a madwoman would hesitate in venturing outside naked. However, it was true, and probably passed to Dickens by a source close to Crowe: the Chambers family, one member of whom was married to William Henry Wills, Dickens' *Household Words* co-editor. Crowe's actual 'streak' was brief: she was quickly removed from the street by a medical acquaintance. She was sent to a private asylum, where she made a quick and full recovery.

But the damage to her reputation was done. It proved impossible to keep the story quiet: it spread rapidly, being reported in the newspapers, anti-Spiritualist magazines and by literary gossips. In response, she wrote to the *Daily News*.

Sir, – I am very sorry to trouble the public about my private maladies or misfortune, but since the press has made my late illness the subject of a paragraph, stating that I have gone mad on the subject of the spirit rapping, I must beg leave to contradict the assertion.

I have been for some time suffering from chronic gastric inflammation; and, after a journey to Edinburgh and a week of considerable fatigue and anxiety, I was taken ill on the 26th of February, and was certainly five or six days – not more – in a state of unconsciousness. During this aberration, I talked of the spirit rapping and fancied spirits were directing me, because the phenomena, so called, have been engaging my attention, and I was writing on the subject; but I was not – and am not – mad about spirits or anything else, thank God! though very much out of health and exceedingly debilitated. I have been residing in London for the past few weeks, and am now at Malvern, trying what homeopathy will do for me ... (29 April 1854: 2)

The story was too entertaining to be easily squashed, not least in the absurdity of a middle-aged female author playing Lady Godiva. The scandal was discussed by literati from Caroline Clive to Robert and Elizabeth Browning, in Italy (Larken 423). Perhaps most significantly, it provided ammunition for the emergent backlash against Spiritualism. Dickens had earlier been intrigued by psychic phenomena, knowledgeably if sceptically reviewing *The Night Side* in the *Examiner*. He stated that Crowe ‘can never be read without pleasure and profit, and can never write otherwise than sensibly and well’ (26 February 1848: 131). He published her in *Household Words*, and hosted her at dinner with the Carlyles and Elizabeth Gaskell. Now Dickens spread the news widely of her sensational illness (his phrasing is echoed in the newspaper accounts). In his letter he dismissed her callously as a ‘medium and an Ass’, although she had never claimed to have any supernatural powers. However, in the same paragraph, he allowed that *Susan Hopley* was ‘rather a clever story’ (*Letters* 7: 288).

In the middle of the crisis Crowe’s novel *Linny Lockwood* appeared, being advertised as ‘now ready’ in *The Times* (28 March: 13). It was received with respect, despite daring subject matter – two women are deserted by the same man, and the wife ends up nursing her husband’s mistress through her pregnancy. The novel again featured Crowe’s interests in women and the dignity of work, with a minor character undertaking some amateur detection. In the meantime the author remained sociable, as if nothing had happened. Artist Henrietta Ward met her in London, post-breakdown, and noted that she was ‘a keen Society woman, unquestionably intellectual, but very easily excited’ (*Reminiscences* 147); Fanny Kemble found her ‘perfectly restored to her senses’ (233). Crowe wrote up the Edinburgh séance in the 1857 *Ghosts and Family Legends*, a book for Christmas which collected ghost stories,

including her own – though without mentioning what happened subsequently. Two years later appeared her last book, a short non-fiction treatise, *Spiritualism and the Age We Live In* (1859). She continued to contribute to periodicals sporadically, her last-known story being ‘Lost Diamonds’, which appeared in the *Manchester Times* of 20 May 1871. It concerns diamonds thought to have been stolen, but actually mislaid. Although not a strong story, it does show that her interest in crime persisted into her eighties. When her name appeared in contemporary newspapers, it was almost exclusively in connection with ghost anecdotes. Crowe lived on the continent until the Franco-Prussian war in 1870, thereafter returning to England, where she settled in Folkestone, near her son William and his family. She died of ‘natural decay’ in 1872 (Boase 1: 775).

Larken comments that because of the Godiva incident: ‘Crowe has been pilloried for more than a century’ (432). Moreover, her versatility – she wrote drama, non-fiction, crime and children’s books, adapting *Uncle Tom’s Cabin* for the younger reader in 1853 – makes her difficult to categorize. Lastly, she was popular – all the easier, then, to dismiss her as a hack and ‘a pioneer of the lowliest sort of domestic fiction’ (Baker 8: 107).

Re-examining Crowe shows her contribution to crime fiction was significant. Novels apart, with her short crime fiction and articles she prepared the ground in *Chambers’s* for ‘Waters’ ‘Recollections of a Police-Officer’, the first police procedural serial, which began in July 1849. Indeed, in the preceding month a quasi-crime series in *Chambers’s*, ‘Experiences of a Barrister’, made reference to her work. In the story ‘The Writ of Habeas Corpus’ an obvious homage appears, with a bit player in its story of inheritance fraud being a servant named Susan Hopley (vol. 11 n.s. 9 June 1849: 354–8).

The novelist Adeline Sergeant, writing in an 1897 essay which grouped Crowe with two other female crime writers, Caroline Clive and Ellen (Mrs Henry) Wood, noted that *Susan Hopley* ‘had all the ingredients of a sensational story’ (149), here referring to the Sensation genre of the 1860s. Its influence cannot be underestimated, particularly on the King of Sensation, Wilkie Collins. In 1854, at the end of the same year as her breakdown, Crowe had enjoyed an evening gathering at the home of Collins, his mother Harriet and brother Charles (Larken 434). Maid-detectives are not common in Victorian fiction, yet Collins’ 1856 crime story ‘Anne Rodway’ also features such a person. *Susan Hopley’s* use of viewpoint was a technique used by ‘later detective writers, most notably Wilkie Collins...until it became both a conventional form and

a philosophical approach to the question of reality' (S. Mitchell 164). In the French preface to *The Woman in White*, Collins claimed his viewpoint inspiration came from a recent trial proceedings, but *Susan Hopley* was nearly 20 years his precursor. Furthermore a plot device from the novel – identifying a criminal by cutting, unobserved, a scrap of cloth from their clothing, then producing it, like a jigsaw piece, in evidence – reappears in Collins' *No Name* (1862).

Larken found Crowe 'a strange, unfathomable woman' (195). It is perhaps equally strange that she downgraded her own work, telling De Quincey that she had an 'entire contempt' for her novels (qtd in Japp 311). This opinion he did not share and neither can we: Crowe was the first major woman author in the crime form, writing two novels devoted to murder mysteries when her contemporaries relegated the subject of murder to a small part of their novelistic canvases. She was the first writer, perhaps, to successfully apply the murder mystery to the novel and sustain it over the narrative unflaggingly. Moreover, she made use of the sleuthing female, making for the first time a female detective the protagonist of a novel. Given these achievements, it is perhaps most strange and unfathomable that she was so utterly forgotten.

4

'I'm a Thief-Taker, Young Lady'

'I'm a thief-taker, young lady'

Colin Hazlewood, *The Mother's Dying Child* 17

The 1850s, in the canonical crime tradition, is an interregnum between Poe and the Sensation novels of Wilkie Collins in the 1860s, apart from Dickens' *Bleak House* (1852–3), with its Inspector Bucket. Closer examination shows an unbroken continuity in crime fiction during this decade. Moreover, it was spreading: the first Italian detective fiction appeared, with Francesco Matriani's *The Blind Woman from Sorrento* (1852) and Emilio De Marchi's *The Priest's Hat* (1858); and the first Spanish, Antonio de Alarcón's 'The Nail' (1853). These writers and others consolidated the emergent genre, their markets ranging across class.

During this period crime fiction took diverse forms. While the crime mystery plot increasingly dominated the narrative, there were various anomalous texts. The presence of the detective was not necessarily guaranteed, and indeed one of the most intriguing murder mystery novels eschewed the sleuth altogether: the 1855 *Paul Ferroll* by Caroline Clive (1801–73).

Of all the women writers discussed in this book, Clive had the least financial need to write, being an heiress from the county gentry. She was certainly the least conventional, particularly in terms of beauty, being described as: 'an ugly little thing. Her bright eyes were squinny, her mouth enormous, her jowl heavy' (M. Clive 10). Clive was also a victim of what seems to have been polio. The disability and her fortune resulted in an unusual personal freedom: she was 'in irons as to her legs, but rode about all over the country unattended and used to get awful falls now and then, but her pluck was indomitable' (qtd in M. Clive 114). She similarly travelled in Europe unchaperoned, one trip with the local

vicar, the equally wealthy Archer Clive, proving a courtship tour. They married, very happily.

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

Paul Ferroll, her first and most successful novel, was not as extreme, but still outrageous for the time. The title, in a curious reversal, came from an early pseudonym of hers (minus the final 'l') attached to a volume of theological essays. *Paul Ferroll* was certainly not religious, the hero murdering his wife without subsequent punishment or repentance. Moreover, it lacked sanctimonious moralizing, then almost compulsory, as authors justified their satisfying of the popular demand for thrilling crime.

Paul Ferroll's focus on the murderer places it in the Newgate category, but it is more of a mystery – and less sprawling than the Mysteries form. Adeline Sergeant notes that *Paul Ferroll* was considered an early Sensation novel (164–5). Certainly the opening chapter of the novel is a piece of controlled scene-setting that a modern crime writer might well envy. An idyllic countryside is painted, through which landowner Paul Ferroll rides. Then its peace is disrupted by crime, with the discovery of his wife's murder.

Paul Ferroll is an odd and unsympathetic character. The investigation into the death proving inconclusive, he marries again, achieving the domestic bliss he did not enjoy with the first Mrs Ferroll. Although a successful writer, he is almost completely self-contained. He shuns his neighbours, but protects them during labour disturbances, where he murders the ringleader of a riot very coolly, if not in cold blood. It is only years later, when an innocent party is convicted of his wife's murder, that he confesses. Even then he is never punished, escaping from prison, with the last words of the novel (in its original edition) being his daughter's affirmation that she still loves him, despite his crime.

The novel was successful, with even a verbena named after Ferroll (M. Clive 276). It is probably best classified as a psychological thriller, and one clearly influential on Sensation fiction, both in English and

probably also via its French translation. Elizabeth Gaskell commented: "The great skill is in the working out of this plot. People here condemn the book, as "the work of a she-devil", but buy it, and read it' (*Further Letters* 147). Like Trollope with *Jessie Phillips*, Clive was sensitive to audience reaction. She retreated from the apparent amorality of the work, writing a prequel, *Why Paul Ferroll Killed His Wife* (1860), which depicts the first Mrs Ferroll as unremittably evil. Although Clive lived to old age, she suffered ill-health and her fictional output was scanty, with no more crime. Only her end was sensational: she died when a spark from a domestic fire set her dress alight.

Despite *Paul Ferroll's* success, in writing a detective-less novel Clive was working against the trend. During the 1850s the sleuth would increasingly occupy the centre of the text. The most striking development was the 'Casebook', what would now be termed the police procedural. During the 1840s, especially after the establishment of Scotland Yard's detective office in 1843, the new professionalism of police drew coverage in the newspaper press. By the decade's end they would be fictionalized, narrator-protagonists, in what would continue as a healthy publishing sub-genre into the 1860s. The initiative came from male writers; but women soon followed the trend, with one writer, Mary Fortune, the subject of a later chapter, building a 40-year career from the male police detective.

The trope began with Waters, the hero/narrator/'author' of 'Recollections of a Police-Officer', which ran in *Chambers's* from 1849 to 1853. The series was the logical continuation of a fictional process beginning in 1830–7, with Samuel Warren's 'Passages from the Diary of a Late Physician' in *Blackwood's Magazine*. Warren created a new form, a series of short encapsulated stories, fictions presented as memoirs, which gained authority from the narrator, a professional man. As such, the series appealed to the emergent middle class. Poe reviewed it as 'very popular but shamefully ill-written' ('Samuel Warren' 349). The paradigm was imitated, not least in Catherine Crowe's *Susan Hopley*. Here Susan, while never forgetting her investigation into Andrew Hopley, via her profession of maidservant solves several minor crimes, presented as self-contained episodes.

More obvious copies were made simply by applying the format to different professions. The anonymous 'The Experiences of a Barrister' was one example, appearing in *Chambers's* in 1849–50, which ran concurrently and overlapped in subject matter with the police stories. They may have had the same author, although only Waters has been credited to William Russell, an enigma, but apparently no

policeman, the pseudonym alluding to a genuine 'Runner' (D. Browne n. 123). Russell applied *Richmond* and Vidocq to Warren's professional form and created a literary sub-genre, the Casebook, from July 1849. Famously, Scotland Yard detectives influenced Charles Dickens, first as subjects for favourable articles in his magazine *Household Words* (co-written with co-editor William Henry Wills), beginning in 1850. But Russell was first in his fictions about detectives, and wrote Casebooks for some years. Significantly his police character is the hero, central to proceedings. Dickens' Inspector Bucket may have been a more memorable character, but he only appears in *Bleak House* from chapter 22 onwards, while the murder he solves occupies chapters 49–54.

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

Snobbery with violence is the term applied to aristocratic detectives of Golden Age crime fiction, such as Lord Peter Wimsey, but it is applicable to how Victorian novelists depicted their police. The tendency was for denigrating, comic names: Blathers and Duff in *Oliver Twist* and Bucket (despite *Bleak House* postdating Dickens' acquaintance with real detectives). When police professionals occupied centre stage, it was only because of acceptable if not superior class. This factor operates in various detective fictions: *Richmond*; Émile Gaboriau's M. Lecoq; and Waters. Richmond's origins are plainly middle-class: he works for a while in a Liverpool 'counting-house' (14–15). Lecoq and Waters were forced to enter the force as distressed gentlemen. The latter protests that: 'adverse circumstances – chiefly the result of my own reckless follies – compelled me to enter the ranks of the metropolitan police, as the sole means left me of procuring food and raiment' (Russell, 'Recollections' 55). Such was not totally improbable: around this period the journalist Harry

Findlater Bussey met a Hertford police sergeant 'who bore the title of a baronet; but, his patrimony having been squandered by his predecessors, he was reduced to the necessity of joining the police force' – and was touchy at any allusion to his title (33).

Russell was the first writer to specialize in police detectives, though initially he seemed unaware of the mystery form, even though *Chambers's* had reprinted Poe's 'The Purloined Letter' in November 1844. His police stories began as adventures, long on coincidence and short on ratiocination. He would develop more of a deductive plot: 'Murder under the Microscope' (from *Experiences of a Real Detective*, 1862) carefully reconstructs a crime, with clues such as a washing-line, used to trip a horse, and bloodstains subjected to forensic examination. That said, the story is still not exceptional for its time. Though Waters was popular, his exploits were essentially hackwork.

Nonetheless Russell was widely imitated, with possible influence upon the French novel. Paul Féval had a Scotland Yard Superintendent, Gregory Temple, in *Jean-Diable* (1862), which led to a magazine of the same name. One of its editors was Gaboriau, who has been generally credited with the invention of the *roman policier*, the police novel, his first being *Le Crime d'Orcival* (1866–7) with Lecoq as protagonist. Yet these novelistic innovations were significantly not followed by English Sensation writers, the most popular crime authors of the decade. Their target was the circulating library (middle-class) market, which meant amateur detectives, genus gentlemen. Even a 'gentlemanly' police hero seemed unthinkable, in novel form at least.

Most immediate was Waters' influence upon short story writers. 'Recollections' was collected in book form, in America (1852, pirated), England (1856), followed by a German translation (1875). It was also reprinted as a staple of the 'yellowback' market, cheap yellow paper-covered booklets. So many Casebooks appeared in the 1860s that it became necessary to differentiate the protagonists. One way was via geography: writers would localize the form, creating titles such as *The Irish Police Officer* by Robert Curtis (1861) and *The New York Detective Police Officer*, 'ed. by John B. Williams, M.D.' (1865).

Coincident with the latter appeared the short story 'Mr Furbush', featuring a New York police sleuth. It was not written as a memoir, being a third-person narration, but otherwise in form was indubitably a Casebook. Moreover, the story was by a woman, and openly ascribed as such: the American writer Harriet Prescott, later Spofford (1835–1921) (Figure 4.1). Her long writing career included poetry, novels and short stories, the form in which she excelled. A modern clerihew describes her thus:



Figure 4.1 Harriet Prescott Spofford, the first American woman to write detective fiction.

Harriet Prescott Spofford
Sold every story she offered.
To Hawthorne she owed debts.
She walked in Poe's footsteps. (Stephen Davies)

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

By the time she began to contribute to the more literary American magazines, she had skills that belied her youth. Her favourite mode was Romantic and Gothic, her style richly ornate. One story, from February 1859, made her reputation as a direct and important successor to Poe – besides being the first-known American detective fiction by a woman. ‘In a Cellar’ told of jewel theft and political intrigue, with a Paris setting and a cosmopolitan, worldly narrator. When submitted to the *Atlantic Magazine* its setting and style made editor James Russell Lowell initially suspect he had been slipped an unacknowledged French translation, particularly since the author was a ‘demure little Yankee girl’ (qtd in Bendixen ix).

The unnamed protagonist of ‘In a Cellar’ is an English ex-diplomat retired to Paris, moving in high society but still consulting re an enormous, stolen diamond.

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

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

His narration is idiosyncratic, eschewing a simple progression: ‘it has become impossible for me to tell a straight story’ (4). The plot of ‘In a Cellar’ is thus as involved as a *noir* thriller, although its detection is rather more straightforward, being based on coincidence and simple misapprehension. The tale is something of a shaggy dog story – in effect, the butler did it. And yet it is a tour-de-force, largely because of its narrative voice, which is allusive, cynical, knowing and magniloquent. A different writer might have commented simply that a young thief

would end up on the gallows. In a punning circumlocution worthy of Nabokov, she expresses it thus (with a gratuitous drug reference, like a sting in the tail): 'With so promising a beginning, he will graduate and take his degree from the loftiest altitude in his line. Hemp is a narcotic; let it bring me forgetfulness' (9). 'In a Cellar' is a work that has no equal in the nineteenth century; its sophistication and style would not be applied to the American detective narrative again until Melville Davisson Post and Raymond Chandler.

Five years later, with 'Mr Furbush' (published in the April 1865 *Harper's Monthly*), she ventured upon the Casebook form. The story was published anonymously, and she used a simpler style, though still tending to the orotund. Detective Furbush is 'a man of genteel proclivities, fond of fancy parties and the *haut ton*, curious in fine women and aristocratic defaulters and speculators' (624). The story (which in *Harper's* immediately preceded an instalment of Wilkie Collins' *Armadale*) begins with the murder of an heiress in a city hotel. Detective Furbush pursues the case 'on his own account and in a kind of amateur way' (624). The murder occurred at the same time as a parade, which passed between the hotel and a photographic studio opposite. Furbush, happening to visit the studio for a portrait, discovers photographs of the parade. He examines them:

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

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

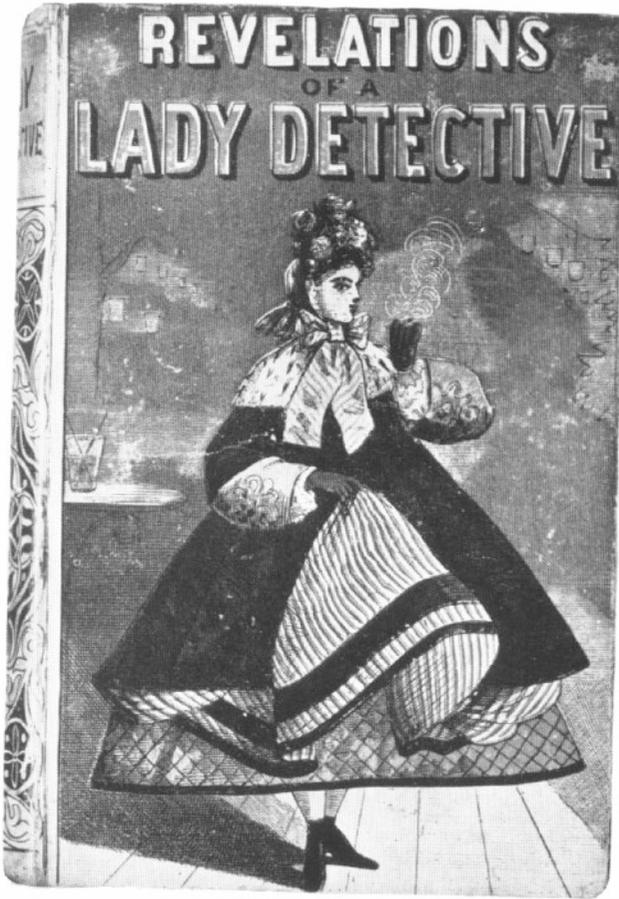
This plot twist possibly originated in Dion Boucicault's play *The Octoroon* (1859), where in Act II a character is murdered while sitting for his photographic portrait, with the evidence of the exposed plate discovered two acts later. Spofford's variation – the enlarging of a photograph to discover evidence of a crime – would reappear in Antonioni's *Blow-Up* a century later. It also figures in another early Casebook story written by a woman, Mary Fortune, a Canadian living in Australia, whose 'The Dead Witness; or the Bush Waterhole', was published in the *Australian Journal* of 20 January 1866. Both stories may independently draw on some true crime case, although the nine-month time interval is sufficient for influence. *Harper's* crossed the Pacific to Australia – its June 1870 issue, for instance, was subject to comment in the September 1870 *Australian Journal* (54).

'Mr Furbush' was clearly not intended as a series, with the detective retiring to become a professional photographer. Yet Spofford published at least one other Furbush story. 'In the Maguerriwock' appeared in the August 1868 *Harper's*. In the meantime Harriet Prescott had made a happy marriage to Richard Spofford, a lawyer and politician, in 1865; their only child, a son, was born and died in 1867. Furbush now seems to be a private eye, accepting work from 'clients'. Ten years previously a pedlar had vanished in the lawless Maguerriwock, on the Maine frontier. Proof of his death is required, and Furbush follows the cold trail, aided by a local sheriff. As with Spofford's first story, it leads to a cellar, where in a butt, not of malmsey, but cider, the pedlar's remains are found – after Furbush, in an exquisitely ghoulish touch, has been invited to taste the brew.

Spofford's three detective stories are diverse, with 'In a Cellar' gloriously unique; 'Mr Furbush' of interest largely because of its photography; and 'In the Maguerriwock' accomplished in its use of suspense, Gothic horror and regional detail. They are also isolated in terms of her *oeuvre*. She had moved from hackwork to a mode ornate, Gothic and macabre – only to find literary tastes changing towards the realist. Indeed she was the subject of a patronizing review in January 1865 by the then 22-year-old Henry James, which advised her to 'study the canons of the so-called realist school' (272). She later found a niche with New England sketches, though never with the acclaim accorded 'In a Cellar'. Her current literary reputation is highest as a writer of the weird, but her contributions to crime are significant. Not least, she was the first woman with a series detective, and sufficiently confident to sign her female name to a story of police detection, that very masculine preserve.

Casebook detectives had diversified geographically, and one further important variation occurred in 1864: female police detectives. Two collections of short stories with women as narrator/protagonist appeared, the anonymous *The Revelations of a Lady Detective* (Figure 4.2) and *The Female Detective* by Andrew Forrester Jr, an apparent pseudonym. Synchronicity again occurred, with both books being advertised within a day, in *Reynolds's Newspaper* of 15 May (8) and the *Edinburgh Caledonian Mercury* of 16 May respectively (1). In a further coincidence, a feisty female amateur detective featured in Colin Hazlewood's play *The Mother's Dying Child*, first performed in London in October 1864; its title was subsequently changed to *The Female Detective*, and in America it was pirated as *The Little Detective*.

These two police detectives did not derive from the Gothic heroine-sleuth, which was nearing its end in the 1860s, nor did they



3417

Figure 4.2 The titlepage of *Revelations of a Lady Detective*. Reproduced from Michael Sadleir's *XIX Fiction*, courtesy of the Baillieu Library.

have the true crime basis of Anne Kidderminster. They comprise a fantasy: the police force was then exclusively male. The exception was women employed as 'female searchers' at police stations, one of whom, now married to a policeman, plays a bit part during the investigation in an 1863 story by Forrester, 'Mrs Fitzgerald's Life Policy' (in his *Revelations of a Private Detective*). Just as Nemesis was invoked as a precedent for female amateur sleuths, justification was needed

for female police, given the genuine contemporary anxiety about applying the concept of professionalism to women, except in the context of home and family. Luckily a French antecedent, if dubious, existed. In the opening story of *The Revelations of a Lady Detective*, 'The Mysterious Countess', the protagonist explains her employment by Colonel Warner:

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

Warner was a fiction. Joseph Fouché (1759-1820) was Napoleon's Minister for Police, Vidocq's ultimate boss. He was (in)famous for creating a model of French policing that the English both admired for its effectiveness yet deplored for its wholesale snooping surveillance, a panopticonic gaze they feared to copy lest it be directed upon themselves. 'Such a spy must of course be a finished tool of corruption,' were the words of an anonymous writer in 1831, voicing the persistent paranoia re 'Napoleon Police' ('The Local Government' 83). Not expressed was that Fouché's reforms essentially transformed the police into professionals, like Warren's physician.

Fouché was also a supreme political survivor, negotiating Revolutionary France from Terror to Restoration, without loss of power or life. He was a spymaster, maintaining files on everyone, and also a very clever man. Like Vidocq, he became the object of enduring fascination. His depictions are many, being played by Albert Finney in Ridley Scott's *The Duellists* (1977) and by Gerard Depardieu in a 2002 French TV miniseries of *Napoleon*. In crime fiction of the nineteenth century, Fouché is a persistent influence, even if only namechecked, as when a lady's maid of intelligence and perspicacity is termed a 'Fouché in petticoats' in Mary Braddon's 1865 *Sir Jasper's Tenant* (38). One of his biographers, the Austrian novelist Stefan Zweig, recalled his appearance in play or opera as 'a sort of forerunner of Sherlock Holmes' (xiv), although Mycroft Holmes is a more accurate comparison. Fouché's *Mémoires* (1824) closely preceded those of his employee Vidocq, and were apparently also ghostwritten. They were soon quickly translated and pirated, editions appearing in England and the USA in 1825.

In his *Mémoires* Fouché mentions his network of informers in passing: 'I had salaried spies in all ranks and all orders; I had them of both sexes' (*Memoirs* 275). Another (purportedly) French memoir, distinctly less reliable than that of Fouché and Vidocq, had already provided more fascinating detail. In 1815 appeared the *Secret Memoirs of Napoleon Buonaparte*, written by a Charles de Bourges Doris. The publisher was the English firm Colburn, best known for the Gothic, and the work, though read as gospel at the time, is now regarded as Napoleonic apocrypha. Nonetheless it revealed (or invented) a titillating nickname for the Empire spies, cited as a coinage of Bonaparte himself: the 'Cytheréan Cohort' (248–9), the cohort of Cythera, the birthplace of Venus. A modern equivalent would be Salon Kitty, the implication being that information was gained via honeytrap.

Female spies were hardly an innovation: the writer Aphra Behn had been a spy for Charles II. She is known as the first professional female author, and that she had also undertaken paid espionage can be seen as only one aspect of a life lived beyond the conventional feminine domestic, dependent upon the masculine. If Fouché had made the police professional, then it followed that this description applied to his covert female employees. Thus he could be cited as precedent for female police detectives in 1864.

The Cytheréan Cohort made the transition into English popular literature in the 1850s. Australian expatriate author John Lang (1816–64) had seen their dramatic potential and approached popular playwright Tom Taylor, a fellow former student of Trinity College, Cambridge. He made a singularly bad choice of collaborator, given that Taylor had a cavalier attitude towards his source material, his huge output largely being fuelled by unacknowledged translations from the French theatre, a common practice in English drama of the period. The collaboration seems to have broken down and Taylor would acknowledge only that Lang contributed the idea for the play (Taylor, *Historical Dramas* 414).

The most likely explanation is that Taylor, who had an experienced eye for what would and would not work on stage, found Lang's plot insufficiently dramatic. He consulted Doris, and from there took a story of a Cytheréan 'nymph', sent to spy on a writer whom Napoleon believed to have libelled him, but who in fact fell in love with and married her quarry (253–63). The result was Taylor's highly successful spy drama *Plot and Passion* (1853). Lang retaliated with a novel, *The Secret Police, or Plot and Passion* (serialized 1856, book 1859). Both were set in the Napoleonic Empire, and featured Fouché as a character, with a female spy as heroine. As a consequence a popular precedent was

created for female (secret) policing, which allowed for professionalism, being employed by the police, even if tending to end at the altar.

The difference between Taylor and Lang's spy texts and the 1864 detectives is that the marriage plot does not figure. These women are complete professionals, married to their work and enjoying it. Such a notion was as disturbing to Victorian convention as the lower classes gaining power as police. In both the 1864 books it is even introduced as almost beyond comprehension. A character in *The Revelations of a Lady Detective* comments: 'A female-detective ... I should as soon have thought of seeing a flying fish or a sea-serpent with a ring through its nose' (260). Forrester's sleuth depicts a village constable who: 'never comprehended that I was a detective. His mind could not grasp the idea of a police officer in petticoats' ('The Unknown Weapon' 25). Petticoat police was shocking, in reality an oxymoron, but in these two fictions it is made credible, even compelling.

As both these books were anonymous or pseudonymous, the possibility exists that the innovation of female police was the work of women writers. 'Anonymous was a woman!' is a famous feminist graffito, and it was also how many nineteenth-century women, including Crowe, entered the literary world. The major clue to the authorship of *The Revelations of a Lady Detective* is that other books were ascribed to the unknown writer, these including *Anonyma*, *Incognita* and *Skittles*. As the titles indicate, these works were not detective fiction: they purported to be memoirs by women of pleasure. Indeed, searching for the word 'Anonyma' in contemporary newspapers, now digitized online, such as *The Times*, shows that it signified a prostitute.

Here another source for the Victorian female detective – the most shocking, even being reprehensible to readers of the era – can be identified. The mid-nineteenth century, despite its reputation for prudery, was an era where the courtesan reigned as a celebrity, particularly in France. They entered fiction with Dumas *filis'* novel *La Dame aux Camélias* (1848), based on the life of Marie Duplessis. Successful plays followed, and an actual *Mémoire* (1858–9) by Céleste de Chabrillan. Several famous courtesans, such as Cora Pearl and Skittles (Catherine Walters), were English, and they represented a gap in the Anglophone popular market, if a writer and publisher were sufficiently enterprising and bold.

More than one author was involved, given the sheer volume of titles. In 1864 seven courtesan books appeared in England, published by Vickers within weeks, as well as *The Revelations of a Lady Detective*, from Berger – all ascribed to a common author, despite the latter being detective fiction. The eight books by the 'author of *Anonyma*' were

lumped together by booksellers and reviewers. They inspired a moral panic. John Cordy Jeaffreson in the *Athenaeum* indignantly reviewed them as 'unclean trash', not fit to be stocked by respectable booksellers and libraries (22 October: 523). After the review he intended to burn them, in the case of *The Revelations of a Lady Detective* without reading it. He judged the book by its cover, which showed a woman in crinoline, smoking a cigarette, something that in the 1860s signified a fast femme. Jeaffreson did allow that: 'The fellow [the author] has a certain amount of vicious cleverness.' The idea of a woman being responsible was clearly unthinkable. Indeed the contemporary sanctions on female sexuality meant a woman would have been very brave, hack and secretive, to pen *Anonyma*.

Despite the furore they caused, *Anonyma* and her companions were not pornographic. Typical is when *Anonyma's* lifestyle is described as 'Orgie succeeded orgie' (*Anonyma* 75), with no further detail. Their real crime was to describe, in Jeaffreson's words, 'the life of a fallen woman as a thoroughly jolly existence' – the book ends with the bad girl well and happily married. All the pious moralizing did not hurt sales: an undated reprint of *Incognita* by E. Griffiths cites in its endpapers figures of 10,000 to 30,000 for the *Anonyma* titles.

Whodunnit? An opinionated and well-read writer is shown by references to Darwin, the utopian socialist Robert Owen and irreverence towards several members of the British royal family. Two popular fiction writers are generally named: William Stephens Hayward (1835–70) and/or Samuel Bracebridge Hemyng (1841–1901). As regards personal knowledge of crime, Hayward had experienced debtor's prison and an appearance at Bow Street Court on a charge of rape. The complainant was lodging house servant Jane Bettison, who was too distressed to describe the incident. The case was adjourned for a week, with Hayward, described as a 'Gentleman', on bail with two sureties of £250 each. At the second hearing, Bettison did not appear and the case was dismissed (*The Times* 7 April 1857: 9; 14 April: 9). Hemyng, an old Etonian and Oxonian, had demi-monde experience from researching and writing the prostitution section (vol. 4) of Mayhew's *London Labour and the London Poor* (1861), where a streetwalker also cites Owen (256). He was a lawyer and is known to have written detective fiction, including *Secrets of the River by a Thames Policeman* (1870?), before becoming a writer for boys.

The Revelations of a Lady Detective seem a fortunate coincidence between the Casebook's fiction of professionalism and the oldest profession of all. What *Anonyma* and her ilk brought to Warren and Waters' model was a

lively female protagonist, presented without sanctimony. The lady detective of *The Revelations* had been in 'my younger days ... employed as a barmaid at a large refreshment saloon at one of the railway stations' (276) – perhaps a unique cv for a Victorian heroine. She is an impoverished widow, 'well born and well educated' and 'verging upon forty' (Marcus, 'The Mysterious Countess' 2, 3). Her name, Mrs Paschal, has a spurious authenticity from London police official Colonel Paschal – also mentioned in *Anonyma* (78). In 1864 he was very much alive and in charge of London's traffic. If he had a wife she was certainly no detective.

The *Revelations* stories are not particularly skilled as detective puzzles. In 'The Mysterious Countess', Mrs Paschal investigates a woman with suspicious wealth, the major adventure being a thrilling pursuit through subterranean secret passages, for which she removes her crinoline. The villain lives in proximity to a bank, to which the passages conveniently lead. These obvious denouements are less interesting than the character of Mrs Paschal, who is confident, intelligent and attractive: 'My brain was vigorous and subtle,' she boasts. 'For the parts I had to play, it was necessary to have nerve and strength, cunning and confidence, resources unlimited' (Marcus, 'The Mysterious Countess' 2).

In contrast, Forrester's *The Female Detective* is not character-driven, but presents a series of intricate crime puzzles. The book is even more of an authorship mystery than *The Revelations*, for there are no clues to the writer behind the apparent pseudonym. It probably alluded to John and Daniel Forrester, two brothers employed as semi-official private detectives by the Corporation of the City of London (Bleiler Introduction, *Three Victorian Detective Novels* ix). Whoever Forrester was, he published various collections of short stories in the 1860s. They were initially simple crime adventures until he encountered Poe, whom he terms 'the great enigma-novelist' ('The Unknown Weapon' 59), and began to experiment with the murder mystery form.

Forrester's best work was *The Female Detective*, yet his lady is singularly reticent and self-effacing, taking 'great care to avoid mentioning myself as much as possible' (3). She begins with a teasing guessing game: 'Who am I?' Her answers are vague: 'It may be that I took to the trade [of female detective] because I had no other means of making a living' or 'for the work of detection I had a longing which I could not overcome'. She is equally vague as to her social position and marital status: 'It may be that I am a widow working for my children – or I may be an unmarried woman, whose only care is herself.' Her friends 'suppose I am a dressmaker' while her enemies 'are in a great measure convinced that my life is a very questionable one' (1–2).

Her sex is thus incidental to the stories, the major exception being 'The Unknown Weapon', the best, longest and most sophisticated of Forrester's works. Here his heroine proves her claim that 'the female 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' (4). In this story, a young man is found dead outside a country mansion, with a barb in his chest – but no other indication of how and why he was murdered. There were only two women, a servant and a housekeeper, at home at the time. The female detective sets out to solve the mystery, which lies in the domestic sphere, intimate watching in a female-dominated rural setting reminiscent of Gaskell's *Cranford*.

Moreover, the *Cranford* narrative 'The Panic' is arguably a source. Both 'The Panic' and 'The Unknown Weapon' contain a story within a story, a northern folk or rural myth concerning a robber carried into a house concealed in a pedlar's pack. The bag being seen to move, a gun is shot at the pack, killing the hidden man. Commentators on Gaskell and Forrester generally cite James Hogg's 1817 short story 'The Long Pack', as a version of or source for this story. However, in Hogg's original, a girl was scared by the pack moving and a boy shot at it. Gaskell, in her retelling of the core story, loses the boy. The step of making the thief's killing an act of female heroism was made first by Gaskell; Forrester's version draws on both Hogg and Gaskell.

In 'The Unknown Weapon' the case is resolved by the discovery of a man-size box, in which a would-be robber was carried into the house. On hearing noises from the box late at night, the housekeeper, a capable and formidable woman, quite the female detective's match, had stabbed the intruder through an air-hole. Then she efficiently concealed the crime, for the dead man was her master's son. Here Forrester showed he could deploy the detective plot over a substantial narrative with ease. But subsequently the author vanishes, though the texts continued to be reprinted. 'The Unknown Weapon' certainly reads like a woman's work, but other stories by Forrester, such as the insurance frauds in *The Revelations of a Private Detective*, are mysteries of legal minutiae, suggesting that he was a lawyer or law student – which would argue against female authorship.

The Revelations of a Lady Detective and *The Female Detective* were interesting and innovative, but apparently had little influence. Ironically Colin Hazlewood's play would be more lasting, performed in America for decades (Bordman 15), and thus providing a continuing and rare depiction of an effective female sleuth. It effectively rendered, via habituation, the female detective into a less outrageous concept. Otherwise, even without

the moral panic over *Anonyma*, women police detectives were simply too far ahead of their time. They were thus not the most important development in crime fiction during the 1860s. That distinction belonged to the novelists: in France Féval, Gaboriau and his *roman policiers*; and in England the writers of the Sensation school, chiefly Collins, Mary Braddon and Ellen (Mrs Henry) Wood. All made adroit use of mystery, murder and detection at novel length: crime was central, dominating the composition. Sensation will be discussed in the following chapters, being an area where women wrote almost as much as they were featured, despite the often murderous and sexually charged matter.

5

Getting Away with Murder: Mary Braddon

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

Mary Braddon, *The Doctor's Wife* 229–30

Sensation novels were a notorious literary genre of the 1860s, named for the furore they created, and their appeal, seen as visceral, depicting the worst of human nature. They drew on contemporary famous cases of murder and bigamy, and often retailed them in a narrative form remarkably prescient of modern crime writing: plot-driven, with relentless suspense. Such was created by the practice of magazine serialization, with its need for cliffhanger endings with each instalment, to keep the reader hungry for more. Sensation looked forward, but also back to the Gothic, using its dramatic set-pieces, like the trapped heroine, while also borrowing the Newgate novel's crime content, used in a contemporary, realist setting.

The first writer identified with Sensation was Wilkie Collins (1824–89). The son of a portrait painter, he had been intended for the law. After his father's death in 1847 he was bequeathed enough money to devote

himself to writing. As an amateur actor he was present at a famous conjunction of English crime writers and the police. An 1851 charity performance of Bulwer Lytton's play *Not As Bad As We Seem* was to be presented by Dickens before an audience including Queen Victoria and Prince Albert. Bulwer Lytton's marriage to Rosina Lytton, also a writer, had broken down in rancour, with the husband's bad behaviour reciprocated by the wife. Rosina now threatened to disrupt the performance, and in precaution Dickens privately hired Scotland Yard detective Inspector Field (who had appeared as 'Wield' in his *Household Word* articles). In the event nothing happened, but the incident not least represented an intriguing meeting of the old and new guard of English crime writing.

Collins knew Crowe; and was a friend of and related by marriage to Dickens. During the 1850s he worked in novel and short story form, gradually introducing and refining crime and mystery elements. Around the same year as his maidservant detective story, the 1856 'Anne Rodway', and his response to Poe's 'The Purloined Letter', 'The Stolen Letter', he met Caroline Graves, one moonlit night, as she fled through the streets of London clad in flowing white robes. From the encounter grew an enduring romance and the bestselling *The Woman in White* (1860).

In the novel young Walter Hartright is a drawing teacher, and the woman in white is Anne Catherick, who has escaped from a lunatic asylum. At Hartright's new job he falls in love with heiress Laura Fairlie, engaged to marry baronet Sir Percival Glyde. She bears a curious resemblance to Anne; and the likeness will be villainously exploited by Sir Percival. The novel represents a brilliant assimilation of genres, from the Gothic, with its ghostly women in white, to true crime, Wilkie using a French case of a marquise whose brother seized her estates and immured her in a madhouse under a false name. The wicked baronet was a fixture from melodrama; and the assortment of parties involved in investigating the mystery, from Hartright to Laura's half-sister Marian Halcombe, had been notable in novels by Crowe, Fanny Trollope and Bulwer Lytton. The novel was an instant success from its first numbers in Dickens' magazine *All the Year Round*. A literary genre followed.

Four writers dominated the Sensation market: Wilkie Collins, Mary Braddon, Ellen (Mrs Henry) Wood and Charles Reade, the latter being less ancestral to modern crime writing, as he tended to the episodic and action-packed rather than the mystery narrative. In contrast, Collins, Braddon and Wood wrote novels that were crime both in subject and

form, often structured around a detective search. Their works were very close to if not identical with modern generic crime, with Collins' *The Woman in White* and *The Moonstone* (1868) subsequently reclassified as mystery and detective fiction respectively.

The first numbers of *The Women in White* appeared in November 1859; by February the following year a detective serial was being published by the woman who would be Collins' most serious literary rival, and later trusted friend (Carnell, *Literary Lives* 103). At the time, Mary Braddon (1835–1915) was a young actress appearing in provincial theatre in Brighton, under the stage name of Mary Seyton (Figure 5.1). Contemporary mores held that actresses were little better than whores; but Mary came from a family of country gentry in Cornwall. Her father Henry was a London solicitor. His improvidence and worse led to a separation from his wife Fanny, who reared three children despite decreasing gentility. The elder daughter married an Italian, the son emigrated to the colonies, to eventually become Premier of Tasmania. Fanny Braddon and Mary were left alone, congenial but with limited means.

Mary Braddon was gifted with drive, initiative and intelligence. Her surviving note- and commonplace books, held in the Wolff collection (The University of Texas at Austin), reveal an intellect intrigued by such matters as the distance of the sun, Hindustanee grammar and Australian Aborigines. Necessary economies would appear to have curtailed her schooling, but her mother Fanny Braddon was a cultured woman. Mary recalled as a child reading Byron aloud to her mother ('The Trail' 110); and the love of literature fostered by Fanny made her a voracious reader – she was well versed, for instance, in the French novel, conventionally considered a bad influence on young women. Mary wrote from early girlhood, and a key to her unfettered imagination is a sketchbook in the Wolff collection, showing heroic men, and women as sultry-eyed and seductive as any Ronald Searle belle.

In the 1909 'The Woman I Remember', Braddon recalled her limited options: she had the choice of becoming a governess, or an actress. The latter was decidedly more fun, but scandalous. However, Fanny was supportive, accompanying the teenage Mary during her adventures in theatre-land, as chaperone, and because mother and daughter were best friends.

Mary Braddon's range extended from Shakespeare to pantomime. She probably played the role of Susan Hopley, which was in the repertoire of the Henry Nye Chart theatrical company with whom she acted (Carnell, *Literary Lives* 337). The play is mentioned in her novel *Aurora Floyd* (332) and also in an 1861 letter she wrote to the journalist George Augustus

 PUNCH, OR THE LONDON CHARIVARI.

PUNCH'S FANCY PORTRAITS.—No. 21.



MISS M. E. BRADDON.

"JUST AS I AM!"

Figure 5.1 This caricature of Mary Braddon from *Punch* (5 March 1881) expresses better than her formal portraits her lively personality – a shrewd literary businesswoman who thoroughly enjoyed penning bloody murder.

Sala, who had rented a country house called Upton Court. It is expressive of her lively, attractive personality:

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

Acting was hard, insecure work – and after seven years Mary Braddon had not become a London leading lady. 'She was by no means a genius as an actress,' recalled a contemporary, 'but she had a most lovely head of hair in wavy rings' (*The Era*, 26 February 1898: 12). Mary needed another paid profession, and the only creative one was literature. Here she had a precedent in Fanny, who had written for popular magazines, both with her husband and after their separation.

Mary began with verse in provincial newspapers. By her own account it was her poems in the *Beverley Recorder* in Yorkshire which caused local printer W. H. Empson to offer ten pounds for a serial novel. But Mary had another link to the town, John Gilby, a wealthy cripple. He supported the Braddon women, although his relationship with the vibrant and statuesque Mary was that of artist to patron. Gilby kept her, but as writer rather than concubine.

Her first novel *Three Times Dead: or, The Secret of the Heath* (1860; later revised as *The Trail of the Serpent*, from which quotations will be made here) was crime, and completed in Beverley. It was a by-product of her patron's pet project: Gilby, like a schoolmaster, had set Braddon the subject of Garibaldi, in the form of an epic poem. His intentions were honourable – he wanted to marry Braddon after making her famous. Yet he insisted on playing the pedagogue, as his letters attest. At times sexual frustrations show, as when he cites as an exemplar a young woman writer with 'a good dear father' (a schoolmaster), who kept a 'cane for her special use' and 'applied it effectively' (qtd in Wolff, *Sensational Victorian* 93). Whatever Braddon thought of these admonitions, she was productively employed in Beverley, recalling it as 'perhaps the happiest half-year of my life' ('The Trail' 119).

Empson had requested 'the human interest and genial humour of Dickens with the plot-weaving of G. W. R. [sic] Reynolds' ('The Trail'

116). That these influences were stipulated rather than *The Woman in White* suggests the arrangement preceded Collins' serialization. The novel begins in Dickensian style: both *Bleak House* and *Three Times Dead* open with ominous descriptions of wet and foggy November days, which seems a deliberate homage. In her 1899 novel *His Darling Sin*, a character calls Inspector Bucket 'the beloved of my childhood' (119–20). She also borrowed a detail from Bulwer Lytton's *Pelham*, where a murderer washes blood off his hands in a basin, then drinks the incriminating evidence. *Three Times Dead* contains a passage listing other influences, incidentally a good description of the novel. A character knocks over a shelf of cheap fictions, which disintegrate. He sits in the mess unable to stop 'reading from the loose leaves the most fascinating *olla podrida* of literature, wherein the writings of Charles Dickens, George Sand, Harrison Ainsworth, and Alexandre Dumas are blended together in the most delicious and exciting confusion' (*The Trail* 240).

The plot is a howcatchem: in a provincial town lives an apparently virtuous young schoolteacher, Jabez North (Ephraim East in *Three Times Dead*). Within a few chapters he commits two murders, then incites his mistress to drown herself and baby. The first murder is blamed on Richard Marwood; and with his arrest enters Detective Peters, Braddon's first and best detective. His sources were varied: Braddon mentions Vidocq in the novel, and knew Russell's work, which both she and Fanny apparently disliked (Carnell, *Literary Lives* 131). Nonetheless Peters is more of a Casebook hero than Bucket, appearing in chapter 5 and remaining a presence throughout the novel. Mary also drew on her theatre experience, Peters being mute, a common trope in melodrama, appearing for instance in Pixérécourt's crime-themed *Le Chien de Montargis*. Peters becomes convinced of Richard Marwood's innocence, but has no evidence. At the trial he advises Marwood – by sign language – to plead not guilty on grounds of insanity.

While Marwood languishes in the madhouse, Peters adopts North's infant son. North himself fakes suicide and escapes to France, where he tricks an heiress into marriage. After Peters rescues Marwood, he receives a pension from his family. Then, in London, he sees a ghost: Jabez North, now the Count de Marolles and a successful banker. Peters enlists various characters to assist him, including North's son, Slosby, now a prodigious young detective. The climax, showing that Braddon even in her debut was a dab hand at suspense, occurs in the Liverpool docks, as passengers wait to embark for America. Peters arrests a coffin, purportedly containing the corpse of an American tourist. When it is

opened North is revealed: 'hot, flushed, and panting, half-suffocated, with desperation in his wicked blue eyes, his teeth locked in furious rage at his utter powerlessness to escape' (*The Trail* 299). He is tried but cheats the hangman by suicide, this time genuine.

In the novel Braddon wrote convincingly of police procedures, as when Peters collects evidence:

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

'You think it dropped through, then?' asked Gus.

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

The ceiling dripping blood reappears in chapter 56 of Thomas Hardy's *Tess of the D'Urbervilles*.

Braddon recalled that the novel came easily to her, running 'merrily off my pen' while Empson's devil waited for the copy in the kitchen ('*The Trail*' 122). The serial was printed in Beverley, then published on commission by the London firm of W. & M. Clark. *Three Times Dead* made its debut in penny numbers, then was bound in boards and published as a book. As the first numbers did not sell well, Empson insisted she trim the manuscript to half the projected length and accept a reduced fee (never paid).

Beverley gave Braddon her literary direction. *Three Times Dead* she resold to London publisher John Maxwell, who cut and reissued it in February 1861 under the title *The Trail of the Serpent*. It would be translated into French as *La Trace du Serpe* in 1864. Also in 1861 *Garibaldi* appeared, published at Gilby's expense: 'a failure, as it is the nature of all early volumes of poems to be', as she wrote in her 1864 novel *The Doctor's Wife* (14). Her association with Gilby also ended around this time, for Braddon had found a far more congenial and powerful literary mentor.

Maxwell was 15 years her senior, Irish, with a noisy, energetic personality. The pair fell in love. But the publisher was in the situation of

Mr Rochester, in *Jane Eyre*, with a wife he could not divorce because of her insanity. Jane Eyre fled temptation; Braddon did not wait the 14 years before Mary Anne Maxwell died. She cohabited with her lover – the 1861 British census lists Mary and Fanny as ‘visitors’ in Maxwell’s household, a small establishment requiring one servant. Just over a year later their first child was born.

Three Times Dead is apprentice work, being in construction and style inferior to Braddon’s later crime novels. It is overly coincidental even for early detective fiction. Yet the book is written with great good humour and narrative drama. It was reprinted in 2003, and one of the attractions to modern readers was Detective Peters. Nonetheless he would be a one-off: despite Waters’ precedent of the serial detective character, there was no equivalent in novel form until Gaboriau’s 1866–7 *Le Crime d’Orcival*. Braddon had no immediate models for continuing with Peters, a pity, for she depicts this working-class character without snobbery. A factor here was *Three Times Dead*’s appearance in penny numbers, aimed at the lower classes (Carnell, Introduction 17–19). For this audience, the police were unproblematic, and could be valorized as heroic. In Braddon’s later works, written when she was termed ‘Queen of the Circulating Libraries’ with their middle-class clients, more typical anxieties are expressed about the police.

In the 1860s Braddon produced a positive flood of fiction, much of it crime, for various markets: pulp, for such periodicals as the *Halfpenny Journal*; and also for the better-paying magazines like *Temple Bar* (both Maxwell publications). The Braddon women also took on the rearing of Maxwell’s six children. One potential problem was that the Maxwells were Irish Catholics, as had been Fanny Braddon’s father, she being the product of an (unsuccessful) mixed marriage. Yet, while the Braddon women were Protestant, they were not bigots; in the blended family the two faiths co-existed.

Fanny Braddon was crucial to the irregular arrangement made by the couple. Unlike Jane Eyre’s mother, she did not (spectrally) advise her daughter to flee temptation. Fanny worked editorially on the *Halfpenny Journal* (Sims 31), and probably managed Mary’s household. Mary Braddon again had the support to write and by the end of 1861 was working on five serials concurrently, while being pregnant for the first time.

She was not the only writer with a home life at odds with contemporary mores: Wilkie Collins lived with Caroline Graves. As a male, he did not suffer the double standard which affected one of the great British novelists of the era, Mary Anne Evans (George Eliot). In 1854 she eloped with writer George Lewes, who like Maxwell was unable to divorce. The scandal

was public knowledge, but while Lewes could be received in polite society, Evans, as a fallen woman, could not. To associate with 'respectable' women could have compromised them, such was the reigning anxiety.

In contrast Braddon's time as a scarlet woman was during her lifetime and for half a century later almost entirely kept quiet. It had its repercussions: when the Maxwells finally married in 1874 almost all of their servants resigned in outrage. Thus it was as 'Miss Braddon' that Mary experienced bestselling status and motherhood, something of which her readers were totally unaware. She would bear six children between 1862 and 1870.

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

Braddon had feminine company from Fanny, writing and the demands of a young family. Were these sufficient? She was vivacious and sociable, and after she became the legal Mrs Maxwell was a noted hostess. But in December 1862 she wrote that: 'I have very little inclination for spending money, & positively no time to be extravagant, if I wished to be so. I go no where where I require fine dress. I can't drink wine. I am not free to stir from London, or would spend my money in travelling; but am altogether bound hand & foot by hard work' (Wolff, 'Devoted Disciple' 10). The description suggests an ink-stained drudge, and while it provides an explanation of why she was reclusive, it is not the full story. Here she is disingenuous, because she could not tell Bulwer Lytton the truth.

In her uncertain social situation the writing of sensational tales probably provided necessary emotional relief. Much of her work in the 1860s involved crimes, mysteries – and also transgressive femininity. The bestselling *Lady Audley's Secret* (1862) and *Aurora Floyd* (1863) boldly explored the theme of women with hidden, even criminal depths. The plots of both novels deal with gradual revelation, their heroines having a secret which is via detection and accident exposed. They therefore have a mystery structure, though murders also occur. Both *Lady Audley* and *Aurora* make first marriages which end in separation. Believing

their husbands are dead, they remarry – only to have the first, and legal, spouses return. The sequence of events following is occasioned by the need for the women to maintain their reputations.

Lady Audley's accomplished mystery plot features one Lucy Graham, a name that with the identical spelling had been used by Catherine Crowe for the heroine of her murder mystery *Men and Women*. Braddon's Lucy is the Victorian feminine ideal embodied: a pettily pretty fair doll, sweet, innocent and vapid. It is possible that Braddon, who admired *The Woman in White*, but was not impressed by Collins' heroine (Tilley 198), was deconstructing the image with his frail and feminine Laura Fairlie in mind. Lucy, a governess, has a proposal of marriage from middle-aged baronet Sir Michael Audley. She accepts, though the reader knows from the end of chapter 1 that Miss Graham is a dubious character.

The early part of the book is structured in alternate chapters featuring characters who will eventually converge. One is George Talboys, returning wealthy from the Australian diggings to see Helen, the wife he left three years before – despite not writing to her in all that time. He is grief-stricken to discover from a newspaper that she is dead. His old friend Robert Audley, a lawyer and nephew of Sir Michael, cares for George, even taking him to visit Audley Court, his uncle's seat, where George vanishes.

The incident makes Robert Audley an amateur sleuth. '[Y]ou ought to have been a detective police officer,' Lady Audley tells Robert (141); and so in a different novel he might have been, had not Braddon been aiming for the middle-class market. Initially Robert is fascinated and puzzled by his aunt by marriage, but gradually becomes suspicious. She faints when he delivers, like a prosecution lawyer, a lecture on circumstantial evidence:

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

A similar chain-list of evidence had appeared in Bulwer Lytton's *Eugene Aram*. However, while Bulwer Lytton's Walter acknowledges Destiny as his guide, Audley cites the 'science' of the 'detective officer', indicating the advances in police investigation between the 1830s and 1860s.

Lady Audley does not murder until George reappears and she pushes him down a well – under the circumstances a perfectly logical reaction. Her career of evil is slipshod, leading to blackmail and finally exposure. Desperate, she bungles an act of arson, which would have rid her of both the blackmailer and Robert Audley. In response Robert reveals all to Sir Michael, who gives him *carte blanche*. With George presumed dead, Lady Audley is guilty of petty treason (husband or master murder, as opposed to high treason against the state), as late as the eighteenth century penalized by burning at the stake. Robert takes the law into his own hands, not immolating the accused, but immuring her in a lunatic asylum. There she eventually dies.

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

To place the novel in its contemporary contexts is to realize that Victorian distinctions between mad, bad and recalcitrant women could be blurred. One notable instance involved Bulwer Lytton and Rosina Bulwer Lytton. In 1858 Rosina publicly denounced Bulwer Lytton to his electorate, and he had her committed, although she was released a month later. *The Woman in White* and *Lady Audley's Secret* were published within several years of this event, and it is intriguing that in both the madhouse functions as a depository for difficult women. Braddon and Collins were, if commenting on the Bulwer Lytton case, doing so indirectly (Braddon was certainly not conscious of any parallel, or else she would never have asked Bulwer Lytton to be *Lady Audley's* dedicatee). However, it is perhaps significant that Rosina read and appreciated *The Woman in White*, for she wrote to Collins complaining that Count Fosco was insufficiently villainous, and recommending Bulwer Lytton as an exemplar of evil (Robinson 154).

By a curious coincidence, a short story published in the *Dublin University Magazine* (November 1861), 'The Woman with the Yellow Hair', dealt with uncannily similar matter to *Lady Audley*: a beautiful blonde woman who murders to hide her sexual duplicity. It was reprinted in the earliest known crime anthology, *The Woman with the Yellow Hair and Other Modern Mysteries* (1862) – the author is given in the *Wellesley Index* as the novelist and historian Percy Fitzgerald (1: 317). He worked for Maxwell as a journalist in the late 1850s, and would later come to know Braddon well.

The possibility of literary influence exists here, given *Lady Audley's* publishing history: it began serialization in Maxwell's *Robin Goodfellow* in July 1861, but the magazine ceased after 13 issues, leaving the novel incomplete. Braddon put *Lady Audley* aside while writing *Aurora Floyd*, which appeared in *Temple Bar* from January to April 1862. Yet the interrupted narrative had left its audience intrigued and *Lady Audley* reappeared, from the beginning, in Tillotson's *Sixpenny Magazine* from January 1862.

Lady Audley and 'The Woman with the Yellow Hair' have some striking similarities, significantly the game of cat and mouse played by the murderess and her prospective brother-in-law, as nosy a sleuth as Robert Audley. The difference is that no madhouse awaits Fitzgerald's murderess, and the story ends with bad triumphant: 'She, who drives about in that deep, dark blue brougham, one of the most "stylish" in the capital, is Mrs St. John Smith. She leaves her cards. She is very beautiful and placid, and with a line – her yellow hair is famous; and she has really nothing to trouble her' ([Fitzgerald] 70).

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

She is of course innocent. Unlike *Lady Audley*, she has menfolk to defend her, with even her previous suitor turning detective, aided by a London professional – a figure who concludes the narrative rather than being central to it. The guilty man proves to be a vengeful servant,

whom Aurora had, in the novel's most outrageous scene, horsewhipped for mistreating her dog. Aurora resumes her place in society, marrying (this time legitimately) her second husband again and becoming an exemplary Victorian mother.

Both *Lady Audley's Secret* and *Aurora Floyd* provoked speculation as to what sort of woman had written such daring books. It was expressed most openly in print via veiled allusions in reviews, such as an attack on Sensation fiction – and its women novelists – published anonymously by writer Margaret Oliphant in *Blackwood's Magazine* in 1867. Only hints were dropped, Maxwell being a powerful figure, physically and as a publisher. Subsequently Braddon's depictions of women were far more conventional, as if she sought to avoid comparisons between the writer and her fiction.

One apparent instance of this new caution was *Eleanor's Victory* (1863), her only novel where the heroine-sleuth motif is central. Eleanor Vane's father commits suicide after being cheated by card-sharps, and she seeks vengeance on the men she regards as his murderers. This not unreasonable desire is frustrated: Eleanor is repeatedly told that she is being unchristian and (worse) unwomanly, that to play detective is a humiliating business of lies, 'pitiful deceptions, studied basenesses' (173). Braddon also makes her haphazard to a fault. Though with 'the will and the courage ... she [does] not possess one of the attributes which are necessary for the watcher who hopes to trace a shameful secret through all the dark intricacies of the hidden pathway that leads to it' (177). Nonetheless, with the help of a devoted male admirer, and much coincidence, she does find the villain, one Launcelot Darrell, who has also cheated her out of an inheritance.

Braddon writes: 'The hour of her triumph had come; and in this supreme moment doubt and fear took possession of her breast' (396). The revelation of Darrell's misdeeds goes no further than the walls of an English manor house. Eleanor stops short of the law, out of pity for the mother of her quarry; she gets her money back, and has the satisfaction of seeing a (somewhat unbelievably) repentant and humbled miscreant. Braddon depicts her as contented with womanly restraint, a diminished revenge and domestic bliss – with Darrell living next door. The final sentence states: 'Eleanor's Victory was a properly womanly conquest ... The tender woman's heart triumphed over the girl's rash vow' (400).

For a modern reader puzzlement arises as to Braddon's making Eleanor so ineffectual. Why at the end does she willingly thwart herself, retreat into passivity? The explanation would seem to be the persistent formula of the heroine-sleuth, which though declining in the 1860s, still

apparently had sufficient influence for Wilkie Collins' sleuth Marian Halcombe to suffer a devastating breakdown. Marian is a strong and androgynous figure, seen as 'ugly' by Walter Hartright (*The Woman in White* 27). She attempts to protect Laura Fairlie, and in fact rescues her from the lunatic asylum where she was incarcerated by her husband. Marian thereafter plays no major role in the narrative, being content to act as housekeeper: 'What a woman's hands *are* fit for . . . early and late, these hands of mine shall do' (333). It is Hartright who restores Laura to her fortune, and like a fairytale hero, marries her.

It could be argued that Marian and Eleanor effectively culminate the tradition of the heroine-sleuth. The two 1864 detectives did not follow the stereotype; nor, from the same year, did Florence Langton in Hazlewood's play *The Mother's Dying Child/The Female Detective*.

Both play and Braddon's novel begin with unscrupulous gamblers on the continent, fathers being fleeced and their daughters turning detective. Florence, though, is not chastised for her 'natural' curiosity. She is an effective foil and ally of Bow Street Runner Roderick Tracy, and even comments that men are 'horrid', and should be 'abolished altogether' (Hazlewood 10). The drama is essentially an actress's showpiece, for Florence assumes different disguises ranging from peasant wench to fast young man. Although reviewed in Australia as 'one of the most trashy specimens of the sensation school ever placed upon the stage' (*Argus* 23 September 1867: 5), it was performed for decades in America, because it was associated with the most popular entertainer there, the actress Lotta (Charlotte Crabtree) (Bordman 25). The play certainly reads as Braddonesque, as if Hazlewood had taken the basic scenario of *Eleanor's Victory*, and gone his own way. He knew her work, having dramatized *Lady Audley* and *Aurora Floyd* in 1863. Yet it should not be assumed that Hazlewood was more sympathetic to women, for he killed Lady Audley onstage.

Another, and pragmatic reason for Braddon's caution with Eleanor, is that by 1863 money was all-important: she had gone from being a kept if working woman to the support of an extended household. Her workload during the early 1860s was frightening: during 1862, when her first child was born, she worked on eight serials. Of these four bore her name, the others being published anonymously or pseudonymously in Maxwell's pulp *Halfpenny Journal*. This extraordinary activity was sparked by Maxwell being in serious financial trouble. He had two magazines fail in 1861 and suspended payment to his creditors in October of that year. His remaining magazines were mortgaged, and in December 1862 he executed a deed of assignment of all his estate and effects (Boase 6: 187), taking strong measures to avoid bankruptcy.

Braddon had considerable earnings from *Lady Audley*, but these were clearly not sufficient to pay the debts. Therefore she wrote Maxwell into the black again. The couple's unmarried status actually was a benefit here, as otherwise her earnings would have been considered officially his, and subject to seizure (Carnell, *Literary Lives* 151). Her strength of will seems awesome. A woman with lesser spirit would have been crushed, even without the additional burden of living in 'sin'.

She was also engaged in a fruitful competition with Wilkie Collins. In 1865 Braddon wrote to Bulwer Lytton: 'My next story [*Sir Jasper's Tenant*] is to begin in Temple Bar in January, if I live – & is to be sensational, for Wilkie Collins in Cornhill will be a most powerful oponent [sic] & I can only fight him with his own weapons – mystery, crime, &c.' (Wolff, 'Devoted Disciple' 26). His serial was *Armadale*, and she commented on the opening numbers: 'I do not fancy that so far it is anything equal to "The Woman in White".' She found the serial 'too openly & inartistically sensational', that Collins was telling the story too 'rapidly', his 'peculiar art' being 'the slow & gradual development of his plot' (Wolff, 'Devoted Disciple' 30). There is no malice here, for she does not crow that *Sir Jasper's Tenant* (not one of her better works) is superior to *Armadale*. Nor does she note that in this novel Collins addressed female villainy, with his red-haired Lydia Gwilt portrayed in a similar balancing act of auctorial ambivalence to Lady Audley, being both villainess and victim.

Braddon wrote much more of what we would now term generic crime than Collins. Despite the problems of quality control caused by the sheer quantity of her production, she matched and could even surpass him. Nearly all her 1860s novels involved crime and its solutions, usually presented within a mystery framework. Even her fictional response to Flaubert's *Madame Bovary*, *The Doctor's Wife*, included fraud, murder and an ironic self-portrait in the Sensation novelist Sigismund Smith, whose comments open this chapter.

By 1864 she and Maxwell were past the danger of bankruptcy. In the following years they invested in property and thereafter were prosperous. She thus had more time for revision, as happened with one of her stronger novels, *Henry Dunbar* (1864). The novel is about switches in identity, which occur, in an elegant example of plot turning, twice in the narrative. Henry Dunbar is a wealthy banker, returning to England after many years rustication in India for an attempted fraud of the family bank. He is met by Joseph Wilmot, a former servant and partner in his crime, who unlike Dunbar suffered severe consequences from it. Shortly afterwards Wilmot is found murdered at Winchester. An inquest

is inconclusive and Dunbar returns to his estates, a gloomy recluse – because of remorse?

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

Braddon's busy writing life would suffer a severe hiatus in 1868, a year in which Wilkie Collins also experienced trials. Both authors suffered bereavement (their mothers died), ill health and emotional stress. During the composition of *The Moonstone* Collins also entangled his personal life with the introduction of a second mistress, Martha Rudd. Caroline Graves decamped late in the year for a short-lived marriage to another, less complicated man. Rudd would bear him three children, and after Caroline's return, this time for good, Collins maintained two irregular households.

Braddon's crises were even worse. First, her elder sister Maggie died in Italy. The death coincided with her brother Edward's return from the colonies, where he likely discovered for the first time the truth about his famous younger sister. George Eliot's brother Isaac shunned her until she belatedly became an honest woman and Edward's reaction seems to have been similarly patriarchal. Shortly after Maggie's death in October 1868, he struck Fanny Braddon 'another & more cruel blow' (Wolff, 'Devoted Disciple' 146). Probably Edward disowned Mary, and also Fanny, for condoning her daughter's fall. The combined shocks prostrated Fanny, and within two weeks she was dead, on 1 November 1868.

Thus ended, Mary Braddon wrote to Bulwer Lytton two days later, 'thirty years of the most perfect union, I believe, that ever existed between two human beings of the same sex' (Wolff, 'Devoted Disciple' 147). She had lost her best friend. Moreover, the management of a household comprising eight children from two families was now Braddon's responsibility and she was in the last stages of another

pregnancy. Her letter to Bulwer Lytton ended ominously: 'my brain is much over excited & I scarce know what I write' (Wolff, 'Devoted Disciple' 148). The subsequent birth may have been difficult. Braddon's descendants recalled that she developed puerperal fever, later described in her *Lucius Davoren* (1873), where a nurse comments on a patient:

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

Delusions were not uncommon with a patient delirious from a high fever in the pre-antibiotic era. The mental disturbance would normally abate with the fever; but Braddon was ill in mind if not body for months. She later described herself to Bulwer Lytton as living through a period in which 'life was a blank ... imagination ran riot & I was surrounded by shadows'. She felt she was living in an 'unreal world' (Wolff, 'Devoted Disciple' 148). Clearly her condition was worse than post-natal depression or even a nervous breakdown.

Journalist George Augustus Sala, who worked with both Braddon and Maxwell, heard rumours. In a letter, undated, but from November or December 1868, he records an encounter with Maxwell. A query about Braddon had elicited the response that 'she was "rapidly recovering from a slight attack of nervous prostration into which she had been thrown by the death of her revered parent"'. Sala thought that Maxwell was: 'in a tremendous funk. The last run of the ore in the Richmond mine [where the couple were living] has been worked. It really does look like Nemesis. How many more 3 vol novels, each representing a ten-roomed house and an acre of land may he not have calculated upon?' Shortly afterwards Sala met an acquaintance who shared the Maxwells' physician: 'according to his showing poor Braddon is altogether off her chump' (qtd in McKenzie 118–19).

The most likely diagnosis is puerperal mania (post-natal psychosis). It had famously afflicted Isabella, wife of the writer William Makepeace Thackeray (an admirer of *Lady Audley's Secret*). Another sufferer was possibly Mary Anne Maxwell, although little is known of her madness except that it occurred subsequent to the birth of her son John in 1856. The disorder was recognized in the nineteenth century as an unpredictable hazard of childbirth. Although severe, it was generally only temporary. The treatment was mostly to wait, as most patients would naturally

recover their wits within a few months. In the case of Braddon, her six months of illness is around the median duration in some studies of post-partum psychosis (Brockington 211). She was no Lady Audley, but that she had a postnatal mental disturbance is an eerie coincidence – life imitating art – between author and character.

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

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

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

Yet even before the marriage, Braddon's letters to Bulwer Lytton described an increased social life. She wrote in 1872 that: 'We had private theatricals on a small scale, & from seventy to eighty people to witness the same & dance afterwards till five next morning' (Wolff, 'Devoted Disciple' 156). Two paintings by her friend the artist William Frith indicate her changing fortunes. The first is an 1865 portrait of Braddon standing alone in an interior, accompanied only by her writing desk. The second was a panorama, *A Private View of the Royal Academy*

in 1881. In it Braddon appears among a fashionable crowd of art lovers, including Oscar Wilde and Anthony Trollope. She also became friends with Wilkie Collins, being one of the few informed in confidence of his final illness (Letter). She probably knew his secret; and he, hers.

From 1870 onwards, Braddon wrote more of character and society than crime. She may have attended to criticism, such as the *Times*' review of *John Marchmont's Legacy*, which commented that 'the machinery of secrets has been done to death' ('Novels in Season' 6). As an acute businesswoman, she would have noted that Sensation was no longer a fashionable literary fad. However, she never quite abandoned the crime mode, which she clearly enjoyed writing, despite her protests. In 1872 she wrote to Bulwer Lytton, with typical zest, that:

The worst part of the business is that the books with murders in them – Lady A. & H. Dunbar – the whole interest centering in the murder – sell better than any others, & the critics say Thou shalt do no murder. However I think this time I shall once more make my dip in the lucky bag of the Newgate Calendar. (Wolff, 'Devoted Disciple' 158)

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

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

Occasionally Braddon merged her crime and social modes, as with the sombre *The Fatal Three* (1888). There is no crime in this novel, only family history, as Mildred Greswold seeks to find the truth behind her husband's first marriage, to a woman suspected of being her own illegitimate sister. The mystery is social, with a child born out of wedlock and condemned to a loveless existence and finally suicide. *The Fatal Three* was perhaps Braddon's best work, an almost perfect marriage between the mystery plot and the realist novel.

Braddon wrote continuously for the rest of her life, her age being almost equal to the number of her books when she died, aged 80, in 1915. Her work has been through a steady process of rediscovery and reassessment. In Victorian studies she is now regarded as a major figure. Certainly she was namechecked by writers as diverse as Fergus Hume, in *The Mystery of a Hansom Cab* (46), and Agatha Christie, in her short story 'Greenshaw's Folly' (338). Not least was her influence on the major crime writer of the fin-de-siècle: Conan Doyle.

In Julian Barnes' 2005 novel *Arthur & George*, a fictionalization of an incident in Conan Doyle's life, the author encounters a bigoted Chief Constable. He tells Conan Doyle his wife reads his books, adding: 'She is also very partial to Mrs Braddon.' Now, Fanny was 'Mrs Braddon'; Mary was known to her readers as Miss Braddon, and to her friends as Mrs Maxwell. Barnes' Conan Doyle feels in response 'a sudden pain, the literary equivalent of gout' (371) – the implication is that Braddon is trashy. In reality, Conan Doyle would have corrected the error, added that Braddon was a friend of his and felt complimented. He told Braddon in a 1909 letter that 'I respect yourself & your work so deeply' (Doyle, Letter to Mary Braddon). And in 1912 Conan Doyle and the elderly Mary Braddon spent two days reading a play together (Wolff, *Sensational Victorian* 376).

Perhaps the best summation comes from another of Braddon's friends, Henry James. He termed her, in a fannish and orotund letter, 'a magnificent benefactress to the literary estate' (qtd in Wolff, *Sensational Victorian* 11). Braddon can also be regarded as a magnificent benefactress to the crime fiction estate.

6

'Dead! And ... Never Called Me Mother': Ellen (Mrs Henry) Wood

She is mysterious because there is no mystery about her.

Margaret Oliphant on Ellen Wood, 1895

In early 1862 the publisher Richard Bentley wrote to one of his authors, Ellen Wood, asking if she knew anything about M. E. Braddon. The reply was that 'M. E.' was 'a Miss Braddon' although nothing else could be ascertained. Wood then revealed a keen awareness of Braddon as a literary rival.

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

Why Bentley asked Ellen Wood (1814–87) about Braddon is unknown, although as they both wrote of murder and deviant femininity, he might have wondered if they were one and the same. By the end of 1862, both women would be rivals in earnest, bestsellers. They led the Sensation school, along with Wilkie Collins and Charles Reade. While professionally the four were sensational, only Wood had a private life that was in Victorian terms irreproachable. She was middle-aged, married to a businessman and mother to a dutiful family.

A façade of formidable and repellent respectability surrounds Ellen Wood. She wrote as Mrs Henry Wood, and her one entry in the *Oxford Dictionary of Quotations* is: 'Dead! and ... never called me mother' (572). The sentimentality of the quotation, and the conventional form of

the name attached to it, seems to epitomize high Victoriana, like the stories of table legs wearing decorous little pantalets. However, like the shrouded legs, it is, if not apocryphal, then certainly dubious. These famous words were not Ellen Wood's; they appeared in T. A. Palmer's pirated stage adaptation of her novel *East Lynne* (1861).

East Lynne is sentimental and moral – and also a murder mystery, one of many Ellen Wood wrote. The work is complex; yet its creator is known only as a virtuous, dull woman. Henrietta Ward, who knew both Crowe and Wood, wrote:

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

Ward here provides a small but significant contradiction of the major biographical source on Wood, the memoirs by her author son Charles. He wrote about his mother first in 1887, in the magazine *Argosy*, and later expanded and revised his memoirs in book form, as *Memorials of Mrs Henry Wood* (1894). He depicts his mother as a perfect housekeeper: 'The complaints about domestics so often heard in these days were never heard in my mother's house and never existed' ('Mrs Henry Wood' 260). Indeed, she seems the Angel in the House personified. The only faintly naughty thing Ellen Wood did was to disguise herself as a monk and secretly enter a monastery at midnight. Shades of Gothic? No, a ruse of her husband so that Ellen could witness midnight mass at The Grand Chartreuse (*Memorials* 135–41).

Charles Wood was hampered by various factors. The first was lack of source matter, for his mother was not a diligent diarist, nor a keeper of letters. He therefore suggested her 'spirit', rather than 'presenting a formal or detailed memoir' (*Memorials* viii) – but without the 'hidden depths' sought by Ward. He was also constrained by filial duty, respectability and genre. Charles Wood was primarily a travel writer, most at ease when providing long descriptions of his parents' journeys in Europe. Ellen Wood was devoutly Evangelical Anglican, and as such a model for Charles was the Victorian religious memoir, a Saint's Life for Protestants. It tended to hagiography, uncritical, naive and unintentionally revealing: *Clear Shining Light* (1882), Emily Leakey's memoir of

her novelist sister Caroline, shows piety offset by indulgence in alcohol and laudanum, and possibly anorexia (S. Walker 85, 87–8).

Charles is more discreet, but unctuous and lacking self-awareness. He unblushingly declares he and his mother had ‘an intimacy between mother and son perhaps never exceeded’ (*Memorials* vii), plainly forgetting Oedipus and Jocasta. His great love and twisted psychology raise doubts as to his reliability. He probably did not know that his mother was born two months after her parents’ hasty marriage, and that her family owned a public house – the latter particularly embarrassing for a woman whose first novel was in the temperance genre (Riley 166, 173). If he had, then he would have omitted it.

In various places his account is dubious. One instance: in the *Memorials* Charles quoted a letter to Johnny Ludlow (a pseudonym used by Ellen Wood for a series of stories in the *Argosy*) from Tom Hood, the editor and humorist. It invited Ludlow to an evening of cigars and Oxford reminiscences (Wolff, *Nineteenth-Century Fiction* 4: 275–6). In Charles’ version, the anecdote shows his mother successfully mimicking the male voice. But the actual letter shows that Hood had found errors in Ludlow’s Oxford, which he offered to correct – convivially, over cigars. The elision shows that Charles was intolerant of anything that showed his mother to be less than perfect. In words he effectively airbrushed her, and even controlled her visual image (Figure 6.1).

Charles wrote that: ‘Her face never lost its look of youth. It was absolutely without line or wrinkle or any mark or sign of age’ (‘Mrs Henry Wood’ 258–9). The only known portrait of Ellen Wood, by the artist Reginald Easton and held at Worcester Town Hall, depicts a well-preserved woman, though it was made when she was almost 70. Images deriving from this portrait were policed by Charles. He protested to Bentley about the ‘dreadful reproductions’ of it accompanying her newspaper obituaries (*Archives of Richard Bentley* 25 February 1887, L97). For *Memorials* he had a photogravure made, showing a soft, attractive countenance, not achieved without some tweaking. Charles complained to Bentley: ‘All charm is taken out of the face, which to me is hard & unpleasing. The lines about the mouth, side of nose, & under chin ought to be removed, or so softened down as to become almost imperceptible’ (*Archives of Richard Bentley* 27 July 1894, L137).

Alternative witnesses to Charles are relatively few: he claims that after her literary success Ellen Wood became angelically house and study-bound, devoting herself to writing. ‘[To] a very great extent,’ says Charles, she gave up “the world”,’ his wording again suggestive of a Saint’s Life (‘Mrs Henry Wood’ 440). Yet she was not reclusive: in a



Figure 6.1 Ellen (Mrs Henry) Wood, the image approved by her son Charles for *Memorials of Mrs Henry Wood*.

letter to Bentley, Wood noted a day spent in making visits, including to Mrs Frith, wife of the artist, and encountering Eliza Lynn Linton (*Archives of Richard Bentley* 15 May 1874, L83, UI).

Charles remains the best source on Ellen Wood – though in his defence it should be noted that writer Isabella Fyvie Mayo thought that he had done his mother ‘justice’ (166). The second-best source on Wood is her surviving letters in the Bentley publishing archive. They usefully

counterbalance, and even contradict, Charles. He claimed that his mother was not money-minded: 'What is vulgarly called "a bargain", she could never think of or attempt. She shrank from the very word' ('Mrs Henry Wood' 352). However, the Bentley letters show a shrewd and tough businesswoman.

The third source on Wood, though it has to be treated with caution, is her work. 'I rarely write anything but it has some foundation in truth,' she told Bentley (*Archives of Richard Bentley* 15 October 1851, L3, UI). Autobiographical gleanings are found, though filtered by the medium of fiction. They are strongest in her earliest works, which appeared anonymously, and thus gave her licence to speak more freely than as the iconic Mrs Henry Wood. In addition, certain themes, notably financial ruin, recur almost obsessively. She could write of recognizable characters, with Archibald Carlyle of *East Lynne* said to be based on 'an eminent citizen of Worcester' (Ede 221).

In 1871 novelist Caroline Norton wrote to *The Times* accusing Wood of plagiarizing her (6). Norton's unhappy marriage had led to successful agitation for women's custody rights, and, after her husband claimed her copyrights, property. In Ellen Wood she met a formidable opponent. Wood retorted that *East Lynne* 'was taken partly from my own imagination, partly from a romance enacted in real life, some of whose actors are living yet and will recognise what I say as true'. She followed by publicly departing from the norm of female modesty, describing her 'gifts of imagination and power of construction ... possessed together in a large degree' (Letter). Charles would depict his mother as a retiring violet: 'perfectly aware of her own power [but] always very modest about her writings' ('Mrs Henry Wood' 342). In *The Times* a steely self-confidence is displayed. George Eliot commented: 'One feels rather ashamed of authoresses this week ... One hardly knows which letter is in the worse taste' (208).

Charles Wood's memoir does give valuable information as to his mother's life and working methods. She was the eldest daughter of Thomas Price, a wealthy Worcester glove manufacturer, her mother's maiden name being Evans. These names indicate Welsh ancestry. Charles makes much of his mother's connections with cathedral society, but her authorial voice, which can be waspish, disagrees. In *Court Netherleigh* she stresses class distinction: 'In those days, to be in trade, no matter how high a class it might be, was looked upon by the upper classes as next door to being in Purgatory. For all social purposes you might almost be in one as the other. Trading was a social crime, and nothing less' (7).

In *Mildred Arkell* she is similarly forthright, describing:

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

The child Ellen was gifted: Charles claims that: 'At seven years old she had gone through, without effort, the studies of girls twice her age.' At the age of ten she 'had read a great part of Shakespeare', and 'invariably' spent her 'unlimited pocket-money' on books ('Mrs Henry Wood' 253-4). Yet there is no indication that she received education beyond that considered suitable for a gentlewoman of her era.

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

Her adolescence was marked by illness, a lateral and inward thoracic spinal deformity. Of Lucy Cheveley in *Mildred Arkell*, said by Charles to be her 'counterpart' (*Memorials* 38), she wrote: 'She had "grown aside", as the familiar saying runs.' She added: 'Where any defect of person exists, none can feel it as does its possessor; it is to the mind one ever-present agony of humiliation' (*Mildred Arkell* 106). Another character described Lucy as 'deformed' (83).

It seems Ellen suffered from scoliosis, its most common adolescent idiopathic form, which predominantly afflicts females. Treatment consisted of bed rest and therapeutic corseting, in this case apparently successfully. In her youth the spinal curvature 'was not so apparent to a beholder', as she wrote of Lucy Cheveley, but it grew 'more formidable'

with age (*Mildred Arkell* 106, 115). The writer Henrietta Keddie (Sarah Tytler) observed that by 'middle-life' she had developed 'a slight hump' back (Keddie 322). Charles: 'her dresses were so arranged with scarves and lace that the curvature was less evident than it might otherwise have been' (*Memorials* 230).

Elizabeth Barrett Browning, eight years Wood's senior, was another gifted teenager diagnosed (wrongly) with spinal problems. She spent a year in bed, or suspended in the hammock of a spine crib. Ellen was immobilized for four years, with untold psychological effect. As Margaret Forster, Barrett Browning's biographer, observed:

All female illnesses in the first half of the nineteenth century were supposed to be cured only if total inactivity was observed. This set up a vicious circle: the strictly enforced rest produced the weakness it was designed to cure and any possible physical improvement was more than cancelled out by the immense harm done to the mind. (24, 30)

The invalid Ellen was allowed brain work: 'Reading and study, always her great pleasure and passion, now became her chief resource' (*Memorials* 34) and she wrote stories, though 'when finished they were consigned to the flames' ('Mrs Henry Wood' 344). At 17, the spinal 'curvature became confirmed and settled', she was no longer in pain, and 'it was no longer necessary to be always reclining'. But she was enfeebled, 'without muscular power' (*Memorials* 36–7).

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

[probably] the strength and activity of the brain overpowered the weaker body ... many writers have suffered in a similar fashion ... There is no doubt that the cultivation of the intellect is often purchased at the expense of muscular power. The constitution may remain vigorous, but whatever is done or accomplished in life has to be done through the brain. ('Mrs Henry Wood' 261)

Despite Ellen's illness, and the Price family's reduced fortune, she was marriageable, not least for good looks. Charles called them 'ethereal', stating: '[Her] beauty was something quite out of the common order' ('Mrs Henry Wood' 258). Keddie, writing of Wood in middle-age, commented that 'She must have been decidedly pretty', noting a 'carnation complexion' and 'abundance of brown hair' (321–2). Compare Wood's description of Lucy Cheveley: 'the delicate,

transparent features, the rich, loving brown eyes, and the damask cheeks' (*Mildred Arkell* 83).

She married at 22, to Henry Wood, 'at the head of a large shipping and banking firm' (*Memorials* 49). Wood had French business interests and was of sufficient prominence to act as English Consul in regional France (Keddie 321). Charles Wood noted that Henry Wood was a 'first rate Conservative politician', fluent French speaker and intellectual, with a fondness for reading books of science. In comparison with his mother the adulation is muted, and affection rare, perhaps because Henry Wood was not imaginative, and had no great taste for literature. In the family circle such would have effectively isolated him from the careers and interests of Ellen and Charles. Son judged the father as lacking Ellen's 'solidity of character and earnest steadfastness of purpose' ('Mrs Henry Wood' 263, 268). In the book, he went further, noting that his father possessed 'a mind a little wanting in ballast' (50), which could imply instability, or a breakdown.

The Woods lived many years in France. Of their children, four survived to adulthood. Ellen Wood continued to write at an amateur level. Henry Wood for his part undertook 'to establish and bring into operation one or two of the large French railways', something in which he 'triumphantly succeeded'. Then, as Charles puts it: 'There came a day when their early home knew them no more, when much that life held dear and sacred had to be parted with for ever ... She never spoke of it. It must have been trouble too deep for words.' These words signal a breakdown in the Mother-Son perfect confidence, a point where Charles cannot bear witness (*Memorials* 143-4).

Precisely what happened is unclear. Charles vaguely notes 'years of trial' (*Memorials* 144). The family continued to live in France, where 'money goes twice as far' (to quote from Wood's 'Featherston's Story' 5), only returning to England c. 1857. Most likely Henry Wood went bankrupt, for, as his son comments, he 'failed in nothing but the administration of his own affairs' (*Memorials* 143). The cause seems unwise business speculation, perhaps those self-same French railways mentioned in the following sentence of the *Memorials*.

Mayo wrote that Ellen Wood 'had had her time of storm and stress, but it had left no scars on her, save keener sympathy for others' (166). Capital is a significant theme in Wood's writing: she knowledgeably presents both sides of financial ruin, often that of bankers, and has scenes where a family's goods are seized by bailiffs. Some examples are *The Shadow of Ashlydyat* (1865) and the 1870 short story 'Out in the Streets'. Moreover, in 'Three Hundred a Year' (1858) she offers practical

hints on how to survive on that amount; in straitened circumstances a lady should not be too proud to contribute to her own housework and cooking.

A slow downwards financial trajectory for the Woods can be surmised, spurring Ellen's professional writing. She would serve a decade-long literary apprenticeship, publishing first in journals, then, after repeated attempts, book form with the temperance novel *Danesbury House* (1860), before the bestselling *East Lynne*. Her earliest business correspondence (*Archives of Richard Bentley* 7 December 1850, L1, UI) is a letter of introduction from a would-be writer, and sent from Dunkirk.

However, the submission mentioned in it, 'Seven Years in the Wedded Life of a Roman Catholic', did not appear in a Bentley publication. Bentley rejected the story for its 'political matter' (*Archives of Richard Bentley* 20 January 1857, L2, UI). It was published in the February 1851 issue of the *New Monthly Magazine* (NMM), started by the publisher Colburn and edited by William Harrison Ainsworth, the Newgate school author of *Jack Sheppard*. He printed her short fiction work in quantity, first in NMM and from 1855 also in *Bentley's Miscellany* (BM), after Ainsworth took over the magazine.

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

Charles Wood further accuses the latter of firstly not paying his mother at all, then subsequently underpaying her. S. M. Ellis doubts this parsimony: 'without exception, the records of his transactions with his other magazine contributors demonstrate that he was ever over-generous in payment' (*William Harrison Ainsworth* 237). That Ellen Wood wrote *gratis*, even as a novice, seems dubious – she needed money and she was married to a businessman. Even in the initial Bentley letter she hinted at payment: 'Should you sufficiently approve of it to give it a place in the Magazine, I should feel obliged by its being inserted upon your usual terms, whatever they may be.' Undoubtedly she did have some financial dispute with William Harrison: in an 1862 letter that is otherwise friendly and admiring, he tells her that the NMM 'is not in a condition to offer you better terms' for serialization of *The Shadow of Ashlydyat* (Wolff, *Nineteenth-Century Fiction* 4: 279).

Her apprentice pieces vary. The earliest *NMM* contributions (1851–2) were without exception anti-Catholic, clearly the ‘political matter’ objectionable to Bentley. Such was not unusual, with Fanny Trollope and Wilkie Collins – to cite just two contemporary examples – expressing similar sentiments in *Father Eustace* (1847) and *The Black Robe* (1881) respectively. Some authors merely catered to popular prejudice, a market demand, but Wood’s vehemence suggests personal antipathy. In the non-fiction ‘A Word to England’ (February–March 1853), she wrote that England was about to be reconquered by Catholicism: ‘*it has been decided that the Inquisition shall be revived when England shall be once more under their yoke*’ (italics in original, 185). Charles claimed a deputation of Catholics visited William Francis Ainsworth seeking the author’s name. They threatened him with death and ‘with the blowing up of the Houses of Parliament’, à la Guy Fawkes (‘Mrs Henry Wood’ 348). More likely the concerned Catholics merely protested. Ainsworth protected his author’s identity, and she never wrote anti-Catholic polemic again.

Her early work shows a writer trying different fictional forms. She wrote in the historical mode (‘The Lady’s Well’, *NMM* 1853) and the Gothic (‘A Dark Deed of the Days Gone By’, *NMM* 1851). ‘An Imperial Visit’ (*NMM* 1853) concerning Napoleon III’s visit to Dunkirk, is an attractive piece of journalism. Yet, amidst this search for direction crime appears, expressed with increasing confidence. It was a predilection of the author herself:

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

Though Wood was attracted by sensational murders, it was the clue-puzzle elements of crime reportage, their whodunnits, that were her real interest. She had been educated conventionally and considerably beneath her capabilities, but like Agatha Christie she brought an analytic intelligence to murder. Here we can see the origins of her later intricate crime plots.

An assured early example was ‘The Self-Convicted’, published in the *NMM* of August 1853, although it had been written nearly two years

previously and offered to Bentley (*Archives of Richard Bentley* 15 October 1851, L3, UI). It fictionalized, she stated, a murder which 'took place many years ago in Worcestershire. An author's licence has been taken with the details ... the chief facts are perfectly authentic' (449). In the story, two men are rivals for a girl, who becomes a witness to the murder of one suitor; the accused being her true love. However, as she heard the incident through a hedge, she cannot visually identify the killer. Subsequently, she is able to prove her lover's innocence and identify the real murderer from his voice.

The real-life origins of 'The Self-Convicted' supplied the plot. When inventing a crime storyline, Wood was initially still learning the mystery structure. 'The Diamond Bracelet' (and its sequels 'Going Into Exile' and 'Coming Out of Exile'), a novelette serialized over three issues of *BM* from June to August 1858 and later reprinted in the *Argosy* in 1874, even featured a police detective, of 'gentlemanly appearance'. The story successfully presents numerous possible suspects and motives for the theft of the eponymous bracelet. It should be noted, though, that the narrative breaks Ronald Knox's first rule of the detective story (194), in that the culprit proves to be someone not previously introduced into the narrative. He is a window cleaner, although Wood does make ample reference to open windows.

Articles and short stories may have kept the Wood family, but the real money was in novels, which Ellen took nearly a decade to achieve. This delay seems W. H. Ainsworth's fault: Charles claimed that he tried to restrict her to short stories ('Mrs Henry Wood' 338). Tinsley recalled that he 'objected to long serials' (130), although the evidence of his magazines during the 1850s is that he preferred himself (or R. S. Surtees) to write them. Wood compromised by borrowing from the Casebook form, writing short story series with settings and characters in common. They were intended for book publication later, not as collections but novels. Here she anticipated what would, in the twentieth century, become a common means to move between magazines and books: in science fiction such composite texts are termed 'fix-ups'. But the episodic nature of the form did not allow her later powerful narrative drive to develop.

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

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

As with other contemporary women writers, the temperance cause proved the means by which Wood finally achieved novel publication. The Scottish Temperance League offered a prize for a novel; Charles Wood claims she wrote the non-crime polemic *Danesbury House* within a month. She won the £100 prize, and in her inexperience sold the copyright of the novel. The book subsequently had an 'immense sale', she told Bentley (*Archives of Richard Bentley* 8 August 1861, L12), from which she did not benefit.

Her next work, *East Lynne*, was serialized in the *NMM* from January 1860 to September 1861, apparently the result of an ultimatum from Wood to W. H. Ainsworth. The novel was written in the periods of respite from a serious illness, most likely gallstones, as she suffered from fever, pains in the liver area and what sounds like jaundice. She became 'weak and thin; she never went out without wearing a thick veil, and a very short walk exhausted her'. To be ill and keep up serial instalments indicate an iron discipline and a sense of utter necessity – she thought she was dying (*Memorials* 225, 185, 224, 189).

Wood survived the writing of *East Lynne* – and its publication in book form. The *NMM* and *BM's* publishers, Chapman and Hall, were offered the novel, but it was famously declined (twice) by George Meredith, their reader. After Samuel Lucas, editor of *Once a Week*, favourably reviewed the book in *The Times*, Meredith wrote him a letter of protest – he thought it 'in the worst style of the present taste' (qtd in Ellis, *William Harrison Ainsworth* n. 238). Meredith had other reasons: in a

series of eerie parallels with *East Lynne*, his wife had eloped with another man, bore an illegitimate child, then died – only a month (October 1861) after *East Lynne* finished its serialization in the *NMM*. A second publisher declined the manuscript before Bentley, on the advice of his reader, Geraldine Jewsbury, accepted the book. It was just over ten years since Wood's first contact with Bentley. If this literary courtship was long, then its novelistic consummation proved an immediate and enormous success.

East Lynne's melodrama and sentiment are well known, but there has been less focus on its mystery content. The plot is double-stranded, with two interlinked domestic and crime narratives meeting at the end: the story of Lady Isabel, an English Madame Bovary, who marries the lawyer Archibald Carlyle and is led by villain Francis Levison to desert him and family, with dire moralistic consequences; and that of Richard Hare, falsely accused of murdering George Hallijohn, Carlyle's clerk and the father of Hare's sweetheart Afy. Moreover, the novel features two amateur detectives, Carlyle and Barbara Hare, sister of Richard, who function as an early detective couple, a Victorian version of Christie's Tommy and Tuppence Beresford.

The crime plot is inextricable from Lady Isabel's story. Richard Hare returns incognito to East Lynne and enlists Barbara to prove his innocence. He believes the killer was a secret lover of Afy's, a rich gentleman known as 'Thorn'. Barbara turns to Carlyle, a family friend, and the pair investigate Richard's story in a covert operation, with the help of Carlyle's clerk. The exercise is not without risks, chiefly to Barbara's maidenly reputation, particularly after the real murderer becomes aware of their activities. Although their inquiry has Gothic/supernatural elements, with the foreboding dreams of Barbara's mother, Mrs Hare, usefully containing clues, it is conducted with legal and intellectual rigour. When a Captain Thorn comes to East Lynne, they set up a meeting at which Richard Hare can view him: but the positive identification is not made.

The melodrama strand of the plot intervenes here, an agonizing consequence of Carlyle and Barbara's detecting, for Lady Isabel has been led to believe their secrecy conceals an affair. It has brought them together; and after Isabel's desertion of Carlyle and presumed death, the two marry. Their investigation lies dormant in domesticity for some years, until the murderer returns to East Lynne, and for the first time is positively identified. The two plot-strands meet, for Francis Levison is guilty.

An interesting distinction between Wood and her fellow Sensation writers appears here. The novel ends with a climactic trial, a device common in detective writing, though curiously evaded in the Sensation

novel. Trials tend not to occur in Collins and Braddon if the villain has a title or superior status. Class is unchallenged, gentry not appearing in the dock. The guilty parties die conveniently or are murdered in vigilante actions by foreigners (*The Woman in White*, *The Moonstone*); go mad or get committed to the madhouse (*The Law and the Lady*, *Lady Audley's Secret*); or are forgiven (*Eleanor's Victory*). Thus the due process of law, involving problematic because proletarian police, is avoided. Braddon and Collins are for their personal lives considered subversive, but in these novels they conform. It is Wood, usually typified as conservative, who shows no fear of this potential class conflict. Her titled villain has sinned, and so she gleefully bids him farewell to the demeaning chain gang: penal servitude for life.

Another interesting feature of *East Lynne* is its use of the woman detective. Although Wood inflicts disfiguring injuries, loss of children, husband, status upon Lady Isabel, she avoids the formulaic punishment of the heroine-sleuth. Barbara Hare was disliked by nineteenth-century critics, who termed her 'intolerable' (Sergeant 181), flippant and 'vulgar' ('Our Female Sensation Novelists' 717). Yet she is a credible detective, making important deductions even while pregnant. The partnership in sleuthing with Carlyle is equitable, as is their marriage. Female detectives appear elsewhere in Wood. *Within the Maze* (1872) features an interfering spinster, Theresa Blake, devoted to High Anglicanism and snooping. She is not a sympathetic character, but Wood observes:

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

East Lynne made Wood famous. She followed with two three-volume novels in 1862, three in 1863 and four the following year, often revisions of her earlier magazine work. She was almost as prolific as Braddon. Even the demise of Henry Wood did not affect her productivity. A letter she sent Bentley spends several aggrieved pages on the stage piracy of *East Lynne*, before describing her husband's final illness, 'a most severe shock to me' (*Archives of Richard Bentley* 16 January 1866, L50, UI). The effect is that she seems more concerned with business than bereavement, in an era in which extravagant displays of grief – as with Victoria for Albert – were conventional. Alternately, she rigorously maintained

barriers between the professional and the private, not even breached by bereavement. By the end of 1870, she had published over 20 novels.

Though she had dealings with other publishers, she maintained her professional (and friendly) relationship with Bentley. The firm appreciated her, though noting that Wilkie Collins sold 'about 750–1000' copies more per novel than she did (*Archives of Richard Bentley*: Note by George Bentley on letter by Ellen Wood, 24 July 1863, L44, UI). But she was capable of managing a business herself, buying the magazine *Argosy*. Charles Wood was listed as the proprietor, but Ellen, named as editor, clearly wore the trousers. With the Woods at the helm, the *Argosy* became a successful fiction magazine, averaging a monthly circulation of 20,000 (Maunder, 'Ellen Wood' 29). Though it was sold to Bentley in 1871, Ellen Wood remained editor to her death.

The *Argosy* provided her with control over her serializations, her novels first appearing in the magazine, as well as the pseudonymous Johnny Ludlow series of stories, in the Casebook mode and often crime in content and form. She also reprinted much of her early magazine work in the *Argosy*. She ran the magazine from her home, with Charles as her devoted assistant, and the magazine also published his travel writing. The *Argosy* was thus a Wood family business, other contributors usually anonymous, although work by Edith Nesbit did appear.

She wrote fewer purely detective and crime works than Braddon or Collins, but nonetheless mysteries and murder feature in most of her novels. In these texts crime, social observation and the didactic co-exist, being powered by intricate and relentless narrative structures. One of her favourite ingredients was Christian morality, with a rival writer, Charlotte (Mrs J. H.) Riddell, commenting that Wood was 'simply a brute, she throws in bits of religion to slip her fodder down the public's throat!' (qtd in Ellis, *Wilkie Collins* 282). However, she did vary her morality according to audience, and not all of the preaching was her own. She told Bentley that John Cassell had added 'a good bit of religion' to the early chapters of *The Channings'* serialization, 'more than in my opinion will be suitable for the readers in the 3 vol form' (*Archives of Richard Bentley* 19 March 1862, L27, UI).

Her narrative method is exemplified in the two novels immediately following *East Lynne – Mrs Halliburton's Troubles* and *The Channings* – both set in the fictional cathedral town of Helstonleigh, based on Worcester. The pair are family sagas, telling of exemplary Christians who overcome trial through Protestant ethics and hard work. Mrs Halliburton's problems are primarily financial, but 14 chapters into the novel, mysteries appear, as well as a detective, Sergeant Delves.

A theme of the novel is snobbishness, and Delves is depicted respectfully: Wood did not find the police to be comic menials. *The Channings'* detective Butterby is more of an incidental figure, as the novel is partly a school story, driven by such mundane mysteries as spilt ink on a choirboy's surplice. Such might seem storms in a provincial teacup, but Wood makes them engrossing.

The reason for this is her storytelling ability, expressed in plots resembling a series of spring-traps that snare and hold the reader. These elaborate mechanisms are best displayed at novel length, and are perhaps the most accomplished aspect of her work. Her entry in the *Dictionary of National Biography* declared that as 'As a skilful weaver of plots she was not inferior to Wilkie Collins' (Seccomb 827). Dorothy L. Sayers, in her Introduction to *Great Short Stories of Detection, Mystery and Horror* (1928), also extolled Wood as 'a most admirable spinner of plots', while commenting that she was 'a little too fond of calling in Providence to cut the knot of intrigue with the sword of coincidence' (22).

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

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

The process sent her into a kind of imaginative trance:

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

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

A supreme example of her clockwork-plot machinery is the sequel to *The Channings*, *Roland Yorke* (1869). The novel concerns the protagonist's

path from rags to riches, and also a feud, in which an author literally dies from a bad review (a theme perhaps dear to Wood, whose work did not always enjoy good reception). However, the narrative from the outset is dominated by a classic detective puzzle, the mysterious shooting of the young lawyer Ollivera, though whether he was murdered or committed suicide is unclear. To solve this mystery, Wood reintroduces her *Channings* detective Butterby, this time appearing in the novel from the beginning, and sustaining his investigation successfully throughout.

Wood sets up the murder scene as carefully as a doll's house. As the narrative progresses she introduces new and contradictory information so that the fateful night is repeatedly re-evaluated. As the plot thickens, Wood presents a variety of possible suspects, with different motives. She first implicates, then clears them, as Crowe did in *Men and Women*, via a rigorous process of elimination. The novel ends with a posthumous confession by the murderer, his narrative turning the original murder scenario on its head. Even an explanation is provided for the apparent suicide letter. In depicting a holograph text in the victim's handwriting providing a found-object suicide note for the murderer, Wood anticipates G. K. Chesterton's Father Brown story 'The Wrong Shape'. Chesterton has been termed 'The first writer to work a significant variation on the theme of the problem-text introduced by Poe' (Black 81). The comment is more properly applied to Ellen Wood.

Her clue-puzzles are precursive of Agatha Christie. Indeed, the two writers have much in common, in their celebration of English bourgeois values, the countryside and domesticity. They are regarded as conservative, but examination of their works can show an anxious, layered complexity. Both seem to have lived largely in their creative imaginations and – with the exception of Christie's amnesiac flit – led quiet and hugely productive lives. Wood in particular appears to have zealously guarded her private life behind a façade of the unexceptionable; and Charles followed her practice in his memoirs.

Margaret Oliphant, an acute critic, wrote an anonymous review of the *Memorials* for *Blackwood's Magazine*. She found it 'a memoir on the old lines, descriptive, eulogistic'. At the end of the biography, Oliphant acidly noted, 'we are as little acquainted with her as we were at the beginning'. She categorized Wood as a typical middle-class Victorian matron, encountered unexceptionally in the female social rounds: 'She is Mrs John Smith, Mrs William Brown, Mrs David Jones.' The reviewerly persona is possibly autobiographical: 'We have been intimately acquainted with [Mrs Henry Wood's] outer woman as long as we remember. We know her to bow to, to call upon, to take tea with;

but, *que diable allait-elle faire dans cette galère?*' (Oliphant, 'Men and Women' 645–6).

The quotation is adapted from Molière's *Scapin*: 'what the devil is she doing in this galley?' In *Scapin* the words came from a father told his son had been kidnapped on a Turkish pirate galley. In the review they express unease: no typical Victorian matron would have written bestselling sensational novels. In the original context, *Scapin's* audience were aware that the father has been deceived. Oliphant hints similarly, but can only write that an 'ideal commonplace' is presented in the *Memorials*, 'more inscrutable than all the mysteries' (646). If Ellen Wood possessed interiority – and as a devout Christian a continuous 'dialogue' with God can be posited – then she considered it entirely her own business and not for public display.

Certainly her commonplace had its contradictions. In her focus on domestic minor crime Wood might be regarded as the inventor of the Cosy sub-category, or with her choirboy detectives in *The Channings* and other works as anticipating Nancy Drew. On the other hand she can display a genuinely Gothic and gory sensibility: 'The Self-Convicted', in its first anonymous version, explicitly describes a murder weapon: 'a thick, knotted stick, covered with brains and hair' (453). In its *Argosy* reprint (February 1872, 143–60), which acknowledged her authorship, she amended it to the less disturbing 'blood and hair' (148).

As a widow, Wood dressed conventionally in black, yet wore rich silk, 'specially made for her in Lyons' and trimmed with 'old laces' (C. Wood, *Memorials* 229). She was conservative, intolerant of trade unions, as in the 1867 *A Life's Secret*, yet wrote sympathetically of the working class. A guardian of Victorian morality, she brutally punished Lady Isabel, yet other female characters, significantly from the lower class, such as Afy Hallijohn in *East Lynne*, fall without serious consequences. Wood was an invalid, and yet wrote hundreds of short stories and 40 books during a 30-year career as writer and magazine editor. Her letters to Bentley reveal a formidable businesswoman, intent on sales figures and production. Perhaps more than any woman writer of her era she ended in a position of complete control over her career, running a small business empire from her reclining chair.

One thing she could not control was her body. Individuals with thoracic spinal curvature are liable to suffer problems with breathing. The spinal deformity also affected her heart. Several months before she died she wrote to Bentley: 'How I wish I could be as I used to be! And especially in regard to never being tired of work. I am not tired of the work itself now, never that, but I have not the strength to do it' (*Archives of*

Richard Bentley 22 December 1886, L138, UI). She died in February 1887. Her monument, in Highgate cemetery, took the unusual form of red Aberdeen granite, a copy of Scipio Africanus' tomb in Rome, bearing words from the biblical Book of Ecclesiastes, 'The Lord Giveth Wisdom.' For a devout Christian woman to copy the memorial of a pagan general seems in curious taste. Charles Wood helpfully explains that both 'were earnestly and unceasingly devoted to good purposes and ... had the welfare of mankind at heart' (*Memorials* 320). It is unclear who was responsible for the design. If Charles, the memorial is his *Memorials* in stone, enclosing the mortal remains of a woman less saintly and more interesting than he would ever admit.

7

The (Feminine) Eye of the Law: Mary Helena Fortune

You must have led an unhappy and roving life, to know how hard it is to be still, and to go quietly through the world like the people – the tame *nothingness* people around you.

Mary Fortune, 'The Detective's Album: The Bushranger's Autobiography' 34

Scene: a sailing vessel bound for Australia. On deck, a steerage emigrant reads aloud to his messmates an account of a gory murder from a Catnach broadsheet. In the first-class saloon, the same crime is perused, in *The Times*. A young woman, a second-class passenger, pores over the latest 'Waters' story in *Chambers's Journal*. And the editor of an informal ship's newspaper transforms yesterday's fracas over a pilfered pie into a mystery parody, complete with Inspector Bucket.

The above is conjectural, but probably not far from how the crime fiction genre travelled to Australia. For much of the nineteenth century it took on average three months to travel from England to the Antipodes. Emigrants thus packed their reading matter, improving and popular. In 1844 the lady novelist Louisa Meredith sought reading matter in a Tasmanian country inn. There was only one book, not the Bible, but the *Newgate Calendar*. Meredith sketched instead (vol. 2, 122). Her reaction was atypical, for other colonists arrived with a taste for crime writing, in a land which would create its own distinctive tradition. They naturalized the genre, just as they naturalized sparrows and rabbits.

Among these naturalizers were Yorkshire-born Ellen Davitt (1812–79) and Canadian Mary Helena Fortune (c. 1833–1909?), both of whom became important pioneers in Australian crime writing. Davitt wrote the first complete Australian murder mystery novel, Fortune the

longest-running early crime serial, in the world. They worked in a frontier society, where colonization was ongoing. Yet the beginnings of national character were evident, distinctive as the indigenous flora and fauna. One of its expressions was crime fiction.

Crime content appears in Australian writing from the first European settlements, precisely because the nation originated as a penal colony. Not until the 1850s did the matter of Australia become of major interest, when gold discoveries led prospective settlers to read about the country. John Lang (1816–64), the first Australian-born author, wrote as an expatriate during this time. He drew upon Australian true crime – unremarkable given his profession of lawyer. However, Lang concealed a considerable stigma: his maternal grandfather, John Harris, had been transported in the First Fleet of 1788, for the petty crime of stealing spoons.

Lang was an early example of an enduring Australian trait: healthy disrespect for authority. In the course of a restless life, he created trouble in England, Australia and India. His family had prospered since their dubious Australian beginnings, gaining the wealth for an English legal training – only to have Lang's 'Botany Bay tricks' get him rusticated from Trinity College, Cambridge (qtd in Crittenden 38). Back in Sydney he started a fight with the colonial legal fraternity, which made him a briefless barrister. He left Australia for good in 1842. His Indian (self-) exile combined law with editing the *Mofussilite* newspaper. The two activities collided unhappily when the East India Company had him jailed for two months for the crime of libel – the real reason being that Lang had successfully defended an Indian banker whom the company were unjustly suing.

Lang's most famous story, 'The Ghost Upon the Rail', appeared in Dickens' *Household Words* in 1853. It retold a famous 1826 Sydney case: Frederick Fisher, a wealthy emancipist (ex-convict) was murdered by a neighbour, who pretended Fisher had sold up and returned to England. The incident is now known as Fisher's Ghost, although the original contained no supernatural happenings. The Maria Marten story probably influenced the retelling, for Lang mentions the Red Barn in the story (14). But his narrative form is not melodrama but the unfolding mystery, told with assurance: an almost perfect murder is undone by the silent witness of a revenant.

Lang also mentions Bulwer Lytton's *Eugene Aram* in 'The Ghost' (14): he was clearly familiar with early crime texts. Their motifs and form he easily transferred to Australia, including Vidocq, who had a secret biographical relevance for Lang. Grandfather Harris had also made Vidocq's move from villainy to policing, though he did not make a career of it.

But a family connection had: Israel Chapman (1794?–1868), like Harris both convict and Jew, was a famous Sydney thief-taker.

Lang depicted Chapman as the secondary character George Flower in his novel *The Forger's Wife* (London, 1855), creating the first Australian fictional detective. The forger of the title is transported to Botany Bay; his wife follows him. The alternate title *Assigned to his Wife* is a plot giveaway, for the colonial authorities allowed felons' spouses to 'employ' them, marrying the personal and the penal. The novel was a romance, vigorous and realistic, but in its crime aspects more of a picaresque adventure than a formally structured detective mystery. Flower gets his results by guile and violence rather than ratiocination.

Lang collected 'The Ghost' and other short stories as *Botany Bay: or, True Tales of Early Australia* (1859). The following year he embarked on an unfinished but fascinating project. 'The Detective' was serialized in the *Mofussillite* from February to April 1860, with an introductory quotation from Fouché. The hero, a young lawyer named Best, falls in love with an heiress abducted by her guardian. A frantic search ensues, involving Detective Wheler (echoes of Dickens' Inspector Wield): 'a very intelligent well-read man, of about forty years of age, and an admirable linguist' (142). Best himself becomes a detective while still searching for his lost love.

'The Detective' shows Lang at ease with the Casebook form, even innovative in his introduction of subjects like kleptomania. It was also inventive structurally, using the larger narrative of the missing girl as a string on which the successive cases depend like beads. But problems are evident with the work: though each case is solved satisfactorily, the greater investigation, of the missing heiress, continually stalls. This narrative does not progress despite frenetic movement: the villain travels from London to Europe, Quebec, South America, Australia, India and back again to London, and Best is almost as peripatetic. 'The Detective' thus shows signs of running out of steam even before the last instalment. In the following issue (13 April 1860) Lang claimed to have lost the remaining 22 chapters, an excuse he had used before (Crittenden 196). Either he was remarkably careless, or he had actually lost interest. What 'The Detective' might have become is unknown: one chapter set in Sydney and another in India does not qualify the work as the first Australian *and* Indian detective novel.

Other contemporary novels experimented with Australian crime matter but not form: bushrangers in Henry Kingsley's 1859 *Geoffrey Hamlyn*; convictism in Caroline Leakey's 1857 *The Broad Arrow*; and the often lawless goldfields, in Céleste de Chabrillan's *Les Voleurs d'Or*

(*The Gold Robbers*), also from 1857. All were inspired by brief visits to Australia, and their sheer diversity is worth noting: the gifted Leakey was a religious writer and charity worker; Kingsley was the brother of the better-known Charles; and Céleste de Chabrillan was a former Parisian courtesan, celebrity circus performer, dancer and memoir-writer, who married Count Lionel de Chabrillan, French consul to the colony of Victoria.

Crime fiction in form *and* content did not appear in Australia until 1865, the year after Lang's death. Synchronicity again occurred, with at least five writers publishing within months in periodicals from the colony of Victoria. The major point of imitation was the Casebook story. In January, rural newspaper the *Hamilton Spectator* published 'Wonderful! When You Come to Think of It!', a sprightly parody namechecking Poe and Waters, with a detective fiction fan playing amateur sleuth. The author was one 'M. C.', almost certainly the teenage Marcus Clarke (1846–81). Clarke owned crime fiction, Poe and Casebook stories; he would later write the classic convict novel *His Natural Life* (1870–2), which in its original serial version had a murder mystery structure. Several months later appeared 'Experiences of a Detective' by 'E. C. M.' in the *Australasian*, equally Casebook crime, and narrated by a police detective, although less lively than 'Wonderful'.

In September, a popular fiction magazine interested in crime writing debuted in Melbourne: the *Australian Journal: a Weekly Record of Amusing and Instructive Literature, Science and the Arts*. The publishers were the printing firm of Clarson, Massina & Co. They blatantly copied an English model, the *London Journal*, but in design rather than content. The *London Journal* specialized in romance and melodrama, but the *Australian Journal* had from its first issue a crime bent. It even had an expoliceman as its founding editor, George Arthur Walstab (1834–1909).

Walstab had gained his police experience during the years 1852–4, when the colony of Victoria had deliberately recruited middle- to upper-class young men as mounted police cadets. The aim was the creation of an elite force, officer material. These 'gentlemanly' police were gold for crime writers. The cadet system created conditions uniquely favourable for police procedurals, for the problem of class so noticeable with English writers did not exist. In colonial Victoria police could unproblematically be fictional protagonists, even detectives.

Walstab, the son of a West Indian planter, was typical intake material. After his stint with the Victorian police he moved to India, where he served in the army during the Indian Mutiny and edited a newspaper. He also published the novel *Looking Back* (Calcutta, 1864),

which made incidental use of his police experience, before returning to Australia. Walstab could also have seen a memoir by a fellow cadet, the pseudonymous 'William Burrows's *Adventures of a Mounted Trooper in the Australian Constabulary* (London, 1859). Like *Looking Back* it only contained a few chapters of police memoir, but its title aimed for the Casebook market.

Under Walstab's editorship, the *Australian Journal's* first issue (2 September 1865) would be historic. Ellen Davitt appeared on the first page with chapter 1 of her serial *Force and Fraud*, the first Australian murder mystery novel. The instalment was followed by the anonymous Casebook, 'The Shepherd's Hut; Or 'Tis Thirteen Years Since', purporting to be the memoirs of an 'Australian Police Officer'. Thus the first six pages of the magazine were almost entirely crime.

Ellen Davitt was the eldest sister of Anthony Trollope's wife Rose, née Heseltine. Whether she knew Fanny Trollope is unknown. She was said to resemble Queen Victoria in dress and deportment (qtd in Allan 21), and writing was but one aspect of a busy professional life. She and her Irish husband Arthur worked in education, emigrating to Victoria in 1855 to run the Model School, the centre of secular education for the colony. Jobless and widowed by the 1860s, she took on a variety of employment, from public lecturing (then a daring move for a woman) to journalism and briefly novel writing.

Like Lang, Davitt had a criminal in the family: her father Edward Heseltine had decamped to France in 1852 after embezzling thousands of pounds from the Yorkshire bank he managed. From his example, she knew that crime could not only involve Force, but also Fraud. The novel intertwines both in a crime romance reminiscent of Fanny Trollope's *Hargrave*, though Davitt is a tighter plotter. Artist Herbert Lindsey and heiress Flora McAlpin fall in love, but her father Angus is opposed to the match. In chapter 3 he is found murdered in the bush. A rival suitor, Pierce Silverton, spends much of the narrative subtly attempting to win Flora and get Lindsey hanged for murder. The novel ends with the words: 'the power of the man of *force* having been destroyed – the arts of the man of *fraud* rendered unavailing' (139).

Davitt's novel does not feature a police detective, rather a series of keen amateur sleuths. But the mystery structure dominates in a classic whodunnit. So carefully does Davitt plot, that the real murderer makes a cameo appearance in chapter 1, periodically reappearing in the text under different names – a device possibly deriving from Bulwer Lytton's *Eugene Aram*, and here used with sophistication. *Force and Fraud* could have been a Sensation novel, except that it comprised fewer than 70,000

words – in a market of three-volume tomes. Because the text is so concise, hardly a word is wasted, unusual in an age of fictional bombast.

Force and Fraud is Davitt's only known example of crime writing, apart from a chilling tale of massacred Aboriginals, 'The Highlander's Revenge' (1867). Her other serials are melodramas, hurriedly written and inferior to *Force and Fraud*. Yet given the strength of the novel it has to be wondered why Davitt did not have a writing career in England, especially since most of the extended Trollope family became authors.

Davitt's crime writing was brief, but 'The Shepherd's Hut' precipitated a crime writing career lasting 50 years. It was written by James Skipp Borlase (1839–1902?), a former lawyer, now staff writer for the *AJ*. He emigrated to Australia in 1864, but deserted his wife Rosanna and fled to the colony of Tasmania. There he was arrested and deported to Melbourne. The couple reconciled, avoiding a court case, but Borlase had effectively destroyed his local legal career.

In England Borlase had contributed to popular magazines, and now he turned to literature again. He tended to vivid hackwork, and 'The Shepherd's Hut' was typical: an action melodrama about the capture of a bushranger. Although written with the pretence of being an actual memoir, another writer, who had already placed poetry with the magazine as 'Waif Wander', apparently spotted its fiction and determined to do better. 'The Stolen Specimens', by an 'Australian Police Officer', appeared in the *AJ* in October. It comprised a police procedural with authentic routine work, such as the entrapment of illegal grog sellers on the Australian goldfields, its plot ratiocinative. Though written with authority, narrated by a mounted police trooper, the author was female. As such, Mary Fortune's 'The Stolen Specimens' was a crime fiction first.

By the mid-1860s women had written of detectives; and even, like Braddon and Spofford, about the police. Yet fiction narrated by a police detective, as with *Richmond* and the *Casebook*, was not a feminine accomplishment, for the police 'voice' was then beyond women's experience. But Fortune had inside knowledge: her second husband Percy Brett was a Victorian mounted police cadet trooper. Furthermore she had lived ten years on the often violent goldfields, where by her own account she was acquainted with at least one murderer ('How I Spent Christmas' 185). There she had placed work with local newspapers, including politically radical poetry, published under her initials M. H. F. It led to a job offer on the *Mount Alexander Mail*, quickly withdrawn when she arrived with small child in tow. She was told: 'as for the request that M. H. F. would call, we want a reporter and sub-editor and thought that he might suit' (Sussex, *The Fortunes* 52).

Recognizing the potential of two Casebook writers, the *AJ* announced an ambitious plan: two police series, 'Memoirs of an Australian Police Officer' and 'Adventures of a Mounted Trooper', the latter title a clear reference to the Burrows memoir. Fortune and Borlase thus wrote the first Australian detective serial, although lasting only a few months. Eleven stories were published, anonymously, with the writers swapping between series. Six were reprinted in Borlase's first book, *The Night Fossickers, and Other Australian Tales of Peril and Adventure* (London, 1867).

The series had a tendency to borrow. An extract from Lang's *The Forger's Wife* appeared, with an introduction implying it was true crime. That Borlase was responsible is supported by his rewriting a passage from Burrows in his 'Pursuing and Pursued'. There are at least three literary thefts in *The Night Fossickers*, of which the most substantial is 'Mystery and Murder', an entire story which computer analysis revealed to be Fortune's work. Indeed, Borlase would be sacked from the *AJ* in 1866 for plagiarizing Sir Walter Scott. He eventually returned to England, and a long career as a writer of popular boys' fiction.

In contrast Fortune wrote over 500 detective stories for the *AJ*'s 'The Detective's Album', from 1868 to 1908 – a 40-year achievement unique in early crime writing. No other woman prior to Anna Katharine Green would write so much detective fiction. She was the first woman to specialize in the genre. The remainder of this chapter is devoted to her criminal writing as well as her life.

Who was Mary Fortune? To her readers she was a complete unknown, hidden behind pseudonyms. While many Victorian women began writing anonymously, or used pseudonyms, fame generally saw the end to their secrecy. Fortune maintained her veil throughout. Even in her lifetime it was noted that: 'her very name is shrouded in mystery ... no one knows who she is or where she lives'. These comments were made in an 1880 article by journalist Henry W. Mitchell (487). Yet, perhaps deliberately, his subject's real name appears within his text, as if encoded: '[I] congratulate the proprietors of the AUSTRALIAN JOURNAL on their good *fortune* in having so gifted a writer on their staff' (487, italics mine). Mitchell may have been punning; but his silence is typical of Fortune's contemporaries. If people knew her, they did not say so, at least in print.

'I am sorry that I am not in a position to place before my readers full details of the life and work of this popular author,' Mitchell wrote, adding: 'I do not think that I ought to bring her forth from her obscurity' (487). This phrasing is curious, hinting at constraint. Mitchell refrains from an opportunity for investigative journalism, bringing his subject into the public gaze. The question arises: why?

Were it not for book collector John Kinmont Moir (1893–1958), who searched for Fortune in the 1950s when people who knew her were still living, her real name would remain a mystery. Moir acquired one of the rarest items in Australian bibliography: *The Detective's Album*, an 1871 collection of stories reprinted from the *AJ*. The author was given as 'W. W.', the abbreviation of 'Waif Wander' she used for her crime fiction. Although both pseudonyms were gender-neutral, the author had published autobiographical writing in the *AJ* which revealed that she was female. These texts consisted of lively journalism from the 1860s–1870s and the 1882–3 goldfields memoir: 'Twenty-Six Years Ago; or, the Diggings from '55'. In the latter she gave her initials as 'M. H. F.'

Moir wanted to solve the mystery and also settle a question of literary precedence: *The Detective's Album* predated Anna Katharine Green's 1878 *The Leavenworth Case*, then thought to be the first detective fiction by a woman. He wrote to the *AJ*, but older members of staff only recalled the contributor as a drunk. Yet Moir persisted, finally obtaining some holograph manuscripts and also a letter to Mrs Minaille Furlong c. 1909, signed M. H. Fortune.

Moir's discovery was noted in bibliographies like Hubin's but otherwise attracted little attention. As a result Fortune was effectively forgotten twice, even by literary scholars. Decades later, when I was assigned 'Waif Wander' as a research puzzle, records not available to Moir had become accessible. If something checkable was mentioned in the writing, it was possible to follow a hunch through a maze of microfilm.

The autobiographical work could be read as a fragmented detective story, a process which was partially initiated by the author herself. 'Waif Wander' seemed perfectly aware of the curiosity she provoked, and self-reflexively dropped clues. Even when not writing crime she made the subject – herself – a mystery. Thus paradoxically the mask of a pseudonym could liberate, providing the licence to speak freely, something not normally permitted nineteenth-century women, given notions of Victorian feminine decorum. In journalism such as 'How I Spent Christmas' she was hidden yet personal and intense:

And the next was Christmas morning; a promising morning too, with no indications of hot wind in it, and I rose with about as rebellious a heart as it was possible to encourage in a human breast. I didn't want to go out holiday-making, and I had no idea where to go and holiday-make if I had the inclination; nevertheless, out I *must* go, for I am simply flesh and blood, you see, and ordinary flesh and

blood could not be expected to endure the vicinity of a regular family Christmas gathering without feeling its own loneliness a hundred times more. (171)

Fortune's memoir had begun as a commission from the English magazine the *Ladies' Companion* to write about the Australian goldfields. As such it is a travelogue, focussed on the writer's surroundings. Also the text is fictionalized, with a considerable admixture of crime melodrama, rendering it unreliable. Yet some genuine leads emerged. 'Waif Wander' stated that she and her 'first-born' son arrived in Melbourne in late 1855 – shipping records revealed that a Mrs Fortune and her son George, aged two, had indeed disembarked in October 1855. She had then advertised for her 'uncle', one 'James Grieve' (not the apple breeder) in the *Argus* newspaper. It was certainly true that she advertised in the *Argus*, but the message was addressed to a George Wilson (5 October: 1).

Nowhere in the memoir does the child's father appear, nor anything about the author's marital status – unusual, given the prevailing obsession with feminine virtue. Travelogues by contemporary women writers such as Anna Jameson's 1838 *Winter Studies and Summer Rambles* and Ellen Clacy's *A Lady's Visit to the Gold Diggings of Australia, in 1852–3* (two works which Fortune is likely to have read) situated them, on the title page, as Mrs Jameson and Mrs Clacy, respectively. Even an anonymous author such as 'A Lady', author of *Life in the Australian Bush in 1841*, repeatedly mentions her husband.

Waif Wander is thus uncategorizable, creating anxiety as to what sort of woman she was – wife, widow, surely not fallen? Though she mentions 'the old happy Canadian life' (Sussex, *The Fortunes* 19), she does not say why she travelled to Australia. A young woman and toddler journeying thousands of miles to join an elderly male relative implies some catastrophe, such as the death of her husband. But nothing in the memoirs indicates she *was* widowed, although it was the most conventional explanation as to why she came from Canada to Australia.

When the memoir was read in conjunction with the journalism, a discrepancy emerged. 'How I Spent Christmas' tells how Waif Wander and a companion, whom a close reading shows to be her son, spent Christmas Day 1868. The boy had never seen a ship before, therefore he could not be young George Fortune, a seasoned traveller. Did George's absence from the Fortune family at Christmas mean that he had died? Death records revealed that Joseph George Fortune, aged five, had indeed died of convulsions (probably meningitis) in early 1858, on the Kingower goldfield. He had been born in Sherbrooke, Quebec, his parents

Joseph Fortune, a surveyor, and Mary Helena Fortune. The couple had married in 1851.

For the first time Waif Wander's full name was revealed. Yet the name of her second son was elusive. As he was not mentioned in the memoirs, he was seemingly born subsequently; but searching birth indexes under the name Fortune did not uncover the child. Had Fortune then remarried? The marriage indexes revealed an October 1858 wedding between Mary Helena Fortune, aged 25, and Percy Rollo Brett, a Kingower mounted policeman of 20. Such a union had seemed likely, given 'W. W.'s knowledge of police procedures – and now it was proved.

Their marriage certificate named George Wilson as her father. She gave her birthplace as Belfast, Ireland, though 'How I Spent Christmas' also noted she had Scottish ancestry (183). Yet the document hinted at further mysteries. While stating she was a widow, she did not give the date of her first husband's decease, nor list any children, living or dead – although the form specifically left space for such information. Moreover, her signature differed from that on George Fortune's death certificate, baptismal certificate and the Moir letter: being backwards instead of forwards slanting. Was she attempting to disguise her handwriting and concealing her marital history? Brett's subsequent history could be traced: he left the police force several months after his marriage. In 1866 he was a poundkeeper in New South Wales, who eloped with and married a Mary Leek. The certificate of this marriage did not mention a previous Brett union at all.

Divorce in colonial Australia was costly, rare, difficult – and it did not happen here. Bigamy, the alternative, much beloved of the Sensation writers, was indicated. If Fortune *had* emigrated to Australia as a widow, then the Kingower marriage was legal; if not, then that marriage was invalid and Brett was free to marry again. The truth only emerged when relatives of Joseph Fortune established that he had remained in Quebec, dying in 1861, three years after Mary had married Brett.

Divorce in nineteenth-century Canada was dependent on the various provincial statutes, with the strictest being Quebec, where Catholic convention and the patriarchal Napoleonic Code applied. The Fortunes, being Protestants, might have been able to end their marriage by petitioning the Quebec legislature. Alternately, it is possible that they obtained what was known as a migratory divorce, crossing the border to sue for divorce in the more legally liberal American states. However, at issue was the custody of the infant Joseph George Fortune. Canadian women in the nineteenth century tended to retain custody after marital breakdown only if they had support and shelter from male

relatives. Mary Fortune was an only child, her father having emigrated to Australia, and she was very young.

Did she leave Joseph Fortune, with him consenting to their only child being taken to the other side of the globe? Such seems unlikely: Fortune was an only son, from a family which had enjoyed some local prominence in Quebec. The most likely explanation is that she took her child and ran – a facilitating factor being that her husband, as a surveyor, would have been away from home for long periods. Furthermore the Fortunes lived close to the American border, where Canadian law would not apply. If she did, it was a brave and very unusual step for a woman who would be a most unconventional Victorian (Backhouse 167, 187, 203).

A woman separated from her husband in the nineteenth century, let alone absconding with their child, was on the margins of polite society. Further marginalization likely occurred when Fortune gave birth to a second son in Australia, in November 1856. The birth occurred within the period covered by 'Twenty-Six Years Ago' but the memoirs elide her pregnancy and the new baby. The birth registration certificate did not name the child, but gave the father as Joseph Fortune, something impossible. The curious backwards signature appeared again on the document. This second son was Eastbourne Vaudrey Fortune, known as George, an individual very familiar to the police in Victoria between 1871 and 1899, indeed spending much of that time firstly in Industrial (Reform) school, then in prison for crimes including robbery under arms (Public Record Office Victoria, Melbourne, PROV, VPRS 515 P, Unit 29, 279). Thus Mary Fortune is almost certainly the only nineteenth-century woman writer of crime to be familiar with the subject from both sides of the law.

Such scandalous material provides an explanation as to Waif Wander's anonymity: she had secrets that could potentially threaten her livelihood. In England, George Eliot and Mary Braddon had achieved careers despite marital irregularities, but they had supportive menfolk. Fortune in her 1860s journalism depicted herself as self-supporting: her tea tasted better because 'I have earned every penny of the money that bought it myself,' adding 'God bless ye all, my dear friends, and grant me continued independence!' – an unusual, even eccentric wish for a Victorian woman ('How I Spent Christmas', 187).

What's in a name? From 'How I Spent Christmas' it was clear 'Waif Wander' was a self-description:

My strange lot has almost been like that of poor 'Topsy' [from *Uncle Tom's Cabin*], who believed she 'growed', as I never knew either

mother or sister or brother; but I never *did* feel so utterly lonely and thoroughly a 'waif', as I did in this great city of yours on Christmas Day ... I am choking; my face is paler than its wont, I know, and my knees tremble; there are big tears in my eyes, and my heart has got the pain of long ago in it. Would you know the reason? Read it in golden letters on the stern of that stately vessel, it is but a simple word, but it is the name of 'home'.

A home lost fifteen weary years ago – a home where Christmas did not find a lonely wanderer, but an envied member of a happy home, where the shadow of death had not yet fallen. (167, 172–3)

Elsewhere, in the article 'Towzer & Co.', she repeatedly used the word 'waif' in reference to a stray dog, a pathetic mongrel bitch, the Co. of Towzer, a terrier. The two dogs are representative of Victorian gender relations, 'little Nameless' clinging to Towzer like ivy to oak, a metaphor then commonly used to describe the relationship of the sexes. 'Waif Wander' feels some sympathy for her fellow 'waif', recognizing 'slavedom' as a survival option. However, as an independent woman, she finds Nameless annoying: 'But however one may try to admire the idea of a dependent and helpless femininity, one must rebel at times, for the honour of the sex, against too abject an exhibition of it, even in a dog' (215–16).

The dog and woman had more than gender in common; one was 'Nameless' and a stray, the other concealed her name, choosing a pseudonym whose two words – 'Waif' and 'Wander' – both had the connotation of homelessness. It was an odd choice of *nom de plume* for a woman in an era when femininity was identified with domesticity. Perhaps it was precisely this separation from the women's place, the home, that she denoted. In another article, 'Our Colonial Christmasses', she referred to herself as a rolling stone, a term that implied a footloose, bohemian *masculinity* (256). Furthermore, Waif is a legal term, signifying among other things lack of ownership – and a woman without a legal owner in the Victorian era was single, beyond the control of husband or father. And to delve into the dictionary even further, waif also has the meaning of outcast, which for a woman in Victorian society usually meant loss of virtue.

Whatever a contemporary reader may have wondered of the pseudonym, it soon denoted a prolific writer of multi-generic talents. In 1866–7 she wrote three serialized novels for the magazine, starting with 'Bertha's Legacy'. These serials contained some crime, but tended more to the romance, including the Gothic melodrama 'Clyzia the Dwarf'.

She was eclectic at this stage of her career, rather than a specialist in fictional crime. Yet a year and four novels after the serials with Borlase ended, Fortune returned to detective fiction. Her new crime stories were followed in 1868 by the 'Detective's Album' series, which she would write for 40 years. Mark Sinclair was the title character (though other detectives appeared). The title 'The Detective's Album' referred to his personal collection of mugshots – the criminals he had investigated. It would be an unpleasant irony that Fortune's surviving son would feature in the prison albums of the Victorian police (Figure 7.1).

As with the earlier series, a spurious authenticity was claimed. A new pseudonym was used: 'W. W.' The change was seemingly an editorial decision to differentiate the police stories from Waif Wander's other work, which tended to more feminine forms: romances, poetry and from 1868 journalism in which she identified herself as a woman. The two pseudonyms were not linked until 1882–3, with the publication of 'Twenty-Six Years Ago'.

In late 1868 Fortune moved from the country to Melbourne, vividly recounted in 'Fourteen Days on the Roads', the first of her journalism. She was writing about her own (woman's) experience, while on the other hand creating the fictional memoirs of a male detective, Mark Sinclair. The two first-person voices were lively, irreverent, opinionated and inquisitive, with a lyrical appreciation of the Australian landscape:

I have been told by some that I tell horrible stories, and by others that I am not sensational enough; and I have personally come to the conclusion that I shall tell just such stories as I please, and that those who do not like them need not read them. ('A Woman's Revenge; or, Almost Lost', by W. W., 333)

My three new friends are animals of the canine species. I might have said dogs at once; but I am fond of fine writing, you see, and never make use of a plain expressive English word when I can introduce a five or six syllabled one, expressive of nothing but my own want of common sense. But what would you have? We must swim with the stream, and nobody would accredit me with any refinement whatever if I used ordinary words on ordinary occasions. ('Towzer & Co.', by Waif Wander, 212)

There was one aspect of Victorian ideology which both 'Waif Wander' and Sinclair voiced, and that was misogyny. Such a bias might be expected when writing in character as a Victorian male, but it recurs when Fortune expresses herself most directly, in the autobiographical

writing. Uncontrollable, wilful females, brazen bedizened girls and in particular women drunkards appear – they were common figures of Victorian scorn. She was also ambivalent about the likes of little Nameless and women who succumbed under the pressures of frontier life. It was unusual for her to write a story without female characters, yet rarely were they presented with complete approval. The exceptions were capable and competent women, qualities which also appeared in her self-portraits. In ‘Towzer & Co.’ she praises ‘honest, downright, straightforward’ women and is proud *not* to be a refined and useless ‘lady’ (212).

A more attractive feature is Fortune’s sense of irony, and her self-referential jokes. In the novel ‘Dora Carleton’, a reprint of one of her early radical ballads was followed by the comment: ‘Wasn’t the fellow who wrote that a ninny’ (721).

Another of these personal asides was more complex:

(Did you, reader, ever wear a pair of steel bracelets? I, Mark Sinclair, writer of the ‘Detective’s Album’ ... ask you the question. *I* have, and the feeling is not a pleasant one, unless you know you can easily get them off again. You know that I am rather a dainty fellow, and I thank my stars that there was not ... a single pair in the Force that would fit me; so easy, many a time I have tried it for sport, and as many times have I taken pleasure in slipping the locked ones from off me, as easily as you would a bit of greased eel skin.) (‘The Detective’s Album: The Bushranger’s Autobiography’ 154)

At this point writer and creation intersect, as they do in their personal histories: Sinclair had Scottish origins (‘The Hart Murder’ 23), as did Fortune. He joined the police force as a ‘cadet in ’55’, the year she arrived in Australia, and ‘applied for admission to the detective force in ’58’, the year she married Brett (‘The Ghostly White Gate’ 384). Sinclair comments on his habit of referring to his ‘old Avoca experience as a “mounted man”. If I had such a thing as a heart I should fancy “Avoca” printed on it indelibly’ (‘Tom Doyle’s Dream’ 585). Fortune’s experience on the goldfields similarly seems to have imprinted powerfully upon her, being an almost obsessive theme in her writing for over half a century.

It overshadows to the point of obliteration her ‘home’, the Montreal so fondly recalled in ‘How I Spent Christmas’. Little reference is made to her pre-emigration years. One factor may have been that the *AJ* was nationalistic, preferring ‘colonial’ material from 1871 onwards

(June 1871: 475). Yet even when writing for other markets, she tends to concentrate on Australian settings. Like Sinclair, who has no being except as a narrator of his police experiences, she almost seems to have come into existence in 1855, when she came to Australia and was first published.

Fortune herself blurred the boundaries between author and fictional character in her game of performative gender, and others assumed that Sinclair really existed. It was claimed 'W. W.' was: 'the widow of a well-known detective, who got the details from her husband's journals and dressed them up for publication. I fancy the detective's name was Sinclair' ('Jay' 9). The source was allegedly the *AJ's* founding publisher, Alfred Massina, although it could also be a misremembrance of Fortune's 1898 story 'The Diamond Cross'. Here Sinclair enlists his wife as crime helpmeet, and she partly narrates the tale under the heading 'Detective Nellie's Notes', with the self-referential comment: 'Not a bad heading is it, Mark? Wouldn't it do for a book, and couldn't I write it?' (175). An intriguing possibility, although Nellie suffers the heroine-sleuth denouement of a nervous breakdown, perhaps the final appearance of this persistent motif.

Though erroneous, 'W. W.' as detective's widow had a fundamental truth in that Fortune's knowledge of the police initially derived from her marriage to Mounted Trooper Percy Rollo Brett. He was born in Wexford, Ireland (coincidentally, where Joseph Fortune's family also originated), c. 1838, the son of an Anglican minister. He became an ensign in the militia during the Crimean war before emigrating to Australia, where he arrived in late 1856. His military experience proved useful when he joined the police force as a mounted trooper. The teenage Brett was sent upcountry, to the goldfields. A year later he was in charge of the two-man station in Kingower, a responsible position, as the goldfield had a population of 800 and a reputation of being 'a nugget or nothing' (*Maryborough and Dunolly Advertiser*, Supplement, 10 August 1858). The ground was so patchy that a digger might see no gold for months, then unearth a nugget like the famous Blanche Barkly, roughly the shape and size of a leg of mutton. Fortune was later to claim that she was only a few feet away at the time of its discovery, by fellow Canadians, in August 1857 ('Recollections of a Digger' 68).

Gold-digging was accompanied by hard drinking: one of Fortune's most memorable images in the memoirs is of a flooded creek full of corks (Sussex, *The Fortunes* 35). The demand for alcohol meant that the sly-grog trade was endemic. It appears in Fortune's first crime story,

'The Stolen Specimens', and the topic recurs in her writing. When she describes a goldfield's general store in 'Dora Carleton' (as she does *not* in the memoirs, despite it being her 'father' Grieve/Wilson's livelihood), she lists among the goods 'gin cases', with imbibers present at this de facto pub – they include a mounted policeman (739–40). In a story from 1904, but set in Kingower, 1856–8, Fortune includes a Mrs Bell, whose five-year-old son, like hers, 'died of convulsions one hot summer day'. This woman 'kept house ... and, of course, sold a sly drink when she could. Almost every tent kept a bottle in those days' ('Her Death Warrant' 102).

Furthermore, in the memoirs, though Fortune depicts the goldrush women shantykeepers with scorn, she makes the throwaway comment that the family American cooking stove was 'afterwards put to illegal use' (Sussex, *The Fortunes* 84). The illegal uses of a stove are limited; it most likely became part of a still. Whether Fortune and her father actually made moonshine is unknown, but she describes such activity in her fiction with her usual unwomanly authority: 'The still, although of rough formation, was in complete working order. The boiler stood over the hot ashes, among which still remained red embers, and the head and worm were attached; and the worm carried its convolutions down through a large hogshead of cold water, discharging the "mountain dew" by a pipe near the bottom into a vessel for the purpose' ('Jim Dickson's Fit of the Horrors' 333).

Also recurring in her writing are references to Percy Brett. He reappears in his wife's fiction in name: Constable Brett, young Brett, Inspector Brett, Percy Rae, Percy Brereton, Percy Butt, Pyne Rollington, Eber Pierce and Rollo Bourke. All but one of these characters are policemen. Moreover, parts of his biography and his physical appearance are also appropriated. Eber Pierce, in Fortune's one 'Detective's Album' novel, 'The Bushranger's Autobiography', is from Wexford, a clergyman's son and a former militia ensign:

Well, I was getting on for nineteen years when this daguerreotype was taken, and it pictures the face of what ladies would term a 'sweetly' handsome boy. The nose is aristocratically aquiline and the nostrils as fine as a thoroughbred's. The eyes are almost as blue as the turquoise ... and the mouth should have been a woman's. Heaven and earth, can that be the face of Dareall the bushranger – that face, with the white teeth showing between the soft silky moustache, and the sun-bright hair resting wavily on a white forehead almost as guileless as a child's! (34)

A more acerbic description appears in the novel 'Dora Carleton':

leaning upon the back of her chair was a slight, young, military-looking man, with a soft, glossy head of fair hair, and a delicate moustache and beard, inclining to be sandy. The face of this young man was very handsome; his nose was small and aquiline, his teeth white and regular, his lips full and rosy, and his forehead broad and full; but there was a look of weakness and inanity in the light blue eyes – a want of firmness in the formation of his chin, and a self-satisfied simper on his lip, that left upon the close observer an impression of weakness of character. (741)

In December 1858 Brett left the police force. The marriage clearly foundered, Brett going to New South Wales. Mary Fortune never forgot her second husband. Without Brett, she would not have written police procedurals, for brief as their marriage apparently was, it supplied her with material – less obviously did the crimes of her son. Her fictional representations of Brett are rich. In an 1893 story, 'The Star-Spangled Banner', Percy Butt is an ex-militia ensign and a mounted policeman in charge of Ti-Tree diggings. He becomes intrigued by a woman shantykeeper, Kate Juniper, Fortune's strongest and most complex fictional female character. 'Kate has a weakness for handsome, young faces with down on 'em instead of hair' (45) serving them soft-drink (claret with sugar). She is also handy with a revolver. Percy finds her self-possession and independence threatening, but is nonetheless attracted to her. The romance, however, ends with Kate being murdered by her jealous husband, a bushranger living incognito on the goldfield.

A footnote to the story asserts that: 'Kate Juniper is no creation of the imagination. There are many diggers yet living who will recognise the favourite of more than one "rush" in the early days' (44). Yet why does she link this character with a young man based on her husband? Percy Brett's son Henry spoke in his dotage of a woman who 'would not let his father alone', which if referring to Fortune, was certainly, in fictional terms, true (Brett 1).

Eber Pierce was the narrator of 'The Bushranger's Autobiography', although the 'manuscript' was 'edited' by Mark Sinclair. Thus Fortune was effectively writing in the fictionalized persona of her estranged husband. Although Pierce's biography departs from Brett's – the latter a law-abiding citizen rather than a bushranger – the description goes beyond a private game, as if she half hoped her ex-husband would read

the serial, recognize himself and therefore the identity of its writer. In the depiction of Pierce perhaps a quiet revenge is achieved, a score settled in words, as is the writer's privilege.

It is one of the abiding mysteries of Fortune's life that she never apparently ventured beyond colonial publication. Her serialized (non-crime) novels such as 'Bertha's Legacy' were highly praised: the former was preceded by an advertisement claiming it was 'by far the best and most cleverly written tale of Australian origin' (*AJ* 24 March 1866: 479) – which at the time had some justification. It is tempting to speculate that had Fortune been able to reach the middle-class audience of novel readers, she might have enjoyed Braddon's success. Instead, she was condemned to the pages of a colonial popular fiction magazine, one which readily put hastily finished and barely edited material into print. Fortune could write at speed, and too much of her voluminous corpus was written in a tearing hurry and not redrafted. She had, in her own words, turned her 'imagination into a bread-earning machine' ('The Whispers of the Dead' (277)). The result is analogous with Kingower goldfield: hours spent reading her stories unearth either 'a nugget or nothing'.

The Detective's Album (1871), her one book, was typical: the stories collected were a patchy assortment, not even re-edited for monograph publication. It was printed by Clarson and Massina, proprietors of the *AJ*. The small Australian book market meant that publishing until the 1890s 'almost inevitably required a subscription list or authorial payment for the production costs' (Tiffin 144). The previous year famed poet Adam Lindsay Gordon (incidentally also a police trooper) died owing the firm printing costs for his book *Ashtaroth*; he shot himself after Alfred Massina refused him a loan. If Fortune funded *The Detective's Album*, it probably exhausted her financial resources – in a year which would strain her to the limits. *The Detective's Album* also appears to be a limited edition, for few copies have survived.

Although the book was not a success, the continuing serial is the most likely influence on Fergus Hume, whose novel *The Mystery of a Hansom Cab* (1886) was an international bestseller. Hume claimed his model was Gaboriau, yet the successful transposition of the detective mode to the mean streets of colonial Melbourne had been achieved two decades earlier, by Borlase and Fortune. It is difficult to see how Hume could have been unaware of the 'Detective's Album', then the major Australian detective publication. The fact that the *AJ* reprinted the serial until 1919 means that Fortune's readership (and the magazine was one

of the most widely circulated in the country) potentially included crime writers such as Arthur Upfield, who emigrated to Australia in 1909. In 1933, an *AJ* reader fondly recalled 'W. W.':

At the age of twelve years I had read a large collection of back numbers of the 'A.J.' without any ill-effect other than a taste for good, clean reading matter, and a dislike for so-called detective stories that failed to reach the high standard of excellence set by 'W.W.' ... his characters are live ones and each story creates the impression that the events related really did happen as written. To him 'I doffs me lid'. (A. A. C., *AJ* July 1933: 884)

'A. A. C.' clearly had no idea of Fortune's gender, far less of her life, which was hardly 'fortunate'. She wrote in 1876, in the last of her journalism: 'I am what my friends – ahem – ! two-legged acquaintances call a "very eccentric person", and a "rather peculiar creature".' Her real friends were four-legged: dogs ('My Friends and Acquaintances' 197). In September 1871, as her one crime novel, 'The Bushranger's Autobiography', began its serialization, her surviving son was committed to the Industrial school system as a 'neglected' child (*Children's Registers*, Old Series 3, fiche 38, 649). A factor in his committal was undoubtedly that his mother was living in the Melbourne Immigrants' Home, described as 'little better than a British workhouse', providing accommodation for the 'ill, old and destitute', and also the 'disreputable' (J. Davies 326, 272). Unlike her male contemporaries, she was not there for the purposes of investigative journalism, but engaged in work for her keep, such as picking oakum. Marcus Clarke had visited the Home two years previously, and described it as a 'terrible Golgotha of ruined lives' (Hergenhan 139, 134). In 1871 he was editing the *AJ* – did he know she lived there?

The events of 1871 were eerily prefigured in a piece of journalism, 'What Passed', from February of that year. In it Waif Wander observes from her window a pair of child vagabonds:

Poor little lads! If I had any tears left to weep for my own troubles, I should weep them for you ... Tears for a couple of dirty little boys, with a little dirty hand-cart, perambulated by their joint exertions! Why, Melbourne would deem 'Waif Wander' mad. Weep for two little ragged, unkempt, almost shoeless rag-gatherers! A pretty pass we should have come to indeed! Little homeless and houseless beings, why don't they – hem! – why don't they go to the Immigrants'

Home, eh? What business have they with small ideas and liberty and a full – stomach? Faugh! I don't know what the present generation is, or rather has come to. You don't see any well disposed children coming to such a pass ...

Public of Melbourne, I wish I might venture to say one or two words to you about these poor strays and waifs in the world of rags and bones. If they are thieves – some of them – who made them so? (346–7)

The use of the word 'waif' is telling here. Despite being arguably at the time the most published author in Australia, in 1871 Fortune was homeless. As the records concerning her son reveal, she was also alcoholic, despite her expressed scorn for female drunks, and given to de facto relationships. E. V. Fortune continued to be trouble, and in 1879 received his first prison sentence. He would subsequently spend 20 years in jail, only being released in 1899.

In 1874 the *Police Gazette* of Victoria noted:

Information is required by the Russell-street police respecting Mary Fortune, who is a reluctant witness in a case of rape. Description: – 40 years of age, tall, pale complexion, thin build; wore dark jacket and skirt, black hat, and old elastic-side boots. Is much given to drink and has been locked up several times for drunkenness. Is a literary subscriber to several of the Melbourne newspapers. Stated she resided with a man named Rutherford, in Easy [Easey] Street, Collingwood. (10 February 1874: 10)

The above is the only known portrait of Mary Fortune.

She not only maintained her fiction output, but lived into old age. In 1898 the magazine *Table Talk* referred to Fortune as 'probably the only truly Bohemian lady writer who has ever earned a living by her pen in Australia'. It praised her as 'the best detective story writer' in the country, but added 'she is very old now and lives from hand to mouth' – despite publishing regularly in each monthly issue of the *Australian Journal* (25 March: 3).

Over a decade later her letter to Minaille Furlong reveals she was impoverished and nearly blind. She mentions receiving a letter from her son – who had died in Tasmania in 1907. Unless she had a third son, the likelihood is that she was suffering from senile dementia. Indeed the letter comments, ambiguously: 'there is a want in that brain somewhere nothing else can possibly account for the muddle' (2). The *AJ* granted her an annuity, as she was unable to work any more, even paying 'for

her burial in another person's grave' – a chilling detail that, like much in her life, evades explanation (Moir).

Several comments perhaps best conclude this account of a remarkable writing life. Ron Campbell, an editor of the *AJ* and a crime writer himself, wrote to Moir of Fortune's 'bibulous habits, for which, God knows, she probably had every reason, as she wrote more, and doubtless got less for it, than any other Australian writer of the time' (Letter). Borlase indeed had claimed the *AJ* paid less than a quarter of the English *Family Herald's* rate. He wrote that 'Many a professional man, and many a literary man, is at present enduring semi-starvation in every Australian city' ('Melbourne in 1869' 233–4).

Henry Mitchell declared that had Waif Wander 'lived in England and America, where literary talent is properly appreciated, she would have, years ago, been regarded as a leading novelist, and have occupied the proud position that merit demands' (487). The comment is relevant to the other early Australian crime writers discussed in this chapter. Lang's writing career was almost entirely expatriate. Borlase, who returned to England, worked for decades writing for popular fiction magazines. Those who remained in Australia struggled as *littérateurs*. Walstab suffered bankruptcy in 1869, and thereafter worked as a public servant and newspaperman, though he is said to have translated Gaboriau (Campbell, *The First Ninety Years*). Clarke did win renown and international publication with *His Natural Life*, which had been serialized concurrently with 'The Bushranger's Autobiography'. But like Walstab he needed a day job, for which he was temperamentally unsuited. Also like Walstab he suffered bankruptcies, the second of which was followed by his premature death. Davitt died in poverty after a failed return to teaching, which destroyed her health. Subsequently Sisters in Crime inaugurated the Davitt, an award for Australian women's crime writing, and in 1993 a commemorative plaque was added to her tomb.

Yet when and where Mary Fortune died remains an abiding mystery.

8

A Jill-of-All-Writing-Trades: Metta Victoria Fuller Victor ('Seeley Regester')

He had a person hired to watch the premises of the nurse constantly; a person who took a room next to hers in the tenement-house where she resided, apparently employed in knitting children's fancy woolen garments, but really for the purpose of giving immediate notification should the guardian of the infant appear upon the scene ... Mrs Barber, the knitting detective.

Metta Victor, *The Dead Letter* 96–7

We do not know who Mrs Barber was, whether young or elderly, like Miss Jane Marple, with whom she shared a fondness for knitting baby clothes. She occupied several pages only of an 1866–7 American novel, *The Dead Letter*, but enough information was given to hint at a New York equivalent of Mrs Paschal or Forrester's female detective. Otherwise the lady is shadowy – as was her creator, Metta Victor (1831–87), who published the novel under the ambiguous pseudonym of Seeley Regester (Figure 8.1)

The Dead Letter was the earliest American detective novel, though its significance would not be recognized for over a century. Its author, like a Vidocq, disguised herself under a variety of pseudonyms: the Singing Sybil, Corinne Cushman, Eleanor Lee Edwards, Rose Kennedy, Mrs Mark Peabody and George E. Booram. Occasionally, she published under her own name, originally Metta Victoria Fuller, later by marriage Morse, and then Victor.

Metta Victor's bibliography is vast and varied, crossing genres and publishing categories. She competed with such market leaders as Harriet Beecher Stowe, Mrs (Isabella) Beeton and Wilkie Collins in the diverse areas of anti-slavery polemic, household hints and detective fiction. No other nineteenth-century woman writer was possibly so versatile.

y for the Wife, the Mother, the Sister, and the Daugh

VOL. VI.—DECEMBER, 1858.—NO. VI.



METTA VICTORIA VICTOR.

Figure 8.1 Metta Victor in 1857 (*The Home*).

She was described as:

Mrs Victor is a lady of medium size, somewhat inclined to stoutness, and has a clear, luminous blue eye and hair of dark brown, falling in rich folds over a forehead of much fullness. Her 'phrenology' is pronounced a strikingly beautiful combination of the emotional and intellectual facilities – her domestic affections being strong, and her family circle her greatest joy. She is the mother of several children. So sensitive is she to public observation that she shrinks from it to such an extent as to be quite a recluse. In conversation she is disposed to be reticent, but speaks with much beauty and decision when aroused. With less reserve, and more freedom in her intercourse with society, she would have made a famous talker. (Sikes 2)

A full biography of Metta is sorely needed, although her eldest sister Frances (b. 1826) and also a writer, is the subject of one biography with another in process (S. Browne). Currently the facts of Metta's life can only be gleaned from diverse and not exhaustive sources. She was born near Erie, Pennsylvania, to a family described in an 1857 profile as 'not born to wealth'. Her parents were Lucy A. Williams, described in the profile as 'a very superior mother', and Adonijah Fuller. Metta was the third of five daughters. Her name seems a deliberate rhyme with that of Frances, whose second name was Aurette. The destiny of the sisters was to involve writing, and marriage to two brothers, by which they acquired the surname of Victor ('Metta Victoria Victor' 248).

Frances early gave signs of literary promise. At nine she wrote verse and plays in which her schoolmates acted. Metta soon followed suit: 'It was at the early age of six years that her taste for poetry began to betray the genius within. Moore, Scott, Byron, and Wordsworth *then* became her best, familiar friends. With a singularly tenacious memory, she acquired a mastery of quotations' ('Metta Victoria Victor' 248).

In 1839 the Fullers moved to Wooster, Ohio, then the Western frontier. Though the girls had the benefit of what were described as 'excellent schools' (Willard and Livermore 734), their lives were certainly rougher and less leisured than in the East. It was noted that Metta shared in 'the duties of home' while also engaged in 'study and composition so far as time would allow' ('Metta Victoria Victor' 248). Lucy Fuller is recorded as being an invalid (Extracts from Reviews). In Metta's later manuals of housewifery she writes with practical experience of tasks like making head cheese.

The Fuller sisters were regarded as prodigies, and soon published, despite living far from the centres of literature. They had Ohio precedents in the Cary sisters, Alice and Phoebe (b. 1820 and 1824 respectively), whose poetry took them from an impoverished background to national literary celebrity. At 14 Frances published verses in the *Cleveland Herald*. Metta debuted even younger: her 1840 poem 'The Silver Lute' was 'reprinted in most of the papers of the West and South' (Willard and Livermore 734–5). She was nine years old at the time of its composition.

It was fortunate for the scribbling Fuller sisters that they wrote at a time when precocity was regarded as an asset. The type of poetry in vogue, post-Romanticism, in which simplicity and spontaneity were valued, provided an arena where untutored youth could shine, and

be readily termed genius. Women poets of the era benefited from early evidence of their gifts, as it created an evolving identity for them beyond the domestic and dutiful daughter, whose freedom was curtailed. Another factor was sex – a young poetic female (preferably pretty) was a marketable publishing commodity.

The typical view of such prodigies was expressed by Poe in his discussion of Lucretia and Margaret Davidson, girl-poets who died in their teens:

The analogies of Nature are universal; and just as the most rapidly growing herbage is the most speedy in its decay ... so the mind is early matured only to be early in its decadence; and when we behold in the eye of infancy the soul of the adult, it is but indulging in a day-dream to hope for any further proportionate development. Should the prodigy survive to ripe age, a mental imbecility, not far removed from idiocy, is too frequently the result. From this rule the exceptions are rare indeed; but it should be observed that when the exception does occur, the intellect is of a Titan cast ... and acquires renown not in one but in all the wide fields of fancy and of reason. (Poe, 'The Davidsons' 293)

The Fuller sisters both avoided dying young or 'mental imbecility', continuing to write. For Metta it was a continuing process: 'At *thirteen* she commenced the career of authorship, which she has followed up to the present time' ('Metta Victoria Victor' 248). Not content with regional fame, in 1848 Frances sent verse to a New York literary paper, the *Home Journal*, which published such notables as Dickens, Sand, Dumas and Poe. She was accepted, with her sister soon following. The letter 17-year-old Metta enclosed with her poems was an unabashed sentimental appeal to Victorian male chivalry:

GENTLEMEN: – Would you care to take under the strong arm of your protection, a little, timid, warbler, who has hardly yet essayed to trill her young song amid the green leaves and bright flowers of her own secluded home ... So she trusts fearlessly to you to uphold the timid pinion just fluttering into the world. And whether she sings to that world, or only to her own spirit, the well shall sparkle, and the flowers spring, and the music gush forever from the soul of

SINGING SYBIL (Qtd in Martin 3)

The editor of the *Home Journal* to whom the Victors appealed was Nathaniel Parker Willis, of whom author Wirt Sikes commented:

Willis had a passion for thus picking up young authors who gave signs of genius, and, while they were yet unripe, pushing them before the public, with sounding praises, almost inevitably to their ultimate detriment. It was in this way that Willis succeeded in giving the *Home Journal* a distinctive reputation for employment of brilliant literary talent, when, in fact, its writers almost always were young and promising persons, who, proud of seeing themselves in print, charged Mr Willis no money for their effusions, and received their pay in the most titillating doses of flattery. (2)

What the *Home Journal* did provide was valuable exposure, the first step on the ladder to a literary career. Sikes, while claiming that Willis turned the heads of his pets with praise – he uses the strong term ‘injured’ with regard to Metta – notes she was ‘not spoiled utterly’ by the association (2). Certainly Willis rated the Fullers the highest of all his girl protégées:

in ‘Singing Sibyl’, ... and her not less gifted sister, we discern more unquestionable marks of true genius, and a greater portion of the unmistakable inspiration of true poetic art, than in any of the lady minstrels – delightful and splendid as some of them have been – that we have heretofore ushered to the applause of the public. (Qtd in ‘Metta Victoria Victor’ 248)

Louisa Alcott, a contemporary of the Fuller sisters, depicts herself in *Little Women* as scribbling teenage tales of blood and thunder. So did Frances and Metta, though they achieved publication and recognition quicker than Jo March. Frances Victor’s first novel was *Anizetta the Guajira; or, The Creole of Cuba*, a serial, then book, published by the Boston Star Spangled Banner Office in 1848. Metta may have been published even earlier: her novel *The Last Days of Tul: a Romance of the Lost Cities of the Yucatan*, reportedly appeared in 1846 when she was 15. It was apparently in the mould of Bulwer Lytton’s *The Last Days of Pompeii* (1834). As no book publication can be found, it was most likely a serial, as was ‘The Tempter’, on the theme of the Wandering Jew, which Metta wrote for the *Home Journal*, and when published in England created ‘a decided sensation’ (Johannsen 2: 278).

The connection with the *Home Journal* led to the sisters visiting New York. They may have met Willis' friend Poe, a contributor to the magazine; and also the littérateur and Baptist minister Reverend Rufus W. Griswold. He would become Poe's literary executor – and prove singularly poor at it. Griswold published Frances and Metta in his *The Female Poets of America* (1849), an anthology of 95 authors, beginning with Ann Bradstreet, and the comment: 'It is less easy to be assured of the genuineness of literary ability in women than in men' (7). Metta had four verses chosen, but it was Frances, with only two poems, who was ranked higher by Poe in his review of the anthology ('Mr Griswold' 161). The following year 'The Spirit of my Song', a poem by Metta from the anthology, was set to music by the composer Stephen Foster, and published as sheet music, for voice and piano.

In the spring of 1850 Adonijah Fuller died. Frances was about to embark on a tour of Europe, with friends (Martin 7), but she and Metta returned to their family, as its support. Economics would have been a significant factor – Adonijah had no sons, but five daughters, two of whom were engaged in a precarious trade. It is unclear how many, if any, of the Fuller daughters were married and/or economically secure at this point. Frances and Metta found editorial work on the *Hesperian Magazine*, in Detroit. Within three years they both married Michigan men. Metta was first, to Dr Richard E. Morse, of Ypsilanti, on 19 November 1850. Morse had been born in New York in 1809, and had served in the Michigan State Legislature in 1835 and 1836 – he was over 20 years Metta's senior (Michigan Historical Commission 125). Frances would wed Jackson Barritt in 1853. In contrast to Metta's marriage, he was a year her junior.

These unions failed, but the sisters were able to divorce, and remarry. The Michigan state laws were unusually liberal for the time: under the 1846 statutes, petitions for divorce could be considered on the grounds of adultery, physical incompetence, a prison term over three years in length, desertion, habitual drunkenness, 'extreme' cruelty (physical or otherwise) and when a husband failed to maintain his wife. Furthermore, if a spouse was sentenced to prison for life, the marriage was automatically and absolutely dissolved (Michigan 332–3). In New York, for instance, the only grounds for divorce was proven adultery.

Metta's first marriage to Morse would be omitted from the Victor family history. It was over a century later that Florence Victor, Metta's youngest and then only surviving child, found the news difficult to believe (F. Victor, Letter). Morse himself would die in 1865, while acting

as United States Consul in Curaçao, in the Caribbean. The marriage did earn some press mentions, but not after July 1851 – which suggests that it foundered quickly. Significantly Metta seems never to have published under her married name of Morse.

The year 1851 saw Griswold edit the Fullers' first and only book of verse, *Poems of Sentiment and Imagination*. It was dedicated to their mother, and included Frances' verse drama 'Azlea, a Tragedy'. The book shows the two young women as self-consciously in love with the role of poet. Frances wrote 'The Dying Poet', 'The Grave of L. E. L.' and 'To Edith May', their contemporary; Metta 'The Poet Lovers'. Though Frances had the majority of poems, subsequently she would be silent until nearly the end of the decade. She went homesteading with Barritt on the Nebraska frontier, something which destroyed the marriage.

In contrast, Metta was extremely productive. In 1852 she published a collection of melodramatic short fiction, *Fresh Leaves from Western Woods* (New York: Derby). It went through four editions. Whatever her marital situation, the status of her writing meant she had financial independence. It should also be noted that unlike the English case of Caroline Norton, whose estranged husband claimed her copyrights, Metta would not have lost financially under the enlightened Michigan divorce law. A divorced Michigan bride retained her property unless she had committed adultery – whereupon her husband was legally entitled 'to hold her personal estate forever' (Michigan 334–5).

She had been well situated as a young poet, in terms of being publishable; and with her prose, she was again in the right place at the right time. During the 1850s, women dominated the American novel, to the dismay of male writers such as Hawthorne who famously wrote in 1855: 'America is now wholly given over to a d—d mob of scribbling women, and I should have no chance while the public taste is occupied with their trash and should be ashamed of myself if I did succeed' (qtd in Freibert and White 356). They wrote and published melodramas, romances of frontier life, comedy or satire, religious, realist or sentimental works and novels of polemical issue. Metta would work in most of these genres.

Her prose juvenilia had tended to melodrama, but now she wrote in realist mode, though with a certain didacticism. *The Senator's Son*, her first novel of social polemic, was a commission from a Cleveland publisher, Tooker and Gatchel. The theme, as with her second novel, *Fashionable Dissipation*, was temperance, among the three favourite issues of contemporary women writers in America. The other two were

women's rights and slavery, the most successful example of the latter being Harriet Beecher Stowe's *Uncle Tom's Cabin* (1852), which set the agenda for the eventual Civil War.

Metta would address all three themes, which could blur, merge into one. Temperance was notably a means by which women's political and legal powerlessness could be addressed, indirectly, as opposed to the direct approach of suffrage. Women could be activists in both areas, as was Alcott. The anti-slavery novel was an even more indirect approach, its depiction of the injustices experienced by female slaves functioning as a critique of patriarchal white society. It should be noted, though, that its writers tended to eschew the ideological leap of regarding black women as their fellows and equals. Metta's third novel, *Mormon Wives*, was ostensibly an attack on Utah's polygyny, but it can also be read as an appeal for the rights of women in general.

Perhaps the experience of divorce radicalized her; perhaps she merely followed fictional fashions. A factor was, as a woman without the support of husband, father or brother, she needed to make a living. It is unfair for *The Feminist Companion to Literature* to take out of context a quotation from the 1857 profile to describe her as being 'devoted to "That brand of literature *paying best*"' (1113), which was followed in the source by the words 'compelled labor which would gladly have been devoted to more noble themes and endeavours' ('Metta Victoria Victor' 249).

The Senator's Son, or, The Maine Law; a Last Refuge: a Story Dedicated to the Law-makers (1853) concerns a young man's rakish progress to drunken ruin, which destroys the lives of his female relatives. The subtitle referred to prohibition laws, Metta's solution to alcoholism. Again, it went through a number of editions. The book is said to have sold 30,000 copies in England (Willard and Livermore 735), though Metta saw none of the proceeds. The lack of a reciprocal copyright agreement between America and England meant a thriving culture of mutual literary piracy. American copyright law only covered the works of US citizens and residents, and English law only covered foreign works if they came from countries recognizing English copyright.

A second temperance novel, *Fashionable Dissipation* (New York: United States Book Co., 1853), was again a story of women vs male drunkenness, though less gloomy – it went through several editions. Thereafter she was silent for three years, cultivating 'her mind by study', claims Sikes (2). The third of her polemical novels was *Mormon Wives; a Narrative of Facts Stranger than Fiction* (1856). The book was unusual in its theme, the impetus being that Utah was seeking recognition as

a state, despite being, as Metta put it in her introduction, 'a moral monster', with its practices of slavery and polygyny.

And, as citizens of this country, we owe it as a duty, not only to the Constitution, but to humanity, that we sternly oppose slavery in all its forms – intemperance and its hideous deformities, and polygamy with its train of evils which no man can truly conceive, but which surely will end in animalizing man, in corrupting the very founts of virtue and purity, and, finally, in barbarism. (viii)

Metta links the big three issues here, not by their common factor of female oppression, but in a conventional appeal to morality and even eugenics. In the appendix to the novel, however, she speaks more freely:

And to show still further the wretched and abject condition of woman, let us quote from ... 'Maxims for Mormon Wives'

1st. Occupy yourself only with household affairs; wait till your husband confides to you those of higher importance, and do not give your advice till he asks it ...

3d. Command his attention by being always attentive to him; never exact any thing, and you will attain much; appear always flattered by the little he does for you, which will excite him to perform more.

4th. All men are vain; never wound his vanity, not even in the most trifling instances. A wife may have more sense than her husband, but she should never seem to know it.

5th. Seem always to obtain information from him, especially before company, though you may pass for a simpleton. Never forget that a wife owes all her importance to her husband. (325–6)

By quoting these maxims, a certain devious sleight of hand is revealed – they might be quoted from a Utah newspaper, but the tone and strictures were not too far removed from contemporary guides for a woman's successful marriage. Clearly Metta did not wish these rules to apply to her own life.

The same year as *Mormon Wives* was published, she married Orville Victor, an Ohio journalist with a legal background. He was a writer, if not possessing her impressive track record, having only contributed poems and sketches to magazines. He is remembered as 'a cold-appearing, austere man', yet was devoted to Metta (qtd in Johannsen 2: 286). Their

careers became intertwined, despite a family of nine children, of whom seven were born in the first decade of their marriage.

Orville at the time of the wedding was associate editor of the *Sandusky Daily Register*; that same month he took an equivalent position on the *Cosmopolitan Art Journal*, produced in Ohio and New York. Metta would write for the Sandusky paper before the couple moved to New York in 1858. It was in the *Cosmopolitan* that the 1857 profile first appeared, the author quite possibly being Orville, for it displays an extensive knowledge of the subject. In addition, it hints at trials and tribulations in what otherwise would, for a woman of 27, with six books to her name, have seemed a charmed literary career:

It is both pleasurable and painful to witness the struggles of unfolding genius – pleasurable, as all beauty is; painful that it should receive so many wounds by way of mortifications and discouragements ... Her life has been one of haps and mishaps – of fortune various; and, it is agreeable to write, has brought the reward which merit is sure, sooner or later, to win, viz.: a loving consideration by the public, and a *paying* consideration by publishers. ('Metta Victoria Victor' 248)

The profile was reprinted in the *Home: a Monthly for the Wife, the Mother, the Sister and the Daughter*, shortly before Metta took over its editorship in January 1859. As editor she was not averse to minor nepotism, publishing that same year the story 'Romantic Husband', by Frances Fuller Barritt, now separated from her spouse and returned from the frontier. The *Home* was published by Beadle & Adams, an enterprising firm which would become a major force in America. They worked predominantly in what would in England have been termed the 'yellowback', paper-covered booklets, issued in series at the price of ten cents – hence the term 'dime novel'. Beadle & Adams tapped the social aspiration market with their guides to etiquette, but also met the demand for baseball rule-books. Chiefly they published cheap exciting literature: frontier and western stories, often incorporating detection, which from the 1880s dominated the form, with sleuths such as Nick Carter (Cox 92). Generations of Americans nurtured their reading on the dime novel.

Beadle & Adams (the brothers Erastus Flavel and Irwin Pedro Beadle and their associate Robert Adams) began with *The Dime Song Book* (1859). Its success led to an instructive series of handbooks, including *The Dime Cook Book* and *The Dime Recipe Book*, both by Metta, and both published in 1859. The inspiration was clearly Mrs Beeton, and indeed

one section in *The Dime Recipe Book*, on poisons (245–5), is a word-for-word unacknowledged quotation from Beeton's *Household Management* (540–1). However, the latter itself borrows heavily from other published sources (Humble xvi). As its cookery sections show, Metta's housewifery was American rather than a transatlantic import. The intent of these small, highly practical books was to save time and money in the complex operations of nineteenth-century housekeeping. They covered anything from doing the washing for a family of 20 before breakfast, to making carpets from cotton and wallpaper.

Orville was also working for Beadle & Adams, writing the *Dime Dialogues*. He became their principal editor in 1861, as well as writing non-fiction for them, generally biography and military history. Metta would write numerous dime novels for the firm, the couple integrating their professional and domestic lives. Had she not written dime fiction, her literary reputation might be higher, for her poetry and polemical novels were the work of a young, undeveloped writer, however promising. Her pen was thereafter incessantly at work producing commercial fiction, which was competent if not unusual – with the notable exception of her crime writing.

Beadle & Adams was nationalist, initially eschewing non-American settings, populist and, as an 1863 advertisement claimed, 'good, pure and reliable' (qtd in Johannsen 1: 46). The stories Metta wrote for them were typical, being dramatic, plot-driven, written in simple language and conventional. Her first dime novel was *Alice Wilde: The Raftsmen's Daughter* (1860). Its subtitle was 'A Forest Romance' – which involved a girl with two lovers, one of whom does his best to hinder/murder the other. She followed with other novels, being so prolific some were published as the work of 'Rose Kennedy'. They varied in content, from comedy (*Uncle Ezekiel and his Exploits on Two Continents*, 1861) to western (*The Gold Hunters*, 1863), generally with a central romance. Crime elements also appeared, as in *The Backwood's Bride: A Romance of Squatter Life* (also from 1860) with a late example of the heroine-sleuth. Susan Carter recognizes the horse of her lost lover in the possession of desperados, and turns detective: 'She, usually so gentle, so forgiving, had grown as hard and unrelenting as steel' (89). Her actions include a night ride through the woods to fetch the sheriff. Then she becomes sick unto death, a passive, marriageable girl, gaining the hero in the last chapter.

Of Metta's dime novels, the most successful was a brief return to polemics with *Maum Guinea*, subtitled a 'slave romance'. The year of its publication, 1861, saw the start of the Civil War. Indeed the novel was highly popular among the Unionist troops, and, it is claimed, with

Abraham Lincoln himself. It was her greatest commercial success, selling over 100,000 copies in America (Johannsen 1: 40). Frances would also write three dime novels. In 1862 she divorced her husband for desertion. Two months later she remarried, to Orville's brother Henry Clay Victor, a naval engineer. He also had been previously married. The following year Henry Victor's Civil War service took him to the West Coast. Thereafter the literary paths of the two sisters diverged for the second time, never to meet again.

Frances wrote journalism for the Western papers, satire, travel-writing and an impassioned account of the local temperance movement, *The Women's War with Whiskey* (1874). She also worked for women's suffrage in the State of Oregon. In the process of her search for remunerative writing work she discovered an ability for history. Ultimately Frances Victor became an authority on early California and Oregon, being the major contributor to Hubert Howe Bancroft's 26-volume *History of the Pacific States* (1890). From this activity she could support herself, even after Henry's bad business judgement caused a separation in 1868. He would die in 1875, in a shipwreck.

In 1866, after eight books with Beadle, Metta published *The Dead Letter: an American Romance*. As a detective novel it represented a major departure, and she published it under the new and ambiguous pseudonym, 'Seeley Regester'. Despite Beadle & Adams' claim in an 1863 advertisement that they eschewed the sensational (Johannsen 1: 45), the content of *The Dead Letter* – murder, theft, illegitimacy – bears comparison with Braddon and Collins. Beadle had already published a crime novel, the 1863 *The Mad Hunter* by Mary Denison (1826?–1911), married to Charles Wheeler Denison, a Baptist minister, diplomat and emancipist activist. Both the Denisons were popular authors, with Mary writing over 80 novels. She has been described as 'frail' and 'diffident' (Stern 463), but *The Mad Hunter* was truly hair-raising and violent fare: 'It was a frightful wound – through the back part of the neck, up through the jaw, the tongue being shot clear off' (100). The eponymous Mad Hunter is less a detective than a crazed vigilante, a Dirty Harry with religion. He achieves justice at gunpoint, the mystery of the novel being more the complex web of relationships between the characters than the attempted murder, solved after three pages. Metta Victor was far subtler and technically skilled in her crime writing.

Some other likely American influences are Alcott's 1865 'V. V.', an accomplished mystery novella informed both by Poe and by Braddon, its villainess Virginie Varens being blonde, petite and even more

unscrupulous than Lady Audley. Spofford's 'Mr Furbush' had also been published in 1865, as was the Casebook private eye collection *Leaves from the Notebook of a New York Detective* by John B. Williams. True crime would also have been a factor: the lurid *National Police Gazette*, published from 1845, and the 1857 establishment of a detective unit within New York's police. Metta Victor's Burton is attached to the latter, although voluntary and unpaid, something enabling Metta to avoid the class prejudices associated with police depictions, even in the egalitarian America.

The Dead Letter appeared as the lead serial in a new publication, *Beadle's Monthly Magazine*, the first instalment being published during December 1865, though dated January 1866 (Johannsen 1: 421). This magazine was ambitious, being 'apparently planned to compete with *Harper's Monthly*', which it resembled (Johannsen 1: 421). The contributors included Alice Cary, Spofford and the Victor couple, Metta writing much of the content under various pseudonyms.

That *Beadle's Monthly* was intended for the *Harper's* audience meant that its content was more sophisticated than the usual dime fare. Indeed, *The Dead Letter* compares well with contemporary English sensational novels, something *Beadle's Monthly* itself noted, though it typically overstated its case: 'The "Dead Letter" is equal to any thing which Wilkie Collins has yet produced, in the subtle element of mystery which overshadows it, while in its keen perception of character, its touching pathos, its elimination of good from evil, it far transcends the "Dead Secret" or "Woman in White"' ('Current Notes').

It has been claimed that *The Dead Letter* had a prior publication (Johannsen 1: 42), something traceable to an editorial in *Beadle's Monthly*: 'Nor was the work written, as assumed, especially for this magazine, but was, in fact, produced two years previous to the issue of our first number' (Johannsen 3: 195). 'Produced' does not mean published; and an earlier appearance has not been located. Furthermore, two factors indicate the editorial should be treated with some caution.

The first *The Dead Letter* contains several glaring continuity errors, such as typically occur during serialization. Furthermore, the editorial claim appears in the context of Beadle & Adams defending themselves from charges of having exploited an actual crime. The passage begins by quoting a review of *The Dead Letter*:

'It is asserted that the author obtained the materials of his story while in a clairvoyant state, and so true were his delineations to the life, that the friends of the parties sought to suppress the work in its

early stages, and further, that the criminal, on his death-bed, recently confessed his crime, the circumstances of which tally singularly enough with those set down in the narrative.'

The author writes to us to say that he is no 'clairvoyant,' nor was his work written in any other than a normal condition of mind. It is pure fiction – nothing else; and save in the initial idea – the murder of young Moreland – is an invention in every respect. It is true that certain parties discovered startling coincidences between the romance and actual characters and occurrences, and for that reason tried to stay the publication; but the coincidences were 'this and nothing more,' for the author had no knowledge whatever of persons or incidents connected with the real tragedy. As for the reported death of the true author of the crime and his 'confession,' neither the publishers nor the author of the romance have any knowledge of such a circumstance. (Johannsen 3: 195)

The rumour that *The Dead Letter* had a true crime basis was persistent, Sikes noting that if the 'whole history of the book' were known 'it would border on the marvelous that a woman should have so wrought out the *probable* facts of a still unsolved tragedy' (2). *Beadle's Monthly* did admit the 'initial idea' for the novel was not a complete 'invention' – the obvious inference being that 'the murder of young Moreland' was based on a genuine crime.

Henry Moreland, dead by chapter 2 of the novel, is a New York banker engaged to Eleanor Argyll, the daughter of a wealthy lawyer in rural 'Blankville' – where he is found stabbed dead on the roadside. An examination of contemporary newspaper murder reports has not revealed an obvious source. However, the elements of the case would have been familiar to the Beadles, who had similarly lost their younger brother James. Moreover the dates were close: James Beadle had died in 1856, and *The Dead Letter* is set in 1857. Yet the firm would not have sought to suppress their own publication; some other party must have been aggrieved. In addition, the 'clairvoyant state of the author' was simply an extrapolation from *The Dead Letter*.

To summarize the plot: *The Dead Letter* is dominated by Moreland's murder, as related by Richard Redfield, hero and detective's assistant. He is intimately involved in the case, for he works in lawyer Argyll's office and is a secret admirer of his bereaved daughter Eleanor. Another rival suitor is James Argyll, a cousin. Both young men are thus suspects, and get involved in the murder investigation, either helping or hindering.

Early investigations focus on Leesy Sullivan, an enigmatic seamstress who travelled on the same train as Moreland. Detective Burton pursues Leesy, aided by his young daughter Lenore, a psychic who, when put into a mesmeric trance, provides a tracking and location service. Leesy, when located, reveals she had been secretly and desperately in love with Moreland. Burton clears her, then withdraws from the case for lack of any other leads. But the Argyll family have come to their own conclusions, with the help of James, who has successfully insinuated Redfield is the killer. The young man is dismissed from Mr Argyll's employ.

He finds work in the Dead Letter office (hence the title), as lost as the missives that pass across his desk – until one of them providentially reopens the case. It is one of the technical achievements of *The Dead Letter* that the novel begins with the discovery of this letter, the first half then being told in flashback, book one ending with Redfield's dismissal. In the second half, he revisits Burton, who examines the letter. In a passage reminiscent of Vidocq and prescient of Sherlock Holmes, Burton describes the unknown letter-writer:

He is about thirty years of age, rather short and broad-shouldered, muscular; has dark complexion and black eyes; the third finger of his right hand has been injured, so as to contract the muscles and leave it useless. He has some education, which he has acquired by hard study since he grew up to be his own master. His childhood was passed in ignorance, in the midst of the worst associations; and his own nature is almost utterly depraved. (205–6)

Unlike Holmes, Burton's deductions are wholly based on an analysis of the handwriting. From the letter, which is coded, he gleans the information that a clue has been hidden in the Argylls' oak tree. Burton and Redfield investigate, and find a broken surgical knife, matching a fragment found in Moreland's body. They also discover that James Argyll has transferred his attentions to Mary Argyll, Eleanor's sister – as, coincidentally, has Redfield. Mary accepts James' proposal, though declaring she has always loved Redfield.

Burton questions Leesy again and learns of George Thorley, an apothecary-surgeon with a grudge against Moreland. His description fits the image Burton gleaned from the handwriting in the dead letter. Burton and Redfield track Thorley to California, then Acapulco, where Burton is able to extract a confession. He grants Thorley partial immunity in return for the name of his accomplice, the commissioner of the murder.

That done, the pair return to New York, where they arrange a meeting between themselves, Leesy and the Argylls – which Ross terms the first known instance of assembling all the characters in a murder mystery together to witness the detective's dramatic denouement (294). James Argyll proves guilty, although Metta builds suspense by making Richard fear he will be accused. James is banished, lawyer Argyll wishing to avoid the publicity of a trial. Richard claims Mary and his rightful place in the family's affections. The couple eventually even adopt the psychic Lenore, Burton having been poisoned by an unknown enemy.

The book's influence is hard to gauge. Beadle & Adams produced six editions besides the initial serialization; their print runs for the book are unknown, but probably were sizeable. An advertisement in the *Saturday Journal* claimed that sales of *The Dead Letter* exceeded that of any other novel published in America, with the exception of *Uncle Tom's Cabin* (2 July 1881: 2). The *Journal* was a Beadle publication and while exaggeration may be suspected it should be noted that, in the 1860s at least, the firm's sales figures were genuinely phenomenal, in the millions (Johannsen 1: 49).

Beadle's Monthly expressed editorial pride in 'our *Dead Letter*', citing it as:

an AMERICAN production, so wholly unlike the works of 'popular' English writers as to form a school of its own; and proving, too, that our own writers need but the incentive of proper pay and proper consideration from publishers to become *leaders* in literature, instead of followers, as they too long have been. (Johannsen 3: 97)

Several paragraphs later it was noted that *Cassell's Illustrated Family Paper* was currently reprinting the novel, but with background and allusions changed to suggest the work was English (Johannsen 3: 97–8). The firm of Cassell, Petter & Galpin had previously ventured into the detective genre with serials of Ellen Wood's *The Channings* and *Mrs Halliburton's Troubles*. Now they were pirating *The Dead Letter*. The serialization, which ran from 3 November 1866 to 9 March 1867, changed the setting to England, with pounds for dollars, Upper New York State becoming Lancashire, and New York Liverpool. The sections set in California were unchanged as to background, necessitating further travel, an Atlantic crossing, for the detectives. However, this additional journey is accomplished effortlessly in little more than a sentence.

In addition, all of the names of the characters were changed. Richard Redfield becomes Guy Harlowe; James Argyll becomes Edgar Henderson,

and his cousins Eleanor and Mary become Beatrice and Marian; Burton becomes Warriston and his daughter Lenore Lucille; Leesy Sullivan becomes Bessy Donovan. The changes seem arbitrary, as in the original no character had a name ineluctably American, as were, for instance, those used by Frances Trollope in *The Refugee in America* – but then Metta Victor was not caricaturizing her countrymen. Indeed, the most substantial change to the novel is the short paragraph describing a gaming-house servant in chapter 9 (chapter 15 of the English serialization) whom Metta depicts as a Negro, complete with accent. In the *Cassell's* version he is Caucasian. The changes are ultimately minor and it is a measure of how similar English and American modes of detective fiction were at the time that a setting could be so easily altered. There is little sense of national character in *The Dead Letter*, either in locale or speech, except in the exotic Californian section.

Sikes termed the pirating 'peculiarly offensive' (2), and certainly it infuriated Beadle & Adams. Lacking legal recourse, they protested where the complaint could do the most damage: the *Athenaeum*, the prime reviewing organ of the English book trade. A debate about copyright had been running in its letters column for some months, and to this Beadle & Adams added their salvo. 'To have appropriated the production of an American writer, it was their legal privilege to do so, considering that no law exists to prevent such an act; but to add to the act of literary piracy that of mutilation and deception, strikes us an excess of *discourtesy* which merits censure' (15 December 1866: 796).

Cassell replied in the next issue, with icy politeness. They did not deny the charge – but as mitigating circumstances stated that American publishers were as guilty of piracy as the English. That Beadle & Adams were overreacting was the implication, for *they themselves* had never complained about alterations made by American publishers when reprinting 'tales appropriated from our columns', much less suggested such pirates were rude or censurable. In any case, the modifications of *The Dead Letter* were 'few', 'slight' and 'necessary, in our opinion, to render it acceptable to English readers' – though they did not explain why an American murder mystery was unacceptable to their readership (22 December 1866: 840).

In the same issue appeared a letter from S. R. T. (Samuel Ralph Townshend) Mayer, later an editor and magazine proprietor. He supported Beadle and the need for copyright reform, noting that *The Dead Letter's* plight was not unusual: 'Three out of four of the so-called "original" tales in the penny journals are reprints of American novels, slightly, and in some cases very insufficiently altered ... "Hastings" had

been duly substituted for "Saratoga", the "Thames" for the "Hudson", "pence for cents", and so on' (841).

Mayer further declared he did not believe a firm with the 'high character' of Cassell would be guilty of such piracy, suggesting as a possibility that the author had simply sold the work 'twice over' (841). 'Hence, author as well as publisher has been wronged,' retorted Beadle & Adams, in a letter the *Athenaeum* printed under the heading of 'STOP THIEF!' The remainder of the letter exploded Cassell's tit-for-tat argument, and noted that the changes to the text 'were copious enough, however, to change the entire *American* paternity of the work' (26 January 1867: 120–1). The alterations did indeed give a different 'maternity' to the novel; but it is an exaggeration to term them 'copious'.

The argument could have continued interminably. The *Athenaeum* apparently closed the correspondence after a missive from Cassell suggesting that America legislate for the copyright of English publications (2 February 1867: 156). The copyright debacle was not in fact resolved for decades, piracy being far too profitable for publishers from both countries to abandon. Yet in this brief skirmish Beadle & Adams successfully publicized the misappropriation of *The Dead Letter*, if not actually gaining an apology from Cassell.

It was an affray from which Metta kept her distance – she had recently become the mother of her seventh child, also called Metta (b. 1866). Also she appears to have been unwilling to acknowledge *The Dead Letter* as hers. Coincidentally, Orville's *History, Civil, Political and Military, of the Southern Rebellion* had recently been 'appropriated in a most shameless manner by other writers', stated *Beadle's Monthly*, though it did not state where (Johannsen 3: 371).

The English version of *The Dead Letter* was crucial to the novel's influence outside America. The mesmerism involved in putting Lenore Burton into trance may thus be echoed in *The Moonstone* (1868). However, more relevant to the tracing of influence could be the characterization of Leesy Sullivan, independent, lovelorn, doomed and matching wits with the detective; it may not be entirely coincidental that a similar figure, Rosanna Spearman, is found in Collins' novel.

Since *The Dead Letter* was rediscovered, opinion has varied as to its merits. Slung, in the Gregg Press reprint, found it 'a transcendent accomplishment' (vii); Maio, in *Murderess Ink*, pronounced it 'Still very readable' (47); while Dilys Winn in the same publication termed it 'mystery mishmash' (43). More recently, Panek, in *Probable Cause*, the first history of American crime writing and its contexts, reviewed the novel unfavourably, declaring: 'Redfield is a dope' (21).

Divorcing any novel from its context is difficult; and the first in a genre will inevitably be handicapped by comparisons to later, more sophisticated work. Certain aspects of *The Dead Letter* may seem unpalatable to modern readers, such as the coincidences, or the idealized, saintly, characterless Argyll sisters. Yet the novel should be recognized for its adroit mystery plot and technical innovations. It is perhaps not up to the standards set by Collins at his best, as *Beadle's Monthly* claimed; and yet it does not fall so very short of them either.

Metta Victor followed *The Dead Letter* with *Too True: a Story of To-Day* (1868), another crime novel. It appeared, not in *Beadle's Monthly*, for that magazine had closed in 1867 – Johannsen noting that consumers seemed ‘not willing to associate the name of Beadle with high class literature’ (1: 421) – but in the rival *Putnam's Monthly Magazine*, which also published the book version. Both magazine and book versions appeared anonymously. Sikes commented that the book’s ‘authorship was quite generally ascribed to other parties, who were careful to make no disclaimer’ (2). The reasons for the anonymity and change of publisher are unknown, but they may have been an attempt to reach a different audience.

Metta Victor had killed off Burton, thus allowing no possibility of a sequel, and *Too True* diffuses its detection between a schoolboy and a young woman, both amateurs. It is also structured more as a Gothic-influenced psychotriller, the central figure being Louis Dassel, a sinister German. In the opening chapters Metta introduces some valuable jewels, also the information that Dassel is an alias for Count Konisberg, wanted for attempted murder. Dassel himself tells Konisberg’s story, after musing:

It is strange ... what mere spider’s-webs will sometimes hang a man! It is no wonder that criminals never feel safe to enjoy the fruits of their guilt. They know not at what moment, through what unexpected chance, they may hear the click of the prison-door shutting upon them, or feel the noose about their necks. Some trifle, which no cunning could have foreseen, will betray them. (44)

It is indicative of how fast and far contemporary crime fiction could travel that the story of Konisberg would be extracted and run as a short story, ‘A Mysterious Affair’, in an Australian regional newspaper, the *Queanbeyan Age* (5 September 1868), credited to *Putnam's* (4).

Young Robbie Cameron, who is tutored by Dassel, assumes the role of investigatory detective, after Dassel jilts his older sister for the younger, after she inherits the jewels. The other detective is Miss Bayles, a young

artist who works as a photo-tinter. She lives in a tenement with as near-neighbour a man who has evidence that Dassel has been involved in a robbery; Dassel's action in framing her neighbour for the crime draws her into the case, as investigator. In a chapter titled 'Tableau Vivant – by the Young Artist', Miss Bayles presents her information, quite in the manner of a Miss Marple. Within a few pages, so does Robbie, by letter from Germany, where he has been studying, and also investigating Dassel/Konisberg.

Too True shows adept manipulation of suspense, particularly in its intricate game of chess, check and mate, played by the villain and his two detectives. However, the book is finished hurriedly, with Miss Bayles being hurriedly married off, in a fairly unconvincing romance sub-plot. It is intriguing, yet ultimately not up to the level of skill displayed in *The Dead Letter*.

Metta's third mystery/crime novel, *The Figure Eight*, saw her revert to the pseudonym of Seeley Regester. It appeared in 1869 as a serial in *The Illuminated Western World*, a magazine edited by Orville. Subsequently it was published in the Beadle's series of Fifty Cent Books, following the reprinted *Dead Letter*. *The Figure Eight* was a less substantial work than her previous novels, in terms of both length and content, though with an arresting opening: 'I had figure eight on the brain.' Meredith, a doctor in Hampton, upstate New York, is found dead in his library, poisoned with prussic acid. He leaves a scrawl: 'Dying ... look ... 8' (5). The motive seems clear – Dr Meredith's fortune in Californian gold, now missing.

Joe Meredith, the narrator and the victim's nephew, is suspected of the crime. He has also witnessed Annie Miller, governess to Dr Meredith's daughter Lillian, sleepwalking and apparently searching for the missing gold. Suspicious, he hides in the vicinity, playing sleuth and pining for Lillian, whom he secretly loves.

The story is told initially in flashback, a crucial bit of information not being revealed until chapter 5 – that the doctor has recently married Inez, a Spanish teenager. Annie Miller had hoped to marry him herself, and for her brother Arthur to marry Lillian. Joe suspects the siblings: he found Annie Miller's handkerchief in the Doctor's laboratory, beneath the poison jars. Furthermore, Arthur is romancing Inez.

Meredith Place, the Doctor's house, is sold as a holiday home to a wealthy New York family, the Chateaubriands. Arthur courts their eldest daughter, and Joe discovers he has grown mysteriously rich, reportedly from the stockmarket. Joe also finds traces of smelting, the thief apparently using Doctor Meredith's laboratory to melt down the missing

gold into coins. He and Miss Miller join forces to find the murderer. Suspicion now focusses on Inez, a very merry widow now that her wealthy cousin Don Miguel has rescued her from penury. She has an interest in love-potions, which she intends to use on Arthur Miller to win him back from Miss Chateaubriand.

In summer, the Chateaubriands move to Meredith Place for the intended wedding. Annie Miller has another attack of somnambulism, returning with a handful of ingots – though where she got them, she cannot remember. Inez too acts suspiciously, being caught investigating the bottles of poison in the laboratory.

The denouement is sudden, and unexpected – Inez summons detectives to raid the laboratory, and they catch Arthur Miller actually coining. He leaps from a window, and is shot dead by the police. After the funeral, Annie Miller sleepwalks again, this time repeating a fragment of dialogue she heard on the night of Dr Meredith's murder, suggesting Inez poisoned her husband. Shocked, Inez confesses. As in *The Dead Letter*, a trial is averted, and Don Miguel takes Inez back to Cuba, to immure her in a convent – though she escapes and marries a sugar planter. Joe and Lillian Meredith marry, and by accident solve the mystery of the figure eight. The missing gold, despite Arthur Miller's thefts from the hoard, restores them to fortune.

There are various faults in this novel, one being that Joe Meredith the narrator disappears from the text three-quarters of the way through, hiding out in the West. The story thereafter becomes third person omniscient, being reconstructed by Joe after the event, and loses much of its immediacy. Metta Victor toys with the devices of red herrings, first Annie Miller as suspect, then Arthur, then Inez, but not with complete success. The revelation of Inez as the killer is unconvincing: 'We, who suffered most by her, always believed that she had no intention of killing her husband – at least not so suddenly – but was trying out these same arts upon him which she afterwards tried upon Arthur Miller – not, however, to enchant, but to disenchant him' (111).

The novel intrigues, mostly in the depiction of Annie Miller, another lovelorn, independent, strong woman, but overall it is hard to escape the impression that the work was scamped. It was an unsatisfactory follow-up to *The Dead Letter*, and certainly sold less well. Metta never wrote as Seeley Regester again. Yet she remained a busy writer. In the 1870s Street and Smith's *New York Weekly* paid her the then extraordinary sum of \$25,000 for a five-year exclusive serial service (Willard and Livermore 735). In all 16 serials of hers appeared in the magazine, some published in book form. Some of these works are crime, for example

Dora Elmyr's Worst Enemy; or Guilty or Not Guilty (1878), a kidnap mystery, skilful but again written too hurriedly. For Beadles' various publications she wrote at least 12 more novels as 'Corinne Cushman', while also producing successful satire and humour (though now much dated) under the pseudonyms of George E. Booram, Walter T. Gray and Mrs Mark Peabody. When the dime novel began to specialize in crime fiction, in the 1880s, she did not follow the trend, but then she was nearing the end of her long career.

Her writing only ceased some five months before her death in 1887. She had an operation for cancer, apparently successful, but with an appalling side-effect: 'Mrs Victor took cold immediately after it, and erysipelas settled in her eyes and destroyed her sight. She was removed to her home in Hohokus, where her last days were cheered by the constant attention of her husband, children, and friends' (Obituary, *New York Times*, 27 June 1887: 8).

The obituary also described her as 'An authoress well known a quarter of a century ago', indicating that despite her continued activity she had gradually faded from public attention. In part, her eclipse was due to her increasing use of pseudonyms, and that she was working in a popular, and ephemeral medium. However, her aversion to personal publicity, as noted by Sikes, may also have been a factor.

Metta Victor's entry in Willard and Livermore described her as 'a beautiful and lovable woman' (735). Orville certainly never forgot her. John H. Whitson, whom Orville edited, encountered him after the failure and sale of the Beadle firm, nearly two decades later. He recalled Orville as a great editor, whose bereavement, described as his 'gnawing life sorrow', never affected his work: 'He spoke with feeling of his wife, long dead. I recall his remark, made almost with tears in his eyes, to the effect that love was a desolating thing when you had lost the object of your affection; that even in those late years he now and then turned suddenly, almost thinking he heard her step or her voice' (qtd in Johanssen 2: 287).

Orville and Metta Victor are now largely forgotten except as 'dime' writers. If anything, as a result of her folklore and history work, Frances Victor (who died in 1902) enjoys a literary reputation higher than that of her younger sister. Despite Metta's hard and continued literary activity, she is of interest largely because of one book, *The Dead Letter*. Yet with that work she gains a posthumous glory as an innovator, the author of the first detective novel in America.

9

The Art of Murder: Anna Katharine Green

Have I read 'The Leavenworth Case'? I have read it through at one sitting.

Wilkie Collins to George Putnam

In 1883 American publisher George Putnam mailed a debut detective novel to Wilkie Collins. The book had been first published in 1878, and would have its English edition the following year. In modern publishing, sending a first novel to a famous writer would be to elicit a blurb endorsement. With Putnam it was more an act of homage, and Collins wrote back appreciatively. From the letter a sense of gracious generational change is gained. He did not regard the novice writer as a threat, and enjoyed her work: 'Her powers of invention are so remarkable – she has so much imagination and so much belief (a most important qualification for our art) in what she writes, that I have nothing to report of myself, so far, but most sincere admiration.' Putnam was so proud of this letter that he would reprint extracts from it in *The Critic*, 1893, in response to a paragraph disparaging women writers (Putnam, 'Wilkie Collins' 52).

The author concerned was Anna Katharine Green (1846–1935) (see Figure 9.1). Her novel *The Leavenworth Case: a Lawyer's Story*, had been an American bestseller, and its English publication would bring it fans including Agatha Christie. It would sell in the hundreds of thousands over several decades, and begin a career stretching into the twentieth century, with Green producing 37 novels over the next 40 years.

The Leavenworth Case has been widely regarded as the first American detective novel, and the first by a woman, both erroneously. Metta Victor had achieved that first feat with her 1866 *The Dead Letter*. But Victor's gender was concealed behind an ambiguous pseudonym, and

The Dead Letter, though successful, could not compare in sales with Green's genuine blockbuster. The book was a phenomenon, by an equally outstanding woman.

In terms of crime fiction's chronology, by 1878 Poe had been dead some 30 years, and Émile Gaboriau, five; Conan Doyle was still only a medical student. While the Sensation genre was no longer a source of moral panic, its major writers were still writing crime, their powers largely undiminished. In 1875, Collins produced *The Law and the Lady*, a novel about a strong female amateur detective clearing her ineffectual husband of murder, as if revisiting and reversing the heroine-sleuth denouement for Marian Halcombe in *The Woman in White*. Braddon also published two fine crime novels in *Dead Men's Shoes* (1876) and *The Cloven Foot* (1879). Green was thus not without competition from some of the best in the crime-writing business, not least in America: in 1878, Victor published the mystery *Dora Elmyr's Worst Enemy* in magazine and book form.

Collins, Braddon and Victor varied their crime writing with other genres. Green differed, for her *oeuvre* would be almost exclusively within crime, one published play and a book of poems apart. In thus specializing she was closest to Gaboriau, whom she claimed as her chief inspiration (Woodward 168). Indeed she was described as the American Gaboriau ('The Author' 2). It was as an American that she benefited from his translations being readily available, if in pirated form, from 1871 onwards. Writers in Britain or its colonies, such as the Australasian Fergus Hume, who would be similarly inspired, had this important French influence delayed: only in 1881 did Henry Vizetelly produce an English edition of Gaboriau, under the title of 'Gaboriau's Sensation Novels'. His marketing essentially looked backwards, as the Sensation label was beginning to be superseded by the term 'detective fiction'. Green would be primarily defined as a detective novelist, as was Hume, whose 1886 *The Mystery of a Hansom Cab* sold in similar quantity, but over a shorter period of time. Both of them would influence the career of the greatest contemporary detective writer, Conan Doyle, whose 'A Study in Scarlet', the first Sherlock Holmes story, was written in 1884, the year *The Leavenworth Case* appeared in England. It only found a publisher in 1887, after Hume's novel had become an international blockbuster.

Of her female antecedents in crime, Braddon was the closest in age; but Green was over a decade younger, better educated and not hampered by the need to earn a living. Her first novel was written in her father's house, which meant she could compose without time constraints, learning from the experience of writing. *The Leavenworth*

Case's immediate success freed her from having to turn her imagination into a bread-earning machine, to use Mary Fortune's phrase. Compared to Braddon, Wood, Victor, and most significantly Fortune, she was lucky indeed.

Nonetheless her path to bestsellerdom was hardly charmed. Anna Katharine Green was born in New York, the second daughter of Catharine Ann Whitney Green and James Wilson Green, a criminal attorney. Both parents were middle-class, of early New England Presbyterian stock. Her father was politically active, indeed something of a force in New York politics, being an editor of the *American Republican*. Anna lost her mother at age three, but did not stint for female care, from her 16-year-old sister Sarah, and later her stepmother Grace Hollister Wilson.

Green, like Spofford, was among the most highly educated women of her generation, attending Ripley Female College in Poultney, Vermont, which offered university-level education to women. She was thus among the first female Bachelor of Arts. In June 1865, shortly after the end of the American Civil War, Ralph Waldo Emerson gave a lecture at the college. He spoke on 'Resources', little knowing how resourceful a member of his audience would later become. His talk was well received, and a group of the students responded with an invitation for Emerson to join their secret sorority. No doubt amused to be among such trail-blazing and intelligent young women, Emerson agreed. A ceremony took place, in which Emerson was initiated into the society's 'mysteries'. In the process, he knelt before its President, and she laid her hand upon the eminent, Emersonian cranium.

This President was Anna Katharine Green. Remembering the encounter years later, she told an interviewer: 'You will note that I was already interested in mysteries.' She would recall it was the 'one great thrill' she experienced during a lifetime in which thrills were mostly expressed in her writing (Green, 'Speaking of Thrills').

After her graduation in 1866, she returned to her father's house, part of an extended family that included her brothers' wives and children. An escape, a future, would have been conventionally gained through marriage. Instead Green sought identity/employment via writing, a process that took 12 years. A description of her during this time survives from writer Mary Hatch, a friend, literary collaborator and relative via marriage, as a 'tall, graceful girl, dressed in gray, with bright red berries on her hat' (a rare glimpse of frivolity with Green). Hatch recalls also Green's 'calm belief of future success,' the confidence surely the product of her education:

In appearance she is rather striking than beautiful. Under a brow of almost masculine depth and power, her dark blue eyes express every emotion, while her mouth, which alone is beautiful, bespeaks sensitive delicacy and poetic feeling. Her form is elegant, being tall and willowy, but her crowning glory is her dark brown hair, which, unbound, sweeps just to the floor when she stands erect. (159)

Like many young writers, Green initially wanted to be a poet. She sent her verse to Emerson, and cherished his reply, which she would frame with glass on both sides and show to visiting journalists. Yet he was polite rather than encouraging. He also did not recall Green well: 'you must be the young lady who, with Miss Tryon, represented the Society which invited me to Pultney [sic], & who with her gave me that pleasant drive to the quarries in your neighbourhood'. About her poetry he noted a certain 'power of expression' and 'the variety and range of the thought'. He concluded: 'But it is quite another question whether it is to be made a profession, whether one may dare leave all other things behind, & write' (Emerson, Letter).

Green was not discouraged, but she did change course and experiment with genre. She tried playwriting, but also crime fiction. Drawing on her family background, she began writing 'A Lawyer's Tale'. The novel was commenced in the early 1870s, its impetus very likely Gaboriau's first appearances in America. Green also knew *Richmond*, for in her novel *That Affair Next Door* (1897), its detectives, policeman Ebenezer Gryce and gifted amateur Miss Amelia Butterworth, are described by a coroner as: 'Two Richmonds in the field' (29). That Green should so casually refer to a Bow Street Runner novel of 60 years back indicates that its pirated American edition had circulation and influence – quite possibly her lawyer father owned a copy.

For over six years she filled notebooks, with only her stepmother Grace in the know and providing encouragement. At the end she had a manuscript of nearly 200,000 words. She would claim she wrote the novel 'only to attract attention to myself as a writer so my poetry would sell' (Interview, *Lewiston Sun*). It was only when the work was finished to her satisfaction that she enlisted the confidence of her father James Wilson Green – and also his help, from his many New York contacts, which ranged from police to the literati.

Famously, Anna Katharine Green carried the manuscript in a shawl-strap to George Putnam, who would recall 'the bright-eyed young lady' who arrived in his office 'in the company of her grey-haired legal papa, with the manuscript (a very big manuscript)'. Putnam found the novel

to be 'well constructed and ingenious' but requested 'some addition to the title' to make it more 'distinctive', and that the whole be cut by a third. Green wrote to sister Sarah that it had been 'a great triumph' to be accepted by the first publisher she tried. 'That is a very wonderful thing. It does not happen to one author out of ten' (Putnam, Letter to Green, 19 July 1878; Green, Letter).

Green claimed to have started *The Leavenworth Case* with two notions, that the murderer should be the first to announce the crime, and that a conversation overheard should be misattributed ('Anna Katharine Green'). Upon these premises she built an elaborate plot structure. The book begins with narrator Raymond, a junior lawyer, receiving the news of murder. His firm's client, rich Mr Leavenworth, has been murdered in a locked room, his library. As an inquest is being held that day, the Misses Leavenworth (nieces and heirs) need a legal advisor present. Their names are Eleanore and Mary, a probable echo of *The Dead Letter*, whose sisters are Eleanor and Mary. Raymond is thus drawn into the drama, becoming an informal assistant to New York detective Ebenezer Gryce. The latter would become a series detective for Green, appearing in 12 of her novels, a feature sourced from Gaboriau and his Monsieur Lecoq.

Evidence is given at Leavenworth's inquest that no robbery occurred, and that the house was securely locked up on the night of the murder. Somebody within the household is guilty, but whom? Hints of suspicion are dropped re the Misses Leavenworth – but also a servant girl, Hannah, is missing. In addition the murder weapon has been found in Leavenworth's bedroom, reloaded. Raymond overhears a conversation between the two Miss Leavenworths that suggests Eleanore has a guilty secret. It seems that she has both removed a letter from the library, and the key to its door.

Gryce, a man as mysterious in his intent as Sherlock Holmes – and Conan Doyle read Green (Doyle, Letter to Green) – directs Raymond to befriend a Mr Henry Clavering. This fine English gentleman knows the Leavenworth girls, and was seen at the house on the night of the murder. Raymond already has his doubts as to the sisters, and now Clavering becomes another suspect: Leavenworth's secretary, Harwell, claims to have had a foreboding dream, implicating the Englishman. After some investigation, Raymond concludes the motive for the murder was a secret marriage, between Clavering and Eleanore, which would have caused an immediate disinheritance had Leavenworth known of it. Gryce merely remarks that he intends to prove Raymond wrong.

Gryce's assistant, known only as 'Q', traces the missing Hannah to upstate New York, where she is hiding with a Mrs Belden. But Hannah is found dead, from poison. She has left a suicide note, which Gryce shows to be faked. He sets up a scene in his office, in which he outlines a train of evidence against Mary Leavenworth, with two suspects summoned and within hearing distance. Upon his damning conclusion, the real murderer is provoked into a confession: Leavenworth's secretary Harwell, who loves Mary. He indeed, was the first to announce the murder. Hannah was a witness, whom he eliminated. The words Raymond overheard, which led him to suspect Eleanore, were in fact spoken by Mary. Much of Eleanore's suspicious behaviour was, indeed, intended to protect Mary, whom she believed to be guilty.

Such is a rough outline, as the detailed analysis of Green's subtle introduction of clues or red herrings, her juggling of the suspects as one seems guilty, one innocent, would fill many pages. The novel comprises an almost architectural design of evidence, and even now a modern reader will not automatically suspect Harwell. As an interviewer noted of Green: 'She never wilfully, playfully or carelessly misled her readers; she only outwitted them with her nicer ingenuity, "so that in the end they had to admit that had they but the eyes to see, the penetration to discover, there, from the start, was the solution of the mystery"' (Woodward 169).

One of the best descriptions of the novel comes from Agatha Christie, who read it as a teenager. She provides a tribute in her 1963 *The Clocks*, spoken by Hercule Poirot: "'It is admirable," said Poirot. "One savours its period atmosphere, its studied and deliberate melodrama, those rich and lavish descriptions of the golden beauty of Eleanor, the moonlight beauty of Mary ... the maid-servant Hannah, so true to type, and the murderer, an excellent psychological study"' (chapter 14).

In *The Leavenworth Case* Green rediscovered and popularized for a new audience various pre-existing crime features, including the locked room mystery, ballistics evidence and the series detective. She also contributed innovations, including the body in the library, the butler (who didn't do it) and the reproduction of a torn but significant fragment of letter which must be reconstructed. These techniques would become formulaic in later whodunnits. Knight: 'Green effectively shaped a model that 40 years later Agatha Christie and others would use and in some ways refine ... [they] would not inherently or structurally vary the pattern Green established' (*Crime Fiction* 53, 54). Perhaps the greatest distinction achieved by *The Leavenworth Case* was that it was used as a textbook at Yale to demonstrate the fallibility of circumstantial evidence (Hatch 161).

It was also claimed that soon after publication the book was discussed by the Pennsylvania Legislature, who could not believe that a woman was responsible. A New York lawyer was present, who had met Green, and assured the politicians that she was the author. The response was: 'Then she must have got some man to help her' (Harkins and Johnston 92). From the lawyer's interjection it is clear the discussion was informal, not occurring during sessions. But if true – and the anecdote is not reported in contemporary newspapers, appearing only in 1901 – it shows how convincingly Green wrote of crime and legal procedures.

To a modern reader, the novel has the same problems re female characterization as *The Dead Letter*: the four near-identically named heroines are so idealized they lack any character. Collins had indeed made similar criticisms of Green's heroines to Putnam, although the publisher omitted them when reprinting the letter (they can be seen in Collins' holograph manuscript, held at The University of Texas at Austin). But that critique made, Collins reverted to the appreciative again: 'Now, I get out of the pulpit, and take my leave in the character of a reader. Dozens of times in reading the story I have stopped to admire the fertility of invention, the delicate treatment of incidents – and the fine perception of the influence of events on the personages of the story' (Putnam, 'Wilkie Collins' 52).

The success of the novel meant Green became financially independent, a literary celebrity, even attending a Presidential reception. She was thus famous when she met Charles Rohlfs (1853–1936). The couple established a rapport, despite her being eight years the senior and their differences in class and background. Rohlfs was the son of German immigrants to the USA. His father, a cabinetmaker, died when Charles was 12, and he became the family breadwinner in various low-skilled jobs. He maintained his education, via night classes at New York's Cooper Union, an institution which provided working men with further education. Rohlfs studied courses ranging from science to design, and was able to move into industrial design, working for cast-iron stove manufacturers. He was innovative, designing patented improvements, but the work, although creative, and sustaining him for 12 years, was not fully satisfying. Rohlfs hankered for the stage, and from 1868 began to work in theatre, appearing with such notables as Edwin Booth. His favoured work was dramatic Shakespearean roles.

Green also loved Shakespeare and the theatre, but probably a more important factor was that Rohlfs attended the same church. But his age and profession caused parental disapproval from the patriarch James Wilson Green. He famously agreed to the marriage only if

Rohlfs abandoned acting. He did, returning to industrial design. Their wedding, when Green was in her late thirties, showed an unostentatious practicality. They married in the South Congregational Church in Brooklyn, in November 1884. Within the context of the *New York Times'* wedding notices, with its brides clad in costly white silk and lace, Green was distinctive and practical in wearing a 'travelling dress of fawn, trimmed with brown plush', a going-away outfit (*New York Times* 26 November 1884: 5).

Green maintained her output of detective novels, generally yearly, despite the births of three children. Probably to save money, the couple moved upstate, to Buffalo, where Green had lived as a girl. They bought land in 1890, and designed a Tudor-style residence for it. Homemaking kindled Rohlfs' interest in furniture design. He could find nothing he liked – his tastes ran to eighteenth-century furniture, which the couple could not afford. So he set to, and designed and crafted what he wanted, one of the first pieces being a writing chair for Green, of oak, with 'a wide, contoured right arm to accommodate her notebook' (Maida 28). His work attracted attention quickly, from friends who wanted similar pieces, then as an expanding business, with clients.

Rohlfs would establish a separate international reputation to Green, as a member of and important spokesman for the American Arts and Crafts movement. Indeed, Green is most commonly pictured seated in an ornately carved chair, one of her husband's productions (Figure 9.1). Rohlfs specialized in the design and manufacture of what he termed 'artistic furniture'. He has been popularly credited with originating the 'Mission' style, and his work is held in numerous museums, including MOMA. His quoted philosophy of aesthetics parallels that of Ruskin.

Green and Rohlfs were a happy couple, living/working in intimacy. Green wrote at home; and for the first years of his furniture-making, Charles Rohlfs worked madly in the family attic. His craft surrounded her, as is evident from photographs of their Buffalo home reproduced in Michael James' 1994 biography of Rohlfs, *Drama in Design*. It is clearly a domestic environment created to both serve and express their needs, a fundamental tenet of the Arts and Crafts movement. Indeed, during the early years of Rohlfs' furniture-making, Green was credited as co-designer. Furthermore, the pair collaborated on the 1891 stage adaptation of *The Leavenworth Case*, in which Rohlfs appeared as the villain. He also gave dramatic recitals, including her verse, and each night took part in a mutual critiquing session of her writing work for the day, which he read aloud. They thus were very well aware of each other's avocation (James, *Drama in Design* 33, 23).



Figure 9.1 Anna Katharine Green, seated in an ornate chair: the work of her husband, Charles Rohlf.

Even during their lifetimes this joint career path was regarded as unusual. A 1915 article commented: ‘The affinity of the carpenter’s bench and the gum-shoe may not be apparent at once.’ It described Rohlf as ‘a direct artistic descendant of William Morris’ and Green as ‘the author of a particularly terrifying and puzzling brand of detective stories’. The article cites the surprise created when the pair were linked: “[W]hat’s the novel-writer woman got to do with the furniture-designer chap?” “Oh, nothing much, except that they are man and wife!” (‘Personal Glimpses’ 1201).

Green's texts can be read for possible mentions of Rohlf's handiwork, but it can be equally argued that the couple shared a joint aesthetic, despite their different vocations. Indeed, the pair mixed aesthetics and personal ethics in a manner entirely consistent with the ideals of Arts and Crafts. *The Leavenworth Case* devotes much space to a humble rural upcountry home, of a plain-sewer, the widowed Mrs Belden, whom Collins regarded as her most successful character (Letter to George Putnam, 7):

It was a pleasant apartment ... square, sunny, and well furnished. On the floor was a crimson carpet, on the walls several pictures, at the windows, cheerful curtains of white, tastefully ornamented with ferns and autumn leaves; in one corner an old melodeon, and in the centre of the room a table draped with a bright cloth, on which were various little knick-knacks, which, without being rich or expensive, were both pretty and, to a certain extent, ornamental. (209)

Mrs Belden describes her tastes as follows: 'Loving what was beautiful, hating what was sordid, drawn by nature towards all that was romantic and uncommon' (240). The room she inhabits, with its emphasis on tasteful simplicity, colour and utility, is Arts and Crafts aesthetics before the fact. It also seems prophetic of the Rohlf's domestic interiors in Buffalo. Their living room was described as 'cozy, cordial' – with fire-light flickering 'fantastically over the originals of mission furniture' (qtd in 'Anna Katharine Green' 48).

The Rohlf's were public figures, accessible to the press and interviewers. As a result we know more of Green's working method than of any other early woman detective writer. Had she and Rohlf's produced a how-to manual of the artistic life, it would have firstly stressed the importance of great literature, for enjoyment, and also for self-improvement. The couple were lifelong devotees of Shakespeare, whose quotations introduce almost every chapter of *The Leavenworth Case*. Rohlf's recommended the study of literary classics, believing that Shakespeare in particular 'had forged his own creative spirit' (James, 'Charles Rohlf's' 233; Hatch 160).

A second emphasis is on the dignity of labour. To Rohlf's, his long hours in his workshop were almost sacred, and Hatch records the young Green writing nine to five. Even after decades of publications she worked every day. She described to Woodward 'the infinite labor, the planning, modelling, the sheer thought and attention to detail that went to the building of a mystery story'. She also managed the family

household largely by herself, devising and tending her own garden. Green was indeed photographed in her garden, with trowel and in an eighteenth-century-style gown, for the *American Magazine* (87, February 1919: 38). Only after the birth of her last child in 1892 did the Rohlfes employ a live-in housekeeper. She also could make her own clothes, a creative act in which she expressed her preference for what would now be termed the elegant vintage (Hatch 160; Woodward 169; Maida 27).

Green and Rohlfes neither separated the artistic from the artisan, nor from the domestic sphere. All labour was dignified. Rohlfes' first love was the theatre; Green had wanted fame as a poet. That they earned renown in other areas was personally unproblematic, for Rohlfes believed that each individual had an outstanding gift, that they could 'do better than anything else' (James, 'Charles Rohlfes' 230). Rohlfes' gift would win him international fame, and for decades Green was both the 'Queen' of detective fiction, and the major American writer in the field.

Green kept newspaper clippings of notable crimes, and had many readers send them to her ('Anna Katharine Green'). For her, the 'vivid, overpowering conception' was paramount, and something for which she was prepared to wait: 'For years an incident would germinate in my mind. Then suddenly, perhaps in the night, I would wake with my story conceived from the first page to the last' (Woodward 169). To another interviewer she noted that a true crime narrative, told to her by a friend, took 'three or four years' to germinate into her 1883 novel *Hand and Ring*. During that time she 'had been revolving that plot subconsciously in my mind, and not in a mechanical way' ('Anna Katharine Green').

Both Green and Rohlfes abhorred the mechanical, the mass-produced. Woodward found Green a model of 'high seriousness' regarding her craft. She ended up 'blushing' for the slapdash 'casual fecundity' with which modern writers like Edgar Wallace worked. Green regarded their mass-production as signalling the decline of the detective story, 'the degeneration of Mystery to mere surprise'. She worked, she said, for love of it: 'They, it seems, write only for dollars.' As a consequence she read little modern crime and usually forebore to comment on it (Woodward 170, 169; 'Detective Fiction'). Paradoxically, *The Leavenworth Case*, despite the care of its writerly craft, was a genuine mass-market phenomenon, with multiple editions/translations. It was doubtless the income from this book and others by Green which helped give Rohlfes the freedom to work as an artistic craftsman.

Not least, Green and Rohlfes brought a dramatic subjectivity, an affect, to their separate work. Rohlfes was almost a Method Actor in the intensity he brought to his designs. Green told Woodward that writing

The Leavenworth Case had 'depleted her nervous energy' and left her physically never the same (170). To another interviewer she described the writing of the climax to *The Forsaken Inn* (1890). In it a woman crawls through a passageway: 'I knew what she was going to find there [a body], and when she was half-way through I was so frightened I could not take her any farther. I had to lay the manuscript away for a time.' To avoid any spillover from her morbid plots, she chose cheerful company and even a cat called Fluffy, 'pure white and of a most sane disposition' ('Anna Katharine Green').

The Rohlfs also followed William Morris in becoming involved with local and social issues, though stopping short of Morris' radical, even revolutionary politics. Both were actively part of their Presbyterian church, as Elder and committee-woman respectively. Rohlfs also gave time to 'the social problems of his community', agitating for issues such as ballot reform. Green had no difficulty with publicly agitating for issues she held dear, such as international copyright law, where she was claimed to have changed, via a personal cable, the attitude of William Gladstone ('Personal Glimpses'; 'Anna Katharine Green'). In the *New York Times* she was forthright, even withering, on the issue:

My experience is that few publishers feel in duty bound to pay for material that their competitors can have for the taking. Our English, French, and German cousins steal from us, and they are sure we steal from them. My books are printed abroad extensively, for which honor I receive not a cent, excepting from an English house, and that not because of the recognition of any right of mine to compensation, but for the advance sheets, with which they can anticipate the appearance of the American publisher's books in Canada, England, France, and Germany. An English publisher recently boasted of the money he had made on American books, for the use of which he had not paid. If no American publisher has made the same boast with reference to English books, it is possibly because he is too modest to noise his shortcomings in this respect to the world. (12 March 1888: 1)

Finally, in considering this mutually influential couple, it is worth noting the importance of construction in both their *oeuvres*. This word recurs in descriptions of Green's work, referring to her plotting. Rohlfs was well known for his process of first designing an article of furniture on paper, then having one of his workmen make a miniature model, which would be refined via further models. This process is analogous with pre-plotting, a vital technique for crime fiction, with its need for

clues to be artfully introduced or concealed, the mystery kept tantalizing until the revelation at the end. Green always knew the endings of her books before she wrote them. As she herself stated: 'I must have a central idea which appeals to my imagination; and an end of such point or interest that the reader will feel that it justifies the intricacies which are introduced to hold it back. In other words the heart of the labyrinth must be worth reaching' (qtd in Wells, chapter 24).

It is as a narrative constructor, an artificer, that Green can be most significantly placed as an innovator. In 1913 Carolyn Wells cited Green as exemplar in *The Technique of the Mystery Story*, in the same company as Poe, Conan Doyle, Gaboriau and Israel Zangwill, describing her as 'one of the very best constructors of a detective story' (chapter 13). Green was a key developer, in novel length, of the clue-puzzle, a form favoured by Ellen Wood. She effectively transmitted it to the new century, where it became the characteristic form of crime fiction's 'Golden Age', the 1920s–1950s. As the *New York Times* wrote, following Green's death:

with the possible exception of 'The Moonstone' it was not until the publication in 1878, of the Brooklyn young woman's 'Leavenworth Case', that the art of sending the reader on a false track regarding the guilty person, and, at the end, of taking him completely by surprise with a convincing solution which had never occurred to his imagination, was developed into a fine art. ('Detective Fiction')

Note those two last words. Wilkie Collins had referred in his letter to Putnam to 'our art', but in 1883 the most common critique of crime fiction was that it was trashy. It was the obvious intelligence of Green's design that helped legitimize the detective genre. She was also extremely logical as well as realistic, avoiding the use of the incredible and also coincidence – something she shared with Conan Doyle (qtd in Knight, *Form and Ideology* 67). In this aspect she differs from her immediate predecessors, the Sensation novelists. Her high religiosity and seriousness additionally absolved her from charges of inciting crime, a persistent critique from the Newgate novel onwards.

Furthermore, because Green was published in hardback, by a reputable publisher, she lifted the American mystery from the dime novel popular market to the middle-class audience. Victor's detective novel *Too True* (1868) had also been published by Putnam, but anonymously. Green differed in not being an isolated instance for the publisher, but rather a recognized, respectable 'brand' name. By 1935, the year of her death, the *New York Times* was describing the reading of mystery

narratives as: 'intellectual relaxation', the 'habitual indulgence ... even by individuals of serious minds', such as college professors. Thus Green helped create what the paper referred to, with a whiff of snobbishness, as 'good' detective fiction ('Detective Fiction').

Forty novels are too much to summarize in one book chapter. The best of Green is the puzzles she created; the weakness a tendency to elaborate language, and an overwhelming sense of Presbyterian gloom. Most recent attention has been devoted to her two female detectives, Miss Amelia Butterworth and Violet Strange. Both appeared relatively late in her career, Amelia in three novels published between 1897 and 1900, and Violet in 1915. These two experiments coincided with several major changes, firstly in publishing practice, as the huge three-deckers of Victoriana became obsolete. Novels became shorter and slimmer than *The Leavenworth Case*, and also less elaborate in prose style. Green (and also Braddon, in England) was here adapting to the literary market, never resting on her veteran's laurels, and so maintaining her career.

The second change was a wide-scale questioning and change in female roles, expressed in various forms, from education, increasing involvement in professions such as medicine and law, the New Woman novel and the Suffragettes. Green was public in her opposition to Female Suffrage – probably she felt she had achieved her career without the vote. But this attitude was also typical for women of her generation. Even Braddon, in an article on changing female roles, expressed ambivalence when comparing the enviable freedoms of the twentieth-century girl with the constricted, demure damsel of her youth, who 'would have shrieked with horror at the idea of breaking windows or scratching a policeman's face' ('The Woman I Remember' 3). Green went further, but as her letters to the *New York Times* make clear, she was primarily offended by the militant wing of the Suffragettes, and their confronting tactics. 'They can even for months insult our President and humiliate the nation as no body of men would have been allowed to do for a day' – referring here to picketing the White House (30 October 1917: 14). Had the battle for the female vote been less violent, as it was in the Antipodes, Green would not have found its activists immodest and graceless.

Nonetheless Green was fully aware of the zeitgeist, expressed in her use of woman detectives. Here she followed an existing trend, although the investigating female detective had never really vanished from the nineteenth-century crime novel. Certainly the heroine-sleuth, effective until thwarted and subjugated into domesticity, effectively ended with the 1860s. But Wilkie Collins in his 1875 *The Law and the Lady*

would move beyond the trope, showing a woman whose detection was unproblematic. At pulp level, in the USA, dime novels had featured at least five female sleuths in the 1880s alone: (Harlan P. Halsey) Old Sleuth's *The Lady Detective* (1880) and *Lady Kate, the Dashing Female Detective* (1886); *La Marmoset, the Detective Queen* (1882); Albert Aiken's *The Actress Detective* (1889); and Edward L. Wheeler's *New York Nell, the Boy-Girl Detective* (1886). Whether these depictions had any connection with the US popularity of *The Female Detective/The Little Detective* play, or the Pinkerton Agency's known employment of female PI Kate Warne in the 1850s–1860s, is unknown. Certainly Old Sleuth's female detectives were both called Kate.

In England the female sleuth was re-energized, initially in Casebook form, starting a minor publishing trend. Firstly came the 1893 magazine publication of Catherine Louisa Pirkis' private detective Loveday Brooke – like the two police heroines of 1864, solely defined by her work rather than romance. Pirkis was a novelist and later animal-rights activist; her only venture into crime, accomplished though it was, proved her last, with the book publication of *The Experiences of Loveday Brooke, Lady Detective* (1894). Interestingly, only three months after the first Loveday story, in the February *Ludgate Monthly*, Mary Fortune for the first time after hundreds of detective stories in the *Australian Journal* featured a policewoman. In her 'The Spade Guinea', Melie is an actress of note, "Melaine' of the Royal", a theatre notorious for its bar, called the 'saddling paddock', where prostitutes paraded for assignations. Consequently none of her lover Coyne's friends will receive her. When he is murdered, she investigates upon her own initiative: 'When I have avenged my poor Ned I shall retire on my laurels!' She is so effective that instead she gains a permanent job as 'female assistant detective, and she has done credit to it, her talent for making up and acting a part foreign to her being of great value in her new *profession*' (457–8, italics mine). It was the first time since 1864 that a woman had been fictionalized as a police detective.

Other writers adding to the revival included: Fergus Hume's unusual Gypsy heroine, *Hagar of the Pawnshop* (1898); Grant Allan with two series heroines, Lois Cayley, graduate of Girton College (*Miss Cayley's Adventures*, 1899), and nurse *Hilda Wade* (1900) whose adventures were completed by Conan Doyle after Allan's death; L. T. (Lillie Thomasina) Meade and Robert Eustace, with *The Detections of Miss Cusack* (1899–1900); and Baroness Orczy's *Lady Molly of Scotland Yard* (1910) – like Melie, a police detective.

Green differed by presenting her first heroine, Amelia Butterworth, not in a Casebook mode, but as the central character in a novel, although

she would use the linked short story form for her second female sleuth, Violet Strange. Both Misses, Amelia and Violet, are conservative, effective figures, gifted at detection but circumscribed by their membership of the New York elite. Amelia Butterworth, of Gramercy Park, appears first in *That Affair Next Door* (1897), where neighbourly proximity to a murder leads her to assist Gryce. Apart from being a spinster, in most respects she recalls Green herself at the time, being in her fifties, self-possessed and sensible, with 'inborn principle and strict Presbyterian training' (*Lost Man's Lane* preface) given to charitable works, her reading staples being Shakespeare and the Bible. Luck makes her a witness, but she competes with as much as assists Gryce.

Green's justification for Amelia's sleuthing was that women contribute to crime detection by knowing the feminine world, a mystery to the male detective. Amelia, not Gryce, knows the uses of pins; can discreetly interrogate other women in the guise of small talk and gossip; and identify a maker of hats as a gumshoe would a car. Not only does she prove good at the work but she thoroughly enjoys it. In her first-person narration Green draws a character with a fine line in waspish or self-deprecating humour: 'I don't like young men in general. They are either over-suave and polite, as if they condescended to remember that you are elderly, and that it is their duty to make you forget it, or else they are pert and shallow and disgust you with their egotism' (*That Affair Next Door* 71).

That the character struck a chord is shown by a reader, Delia L. Avery, actually writing to Green suggesting Amelia marry Gryce. Green wrote back in character, displeased; Avery expressed her apologetic regret: 'I had no thought that you were to be of further use to Mrs Rohlfs as Miss Butterworth' (Avery). Yet Green only used Amelia for three years, ending with *The Circular Study* (1900), where she is more of a cameo, seen through Gryce's eyes, and thus less entertaining. The major focus of the novel is gadgetry, an interest of Green's which she shared with Rohlfs, who had begun work as an industrial designer. It is expressed here as an elaborate invention by which the victim, an inventor, communicates with his deaf-mute servant. The invention, and then the murder decoded, Amelia retires. She declares she has 'put her finger in the police pie for the last time, Mr Gryce – positively for the last time'. Gryce, older and thus more suitable for retirement, watches her go, observing her 'quiet complacency ... she was not altogether dissatisfied with herself or the result of her interference in matters usually considered at variance with a refined woman's natural instincts' (288–9).

Violet Strange appears in 1915, and though young is not a particularly modern miss. She works as a contractor for a private eye, but keeps her

profession secret, ostensibly being a socialite living in luxury. Her reason why is the thread of mystery uniting the short stories in *The Golden Slipper*. Violet functions as a society investigator, her privilege a major strength. She is presented as small – a means of demonstrating that she is not threatening, as with Emily Williams in Trollope's *Refugee*, and quaint – creating the impression her detection is idiosyncratic, even eccentric, as with another Trollope female detective, Martha Maxwell in *Jessie Phillips*.

Violet works, Green gradually reveals, because she secretly needs the money, for altruistic, family reasons. Her domineering father has banished his eldest daughter Theresa, for the crime of an unsuitable attachment to a musician. The latter, though, has recognized his wife's superb singing voice, and trained it. When Violet tracks Theresa down, she uses her detection fees to send her to Europe to become a diva. Then, as she confesses to Roger Upjohn, a widower whom she has cleared of murder, she has to stop working. Her father has become suspicious:

'Someone had told him I was doing things on the sly which he had better look into; and of course he asked questions and – and I answered them. He wasn't pleased – in fact he was very displeased, – I don't think we can blame him for that – but we had no open break for I love him dearly, for all my opposing ways, and he saw that, and it helped, though he did say after I had given my promise to stop where I was and never to take up such work again, that – ' here she stole a shy look at the face bent so eagerly towards her – 'that I had lost my social status and need never hope now for the attentions of – of – well, of such men as he admires and puts faith in. So you see,' her dimples all showing, 'that I am not such a very good match for an Upjohn of Massachusetts, even if he has a reputation to recover and an honourable name to achieve. The scale hangs more evenly than you think.' (*The Golden Slipper*, Problem IX)

This passage hides rebellion behind a surface of romance. Although Violet obeys her father, and gives up detection, it has served its purpose, established her sister as an opera singer – and set up a likely family reconciliation. If she has compromised herself socially, then she cares not, for she has escaped the high society marriage her father would have approved, if not actively arranged. With Upjohn she can have a more equitable marriage, of her own choosing – just as Green did, by marrying a social, but not creative or intellectual, inferior in Rohlf's. But the parallel between author and character stops there, with the end of

Violet's professionalism. Green's major personal revolt, of continuing a career despite marriage, was decades in the past, but still in 1915 too radical a notion for her readers.

Domestic tyrants, husbands and fathers, recur in Green, her apparent conformity undercut by a sharp critique of women's lack of power. It is often accompanied by class factors – a feature also that she shares with Wood. True worth she sees as not dependent on money, nor status. In *That Affair Next Door* and *A Strange Disappearance* (1885), young men marry socially beneath them, and regret the decision – only to have their wives prove their superiority. Perhaps Green's most powerful depiction of women and their inequality is in an 1895 short story, 'Midnight at Beauchamp Row'. Here Letty Chivers spends her first married Christmas Eve alone at home, guarding the payroll money from the firm where her husband Ned is manager. In a carefully controlled narrative combining pity and terror, she is successively menaced by two men, one a tramp, the other a Negro – who proves to be Ned in disguise. He has planned to rob his employer even if he has to frighten his wife nearly to death in the process.

The end of Green's long life was tragic, both for her and Rohlfs. It would be the fate of this talented and decent couple simply to live too long. Green retired from writing in 1922 aged 76, and Rohlfs gradually scaled down his workshop, closing it by the end of the decade. They should have enjoyed a serene retirement, with their children grown, established in their separate lives. But their sons were involved in aviation, a risky profession particularly in its early days. Both experienced plane crashes – Roland survived his, but Sterling Rohlfs was killed in 1928. Two years later, the eldest Rohlfs child Rosamund ailed and died. The couple had thus outlived two of their three children, and also the economic conditions which had favoured their professions. Green's style of writing now seemed outmoded in America with the rise of the hardboiled genre, and in the Great Depression there was little call for artistic furniture. At 88 Green was still giving interviews, with Rohlfs assisting (*Lewiston Sun*), but in April 1935 she died. Rohlfs followed 14 months later.

After her death, something curious happened. Green had died six years short of a famous anniversary in crime fiction, the hundredth anniversary of 'The Murders in the Rue Morgue'. To commemorate it, in 1941 Howard Haycraft, a 22-year-old crime fan and publisher with H. W. Wilson, purveyors of library reference books, wrote *Murder for Pleasure*, the first book-length history of detective fiction. Green's undoubted status as the bestselling woman writer in the genre for decades

raised the question for Haycraft of how to position her historically. She had been born in the same decade as Poe's short stories, and if no earlier woman could be recollected, then she had to be the founding mother. He wrote that she was 'the first, in fact, to practice the form in any land or language' (83–4). It was certainly a claim that Green never made for herself. The motherhood tag has stuck, with the title of Green's 1989 biography by Patricia D. Maida being *Mother of Detective Fiction*. Haycraft and Ellery Queen even collaborated on a genealogy of crime fiction, in which Green as mother appeared in a family tree of genre nigh 40 years after Poe-the-father. In nature it would be a biological impossibility. And as this book has shown, it is frankly wrong.

Conclusion: 'She Has Got a Murderess in Manuscript in her Bedroom'

The young lady who is kind enough to teach one's daughters French and music looks and talks like an ordinary being, but it is very likely if we only knew all, that she has got a murderess in manuscript in her bedroom, at the elaboration of whose career she is working all her spare hours, and through the vivid delineation of whose amatory and homicidal performances she hopes herself to attain to literary fame. It is difficult to believe how anybody who is to all outward appearance so harmless, and who takes her meals with such regularity, can be engaged in the manufacture of all the frightful sentiments and harrowing plots to the production of which she retires, for anything we can tell, when the music-lessons and the French are over for the day ...

A quiet man thinks all this very terrible, and opines that the book must have been written by a she fiend. Nothing of the kind. It has been written by the wife of the curate in an adjoining parish, or by a clever governess, or an amiable blue-stocking, whose time hangs heavy on her hands, and who composes this sort of thing when she is tired of composing hymns.

'Homicidal Heroines', *Saturday Review* 7 April 1866:
403-4

In 1866, an anonymous essayist in the *Saturday Review* presented an overview of Sensation fiction at its height of popularity. In the course of his argument he discusses the creators of 'Homicidal Heroines' like Lady Audley, not dissolute or abandoned women, but clever and respectable

governesses, bluestockings and curate's wives. Nor were they necessarily uncommon: his own household might well contain an aspiring Queen of Sensation.

These hypothetical examples typify the women discussed in this book. Mary Denison and Elizabeth Gaskell were clergy wives; Mary Fortune was briefly a governess, if drunken (*Children's Registers*, Old Series 5, fiche 62, 489), and Ellen Davitt a schoolteacher; and Catherine Crowe, to name just one example, would probably not have objected to being labelled an 'amiable blue-stocking'. All just happened to have 'a murderess in manuscript' in their bedrooms.

The *Saturday Review* author's significant error is that he imagines or portrays them as amateurs, though aspiring to literary fame. As he would have known from the example of Braddon and Wood, and which his bedroom scribblers also knew, women crime authors were hard-nosed professionals. They competed with their male counterparts, publishing in periodical and book form, often to more contemporary acclaim and success. Crime writing was therefore, despite its shocking matter, not an unusual activity for women during the nineteenth century, the period when the genre of crime fiction codified and became a mass-market literary phenomenon. It might even be acceptable, despite the prevailing feminine ideal of the Angel in the House. That the *Saturday Review's* comments were made in the 1860s, rather than say the 1930s, when Queens of Crime such as Agatha Christie reigned, is indicative of the argument this book has made: that crime writing is inclusive of both genders, even before the formal beginnings of the genre.

Far from women being absent from crime writing's beginnings, they have been a continuous genre presence. Crime fiction has been consistently a space for women writers, even though they were, until the twentieth century, excluded from professional knowledge of criminal subject matter. Instead they (like many of their male counterparts) partook of the prevalent cultural centrality of 'murder-mania' in the early modern period. Some might have attended trials or executions; at the least they followed crime reportage in the newspapers. A few had male relatives who were lawyers (Trollope, Green), malefactors (Davitt and Fortune) or even a policeman (Fortune). Their experience of crime might have been largely indirect, but it was no handicap to their fiction.

Crime fiction was an option for the professional female writer prepared to undertake the experiment with form and content that crime fiction presents, and to move between literary genres in search of a market. Sometimes the venture into crime would be brief, however adept, as with Davitt. Sometimes it would be a persisting obsession, re-emerging

at intervals, as with Braddon. Sometimes it would develop into a literary specialty, as with Fortune and Green. The result was some innovative, bold and very fine crime fiction, every bit as deadly as the male's.

Through their writing, either in subject matter or in person, when identified as female, they also took part in a continuing debate about women's roles. At the beginning of the nineteenth century, the feminine was perceived as devoted to the domestic, legally inferior to her husband, son and father. During this hundred-year period, reforms to divorce and marriage laws were made, education improved with the opening of tertiary institutions for women, and that they should vote was either achieved or the subject of intense agitation. The law and the police force might have remained off-limits to women until the new century, but was fictionally an area to which these female professionals struck their claims alongside the males. When writing of similarly venturesome heroines they might strike social constraints, as with the motif of the heroine-sleuth, who could be successful up to a point, and then was punished into marriageability. This figure dominated depictions of detecting women for most of the century, but by the end the professional female sleuth had, with the rise of the New Woman, become unexceptionable and unexceptional.

The popular view of crime fiction's origins has been the paternal genealogy of Poe, Collins and Conan Doyle, with Anna Katharine Green a belated 'mother'. The purpose of this book has been to add the women, the other mothers of crime, to the detective genealogy and family photograph album. Thus, the counterpart of Godwin, creator of the first male 'detective', Caleb Williams, is Ann Radcliffe and *Udolpho's* heroine-sleuth Emily. Comparable with Bulwer Lytton, author of firstly multi-genre works with crime elements, then novels focussed on the mystery plot, is Frances Trollope. Beside Poe's three short story miniatures in the 1840s are the three-volume novel canvases of Catherine Crowe. And so it goes: in the 1860s Wilkie Collins and Gaboriau are accompanied by Mary Braddon, Ellen Wood and Metta Victor; and even the Casebook tradition includes women, in the shape of Harriet Prescott Spofford and Mary Fortune, not to mention the female detectives of *The Revelations* and Andrew Forrester Jr. The result is a talented assemblage, equitable and colourful, with rainbow bonnets and flowing skirts alongside the sober dark suits and top hats of the males.

Cherchez les femmes? Consider them found.

A Timeline of Early True Crime and its Fictions

- 1654 Murder of Thomas Kidderminster
1688 Pamphlet *A True Relation of a Horrid Murder Committed Upon the Person of Thomas Kidderminster*
- 1728 First *Newgate Calendar*
1735–9 Gayot de Pitaval's *Causes Célèbres et Intéressants*
1745 Eugene Aram murders Daniel Clarke
Kidderminster case in *Gentleman's Magazine*
- 1759 Eugene Aram hanged for murder
1764 Birth of Ann Radcliffe
1770 Birth of James Hogg
1779 Birth of Frances Trollope
1787 Gothic novelist Charlotte Smith translates selected tales from Pitaval with the title of *The Romance of Real Life*
- 1790 Birth of Catherine Crowe
1791 Radcliffe's *The Romance of the Forest*
1792 Radcliffe's *The Italian*
1794 Murder of Edward Culshaw by John Toms in Prescot, Lancashire, first known case of forensic ballistics
Radcliffe's Gothic *The Mysteries of Udolpho*
William Godwin's *Caleb Williams*
- 1796 *Caleb Williams* adapted for the stage as *The Iron Chest; or, Murder Brought to Light* by George Colman
Matthew Lewis' *The Monk*
Caleb Williams translated for a Paris production as *Falkland*
- 1799 Birth of Ellen Davitt
1812 Birth of Ellen Wood
1815 *Secret Memoirs of Napoleon Buonaparte*, written by Charles de Bourges
Doris, introduces notion of Cytheréan Cohort, female police spies
- 1816 Birth of John Lang
1817 George Ludlum turns the recent murder of Mary Ashford into melodrama *The Mysterious Murder: or, What's the Clock?*
- 1818 Publication of Jane Austen's *Northanger Abbey*
1820 E. T. A. Hoffmann's 'Mademoiselle de Scudéry'
Death of Joseph Fouché
1823 Death of Ann Radcliffe
1824 Weare–Thurtell murder case
James Hogg's *Private Memoirs and Confessions of a Justified Sinner*
Publication of Fouché's *Mémoires*
Birth of Wilkie Collins
- 1825 George Borrow's *Celebrated Trials, and Remarkable Cases of Criminal Jurisprudence* retells the Kidderminster case
Translations of Fouché in England and the USA
- 1826 'Fisher's Ghost' case in Australia

- 1827 Murder of Maria Marten in the Red Barn
Richmond: Or, Scenes in the Life of a Bow Street Officer, Drawn Up from His Private Memoranda
Thomas De Quincey's 'On Murder Considered as One of the Fine Arts' (1827–54)
- 1828 Adolph Müllner's 'Der Kaliber', regarded as the first detective fiction in the German language
First volume of Vidocq's *Mémoires*
Edward Bulwer Lytton's multi-genre *Pelham*
- 1829 Steen Steenson Blicher's 'The Rector of Veilbye', first Danish-language crime work
- 1830 Samuel Warren's 'Passages from the Diary of a Late Physician' creates the model for the Casebook form in *Blackwood's Magazine* (1830–7)
Bulwer Lytton's *Paul Clifford*, first Newgate novel
- 1831 Birth of Metta Fuller (later Victor)
- 1832 Bulwer Lytton's *Eugene Aram*
Birth of Émile Gaboriau
Frances Trollope's *The Refugee in America*
- 1833 Edward Fitzball's melodrama *Jonathan Bradford; or, The Murder at the Roadside Inn*
Birth of Mary Fortune
Birth of Kate Warne
- 1834 John Cleave's *Weekly Police Gazette*
- 1835 Birth of Mary Braddon
- 1837 William E. Burton's 'Leaves from a Life in London'
Death of James Hogg
George Sand's *Mauprat*
- 1839 End of the Bow Street Runners
Maurits Hansen's *The Murder of Engineer Roofsen* first Norwegian crime novel
Newgate novel, William Harrison Ainsworth's *Jack Sheppard*
- 1840 Case of François Courvoisier
- 1841 Bulwer Lytton's *Night and Morning*
Crowe's *Susan Hopley; or, Circumstantial Evidence*
Edgar Allan Poe's 'The Murders in the Rue Morgue'
Chronicles of Crime; or, the New Newgate Calendar by the pseudonymous 'Camden Pelham'
- 1842 Poe's 'The Mystery of Marie Roget' (1842)
Les Mystères de Paris (1842–3) by Eugène Sue
In London a small detective unit is inaugurated as part of the police force
- 1843 Frances Trollope's *Hargrave* and *Jessie Phillips*
Crowe's *Men and Women; or, Manorial Rights*
- 1844 Poe's 'The Purloined Letter'
G. W. M. Reynolds' *The Mysteries of London* (1844–8)
Paul Féval's *Les Mystères de Londres*
- 1845 De Quincey's critique of *Caleb Williams*
- 1846 Birth of Anna Katharine Green
- 1847 Crowe's *The Story of Lilly Dawson*

- 1848 Famous French trial of Francis Bertrand for necrophilic grave-robbing
Gaskell's *Mary Barton*
The Fuller sisters visit New York
- 1849 Death of Edgar Allan Poe
Maria Manning hanged for the death of her lover
William Russell's 'Waters' series of short detective series debuts in *Chambers's Edinburgh Journal*
- 1850 Dickens and his *Household Words* co-editor, William Henry Wills, interview and write articles on Scotland Yard detectives
Metta Fuller briefly marries Dr Richard Morse
- 1852 Dickens' *Bleak House*, with Inspector Bucket (1852–3)
First Italian crime fiction, Francesco Matriani's *The Blind Woman from Sorrento*
Waters' Casebooks pirated in America
- 1853 First Spanish crime fiction, Antonio de Alarcón's 'The Nail'
Tom Taylor's highly successful spy drama *Plot and Passion* popularizes Cytheréan Cohort
Lang's 'The Ghost Upon the Rail'
- 1854 Alexandre Dumas' 1854–7 novel *Les Mohicans de Paris* introduces the phrase 'Cherchons la femme'
Crowe involved in Spiritualist scandal, leading to a breakdown
- 1855 Caroline Clive's *Paul Ferroll*
Lang's *The Forger's Wife*, first Australian fictional detective
Mary Fortune emigrates to Australia
- 1856 Collins' maid-detective 'Anne Rodway'
Waters appears in book form in England
Lang's serialized novel, *The Secret Police, or Plot and Passion*
Metta Fuller marries Orville Victor
Kate Warne employed as private detective by Pinkerton detective agency
- 1858 Early Italian detective novel, Emilio De Marchi's *The Priest's Hat*
Fortune's bigamous marriage to mounted trooper Percy Brett
- 1859 Harriet Prescott's 'In a Cellar'
Novel publication of Lang's *The Secret Police, or Plot and Passion*
Lang's *Botany Bay: or True Tales of Early Australia*
'William Burrows' *Adventures of a Mounted Trooper in the Australian Constabulary*
- 1860 Collins' *The Woman in White*
Braddon's *Three Times Dead*
Wood's *East Lynne* begins serialization
Lang's unfinished *The Detective*
- 1861 *The Irish Police Officer* by Robert Curtis
Braddon's *Lady Audley's Secret* begins serialization in *Robin Goodfellow*
Wood's *East Lynne* published in book form
- 1862 Paul Féval has a Scotland Yard Superintendent, Gregory Temple, in *Jean Diable*
Braddon's *Lady Audley's Secret* published in book form
Birth of Braddon and Maxwell's first child
First crime anthology *The Woman with the Yellow Hair and Other Modern Mysteries*

- 1863 Braddon's *Aurora Floyd* and *Eleanor's Victory*
Colin Hazlewood dramatizes *Lady Audley* and *Aurora Floyd*
Death of Frances Trollope
- 1864 Braddon's *Three Times Dead* translated into French as *La Trace du Serpe*
The Revelations of a Lady Detective, by the author of *Anonyma*
The Female Detective by Andrew Forrester
Colin Hazlewood's play *The Mother's Dying Child/The Female Detective*
Death of John Lang
- 1865 *The New York Detective Police Officer*, by John B. Williams, MD
Harriet Prescott Spofford's 'Mr Furbush', first woman known to have worked in Casebook form
First issue of *Australian Journal*, containing Davitt's *Force and Fraud* and Borlase's 'The Shepherd's Hut'. Fortune and Borlase collaborate on the first Australian detective series
- 1866 'Seeley Regester' (Metta Victor)'s *The Dead Letter*, first American detective novel, plagiarized in England with the American settings changed by Cassell's
Gaboriau creates the *roman policier*, the police novel, the first being *Le Crime d'Orcival* (1866–7) with Lecoq as protagonist
Anna Katharine Green graduates from Ripley Female College
- 1867 James Skipp Borlase's *The Night Fossickers, and Other Australian Tales of Peril and Adventure*
- 1868 Collins' *The Moonstone*
Beginning of longest running early detective series, Mary Fortune ('W. W.')'s 'The Detective's Album'
Braddon suffers breakdown
Victor's *Too True*
Death of Kate Warne
- 1869 Victor's *The Figure Eight*
- 1870 Dickens' unfinished *The Mystery of Edwin Drood*
- 1871 Fortune's *The Detective's Album*
Gaboriau pirated in America
- 1872 Death of Catherine Crowe
- 1873 Death of Émile Gaboriau
- 1874 Maxwell and Braddon marry
Allan Pinkerton's *The Expressman and the Detective*
- 1875 German translation of Waters
- 1878 Green's *The Leavenworth Case*
- 1879 Death of Ellen Davitt
- 1880 Old Sleuth (Harlan P. Halsey)'s dime novel *The Lady Detective*
- 1881 First use of the genre term 'detective fiction'
Gaboriau translated in England
- 1882 Dime novel *La Marmoset, the Detective Queen*
- 1883 First dime novel detective series publications, Norman L. Munro's *Old Cap Collier Library* and Frank Tousey's *New York Detective Library*
- 1884 Green's *The Leavenworth Case* published in England and she marries Charles Rohlf's
Conan Doyle writes 'A Study in Scarlet', the first Sherlock Holmes story
- 1885 Dime novel series *Old Sleuth Library*

- 1886 First publication of Fergus Hume's *The Mystery of a Hansom Cab* in Australia
 Old Sleuth (Harlan P. Halsey)'s dime novel *Lady Kate, the Dashing Female Detective* in the Old Sleuth series
 Dime novel hero Nick Carter created for *New York Weekly*
 Edward L. Wheeler's dime novel *New York Nell, the Boy-Girl Detective* (Beadle & Adams)
- 1887 First English publication of Fergus Hume's *The Mystery of a Hansom Cab*
 Death of Ellen Wood
 Death of Metta Victor
 First publication of Sherlock Holmes, 'A Study in Scarlet'
- 1889 Death of Wilkie Collins
 Albert W. Aiken's *The Actress Detective* (Beadle & Adams)
- 1891 Stage adaptation of *The Leavenworth Case*
- 1892 *The Adventures of Sherlock Holmes* collected in book form
 Israel Zangwill's *The Big Bow Mystery*
- 1893 Catherine Louisa Pirkis' detective Loveday Brooke
- 1894 Arthur Morrison's *Martin Hewitt, Investigator*
- 1897 First appearance of Green's Amelia Butterworth
- 1900 Last appearance of Amelia Butterworth
- 1907 Maurice Leblanc's *Arsène Lupin*
 Jacques Futrelle's *The Thinking Machine*
- 1908 End of Fortune's contributions to 'The Detective's Album'
 First novel by Mary Roberts Rinehart, *The Circular Staircase*
- 1910 Baroness Orczy's *Lady Molly of Scotland Yard*
- 1911 G. K. Chesterton debuts Father Brown
- 1913 Carolyn Wells' *The Technique of the Mystery Story*
- 1915 Death of Mary Braddon
 Green's Violet Strange appears
- 1920 Agatha Christie's first Poirot novel, *The Mysterious Affair at Styles*
- 1922 Green retires from writing
- 1923 Dorothy Sayers' *Whose Body?* the first Peter Wimsey novel
 Dashiell Hammett begins writing hardboiled detection
- 1928 Arthur Upfield debuts Boney in *The House of Cain*
- 1929 Debut of 'Ellery Queen'
- 1930 Christie debuts Miss Marple
- 1932 First Raymond Chandler detective story
- 1933 Erle Stanley Gardner debuts Perry Mason
- 1934 James M. Cain *The Postman Always Rings Twice*
 Ngaio Marsh debuts Inspector Alleyn
 Death of Anna Katharine Green
- 1941 Howard Haycraft's *Murder for Pleasure* claims Green as mother of detective fiction

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Index

- Adams, Robert 151
Aiken, Albert
 The Actress Detective 178
Ainsworth, William F. 109–10
Ainsworth, William H. 53, 86,
 109–12
 Jack Sheppard 109
Alarcón, Antonio de
 ‘The Nail’ 64
Albert, Prince 54, 82, 114
Alcott, Louisa May 146
 Little Women 146
 ‘V. V.’ 153
Alexander, Bruce 20
All the Year Round 82
Allan, Grant
 Hilda Wade 178
 Miss Cayley’s Adventures 178
Altick, Richard
 Victorian Studies in Scarlet 15
American Magazine 174
Andersen, Hans Christian 50, 52–3
Anonyma 76–8, 80
Antonioni, Michelangelo
 Blow-Up 71
Aram, Eugene 8–11, 20, 23–4
Argosy 103, 111, 115, 118
Argus 128
Ashford, Mary 18
Athenaeum, The 43, 47, 77, 158–9
Atlantic Magazine, The 70
Austen, Jane 22
 Northanger Abbey 35–6
Australasian 123
Australian crime fiction *see* crime
 fiction in Australia
Australian Journal 71, 123–41, 178
Avery, Delia L. 179
- Bancroft, Hubert
 History of the Pacific States 153
Barker, Juliet 52
- Barnes, Julian
 Arthur & George 100
Barritt, Frances *see* Victor, Frances
Barritt, Jackson 147–8
Baudelaire, Charles 52
Beadle & Adams 151–5, 157–61,
 163
Beadle, Erastus 151, 155
Beadle, Irwin 151, 155
Beadle, James (murder victim) 155
Beadle’s Monthly 154, 159, 160
Beattie, J. M. 10
Beeton, Isabella 142, 151–2
 *Mrs Beeton’s Book of Household
 Management* 151–2
Behn, Aphra 75
Bentley, Richard 101, 103–5,
 109–15, 118
Bentley’s Miscellany 109
Bertrand, François 28, 45
Bettison, Jane (crime victim) 78
Beverley Recorder 85
Blackwood’s Magazine 51, 66,
 93, 117
Blicher, Steen Steenson
 ‘The Rector of Veilbye’ 12
Bonaparte, Napoleon 21, 74
Booth, Edwin 170
Borlase, James Skipp 125–6, 132,
 138, 141
 as ‘An Australian Mounted Trooper’:
 ‘Pursuing and Pursued’ 126
 as ‘An Australian Police Officer’:
 ‘The Shepherd’s Hut’ 124–5
 ‘Melbourne in 1869’ 141
 The Night Fossickers 126
Borlase, Rosanna 125
Borrow, George
 Celebrated Trials 33
Boucicault, Dion
 The Octoroon 71
Bow Street Runners 20–1, 39, 46, 56,
 67, 94, 167

- Braddon, Edward 83, 96
 Braddon, Fanny 83–4, 86, 88, 96, 100
 Braddon, Henry 83
 Braddon, Maggie 96
 Braddon, Mary 80–101, 114–15, 130,
 138, 153, 177, 183–5
Aurora Floyd 83, 89–90, 92–4
The Cloven Foot 99, 165
Dead Man's Shoes 99, 165
The Doctor's Wife 81, 87, 95
Eleanor's Victory 31, 93–4, 114
The Fatal Three 100
Fenton's Quest 98
Flower and Weed 99
 Garibaldi 85, 87
 'George Caulfield's Journey' 99
Henry Dunbar 95–6, 99
His Darling Sin 86, 99
John Marchmont's Legacy 99
Lady Audley's Secret 89–95, 97–9,
 101, 114, 154, 183–4
Lucius Davoren 97
One Life, One Love 99
Rough Justice 99
Sir Jasper's Tenant 74, 95
A Strange World 99
Three Times Dead see *The Trail of the
 Serpent*
La Trace Du Serpe see *The Trail of the
 Serpent*
 'The Trail of the Serpent'
 (article) 85, 87
The Trail of the Serpent (novel)
 85–8
 'The Woman I Remember' 83
Wyllard's Weird 99
 Bradstreet, Ann 147
 Brett, Henry 137
 Brett, Percy 125, 129, 135–6
 Bridgman, Orlando 32
 Brontë, Charlotte 52
Jane Eyre 23, 88
 Brown, Charles Brockden 34
 Brown, Father (fictional
 detective) 99, 117
 Browning, Elizabeth Barrett 61, 107
 Browning, Robert 61
 Bucket, Inspector (fictional detective)
 36–7, 64, 67, 86, 120
 Bulwer Lytton, Edward 22–4, 37, 52,
 56, 82, 89, 91, 96–9, 185
Eugene Aram 23–4, 91, 121, 124
The Last Days of Pompeii 146
Night and Morning 45–6
Not as Bad as We Seem 82
Paul Clifford 24
Pelham 22–3, 38, 44–5, 86
 Bulwer Lytton, Rosina 82, 91
 Burney, Fanny 35
 'Burrows, William'
*Adventures of a Mounted
 Trooper* 124, 126
 Burton, William E.
 'Leaves from a Life in London'
 series 25
Burton's Gentleman's Magazine 25
 Bussey, Harry Findlater 67–8
 Byron, George Gordon 50, 83, 144
 'C., M.'
 'Wonderful!' 123
Caledonian Mercury 72
 Campbell, Ron 141
 Carey, George (murder victim) 12
 Carlyle, Jane Welsh 57, 61
 Carlyle, Thomas 51, 61
 'Carter, Nick' (fictional detective) 151
 Cary, Alice 144, 154
 Cary, Phoebe 144
 casebook genre 66–8, 71–9, 86, 111,
 115, 122–6, 154, 178, 185
 Cassell, John 115
 Cassell, Petter & Galpin 157–9
Cassell's Illustrated Family Paper
 157–9
 Catnach, James 13, 120
 Chabrillan, Céleste de 76, 123
Adieux au Monde, Mémoires 76
The Gold Robbers 122–3
 Chabrillan, Lionel 123
 Chambers, Robert 52–4, 56
Vestiges 54
Chambers's Edinburgh Journal 17, 28,
 34, 51, 53–4, 62, 66, 68, 120
 Chandler, Raymond 71
 Chapman & Hall (publishers) 112
 Chapman, Israel 122
 Chart, Henry Nye 83

- Chesterton, G. K. 99
 'The Wrong Shape' 117
- Chorley, Henry Fothergill 22, 43
- Christie, Agatha 1, 4, 110, 113, 117, 164, 169, 184
The Clocks 169
 'Greenshaw's Folly' 100
- Clacy, Ellen
A Lady's Visit 128
- Clarke, Daniel 8–9, 23
- Clarke, Marcus 123, 139, 141
His Natural Life 123
- Clarson, Massina & Co. 123, 138
- Cleave, John
The Weekly Police Gazette 13–14
- Clive, Archer 65
- Clive, Caroline 4, 61–2, 64–6
IX Poems 65
Paul Ferroll 64–6
Why Paul Ferroll Killed His Wife 66
- Colburn, Henry 75, 109
- Collins, Charles Allston 62, 67
- Collins, Harriet 62, 96
- Collins, Wilkie 1–3, 5, 56, 62, 64, 80–2, 88, 91, 95–6, 99, 101, 110, 114–16, 142, 153–5, 160, 164–5, 170, 176, 185
 'Anne Rodway' 62, 82
Armadale 71, 95
The Black Robe 110
The Dead Secret 154
The Law and the Lady 114, 165, 177
The Moonstone 2, 83, 96, 114, 159, 176
No Name 63
 'The Stolen Letter' 82
The Woman in White 2, 63, 82–3, 86, 90–1, 94, 110, 112, 114, 154, 165
- Colman, George
The Iron Chest 19
- Combe, George 52
- Corder, William 15–16
- Cornwell, Patricia 1
- Cosmopolitan Art Journal* 151
- Cosy genre 118
- Courvoisier, François 13–15, 20
- Crabtree, Charlotte 94
- Creasey, John 20
- crime fiction in Australia 120–41
- Critic* 164
- Cromwell, Oliver 31
- Crosland, Camilla 52
- Crowe, Catherine 28, 45–63, 76, 82, 102, 184–5
Adventures of Susan Hopley 45–50, 53–7, 61–2, 66
Aristodemus 51, 53
 'Frank Hepburn' 54
Ghosts and Family Legends 59–61
The Juvenile Uncle Tom's Cabin 62
Linny Lockwood 61
 'Lost Diamonds' 62
 'Lycanthropy' 45
Men and Women 22, 54–7, 90, 117
 'The Morning Visitor' 50
The Night Side of Nature 59–61
Spiritualism 62
The Story of Lilly Dawson 45, 50–1, 57–8.
- Crowe, John 50
- Crowe, William 51, 62
- Curtis, Robert
The Irish Police Officer 68
- Cytheréan Cohort 75
- Daily News* 60
- Darwin, Charles 77
On the Origin of Species 54
- Davidson, Lucretia 144
- Davidson, Margaret 144
- Davitt, Arthur 124
- Davitt, Ellen 120, 124–5, 141, 184
Force and Fraud 124–5
 'The Highlander's Revenge' 125
- Davitt Award 141
- Dea Vindex *see* Nemesis
- Death Hunters 13, 28, 34
- Defoe, Daniel
Moll Flanders 7
- Denison, Charles 153
- Denison, Mary 184
The Mad Hunter 153
- De Quincey, Thomas 28, 56–7, 63
 'Klosterheim' 57
 'Notes on Gillfillian's Literary Portraits' 19–20, 57
 'On Murder' 17–18, 56

- Dickens, Charles 19, 46, 53, 56,
60–1, 67, 82, 85–6,
121–2, 145
Bleak House 36–7, 64, 67, 86
The Mystery of Edwin Drood 18
Oliver Twist 24, 67
dime novel 151–3, 163
Dime Song Book 151
Doris, Charles de Bourges
Secret Memoirs of Napoleon 75
Doyle, Arthur Conan 1–3, 5, 26,
100, 165, 168, 176, 185
‘A Study in Scarlet’ 165
Drayne, Moses 32
Drew, Nancy (fictional
character) 118
Dublin University Magazine 92
Dumas, Alexandre (*père*) 1, 26,
86, 145
The Mohicans of Paris 1, 21
Dumas, Alexandre (*fils*)
La Dame aux Camélias 76
Duplessis, Marie 76
Easton, R. 103–4
Edgeworth, Maria 35
Edinburgh Review 51
Eliot, George 88–9, 96, 105, 130
Ellis, S. M. 109
Ellroy, James 1
The Black Dahlia 1
Emerson, Ralph Waldo 50, 166–7
Empson, W. H. 85, 87
Eustace, Robert
Detections of Miss Cusack 178
Evans, Isaac 96
Examiner 46, 61
‘Experiences of a Barrister’
(series) 62, 66
‘The Writ of Habeas Corpus’ 62
Falkland *see* Colman, George *The Iron
Chest*
Family Herald 141
Female Detective, The (play) *see*
Hazlewood, Colin *The Mother’s
Dying Child*
female detectives 3
dime novels 178
heroine-sleuth 34–7, 39–43, 72,
93–4, 114, 135, 152, 165,
177, 185
New Woman 178, 185
police 72–80, 178
true crime *see* Kidderminster,
Anne; Warne, Kate
Ferrier, Susan 47
Féval, Paul 44, 68, 80
Jean-Diable 68
Les Mystères de Londres 44
Field, Charles 82, 122
Fielding, Henry 12, 14, 20, 22, 39
Covent-Garden Journal 12–13
Tom Jones 12
Fielding, John 20
Findlay, John Ritchie 56
Fisher, Frederick (murder victim) 121
Fitzball, Edward
Jonathan Bradford 18
Fitzgerald, Percy 92
‘The Woman with the Yellow
Hair’ 92
Flaubert, Gustave
Madame Bovary 95, 113
‘Forrester, Andrew, Jr’ 185
The Female Detective 72, 76,
78–9, 142
‘Mrs Fitzgibbon’s Life Policy’ 73
*The Revelations of a Private
Detective* 73, 79
‘The Unknown Weapon’ 78–9
Forrester, Daniel 78
Forrester, John 78
Forster, John 46–7, 49, 57
Forster, Margaret 107
Fortune, George (Eastbourne
Vaudrey) 130, 132–3,
139–40
Fortune, Joseph 129–30, 135
Fortune, Joseph George 128–9
Fortune, Mary 3, 66, 71, 120–41,
166, 184–5
as ‘An Australian Police Officer’:
‘The Dead Witness’ 71
‘The Stolen Specimens’
125, 136
as ‘An Australian Mounted Trooper’:
‘Mystery and Murder’ 126

- as 'Waif Wander':
 'Bertha's Legacy' 131, 138
 'Clyzia the Dwarf' 131
 'Dora Carleton' 132, 136–7
 'Fourteen Days on the
 Roads' 132
 'How I Spent Christmas' 125,
 127–31, 134
 'Jim Dickson's Fit' 136
 'My Friends and
 Acquaintances' 139
 'Our Colonial Christmases' 131
 'Towzer & Co.' 131–2, 134
 'Twenty-Six Years Ago' 127, 129,
 136
 'What Passed' 139–40
- as 'W. W.':
 'The Bushranger's
 Autobiography' 120, 134,
 136–7, 139, 141
The Detective's Album
 127, 138
 'The Detective's Album',
 published serially in the
Australian Journal 3, 126,
 132, 138
 'The Diamond Cross' 135
 'The Ghostly White Gate' 134
 'The Hart Murder' 134
 'Her Death Warrant' 136
 'The Spade Guinea' 178
 'The Star-Spangled Banner' 137
 'Tom Doyle's Dream' 134
 'The Whispers of the Dead' 138
 'A Woman's Revenge' 132
- Foster, Stephen 147
 Fothergill, Henry 22
 Fouché, Joseph 21, 74–5, 122
Mémoires 74–5
 Frith, Isabelle 104
 Frith, William 98–9, 104
*A Private View of the Royal
 Academy* 98–9
 Fuller, Adonijah 144, 147
 Fuller, Frances *see* Victor,
 Frances
 Fuller, Lucy 144, 147
 Fuller, Metta *see* Victor, Metta
 Furlong, Minaille 127, 140
 Gaboriau, Émile 2, 68, 80, 138, 141,
 165, 167–8, 176, 185
Le Crime D'Orcival 68, 88
 Garrow, William 11
 Gaskell, Elizabeth 36–7, 48, 61,
 66, 184
Cranford 79
 'Disappearances' 37
Mary Barton 36–7, 48
Gazette des Tribunaux 13
Gentleman's Magazine 33
 Gilby, John 85–7
 Gladstone, William 175
God Admonishing His People 11
 Godwin, William 2, 10, 19, 24, 34,
 47, 185
Caleb Williams 2, 19–20, 36, 47,
 57, 185
 Golden Age (of detective fiction)
 67, 176
 Gordon, Adam Lindsay 138
 Gothic 18–19, 24, 29, 35, 38–40, 44,
 53, 70, 72, 75, 81–2, 102, 110,
 113, 118, 131, 134
 Gothic, Female 29–31, 33–5
 Gothic, Male 30, 33
Graham's Magazine 45–6
 Graves, Caroline 82, 88, 96
 Green, Anna Katharine 1–2, 5,
 126–7, 164–82, 184–5
The Circular Study 179
The Forsaken Inn 175
The Golden Slipper 180
Hand and Ring 174
The Leavenworth Case (novel) 1,
 127, 164–5, 167–71, 173–7
The Leavenworth Case (play) 171
Lost Man's Lane 179
 'Midnight at Beauchamp Row' 181
A Strange Disappearance 181
That Affair Next Door 21, 167,
 179, 181
 Green, Catharine 166
 Green, Grace 166–7
 Green, James Wilson 166–8, 170
 Green, Sarah 166, 168
 Griswold, Rufus 147–8
Female Poets of America 147
 Guerre, Martin 8

- Halfpenny Journal* 88, 94
 Halsey, Harlan *see* 'Sleuth, Old'
 Halttunen, Karen
 Murder Most Foul 11
Hamilton Spectator 123
 Hardy, Thomas
 Tess of the D'Urbervilles 87
Harper's Magazine 71, 154
 Harris, John 121
 Hatch, Mary 166–7, 173
 Hawthorne, Nathaniel 148
 Haycraft, Howard
 Murder for Pleasure 181–2
 Hayward, William 77
 Hazlewood, Colin 94
 The Mother's Dying Child 64, 72,
 79, 94, 178
 Hemyng, Samuel Bracebridge 77
 Secrets of the River 77
 Herald (Cleveland) 144
 Hervey, Thomas 47
 Hervieu, A. 37–8
 Heseltine, Edward 124
Hesperian Magazine 147
 Hoffmann, E. T. A.
 'Mademoiselle de Scudéry' 12, 41
 Hogg, James
 'The Long Pack' 79
 *The Private Memoirs and
 Confessions of a Justified
 Sinner* 33–4, 48
 Holmes, Sherlock (fictional character)
 2, 19, 26–7, 30, 74, 156, 168
Home, The 151
Home Journal 145–7
 Hood, Tom 103
Household Words 60–1, 67, 82, 121
 Houseman, Richard 8–9, 24
 Hubin, Allen 1, 3
 Crime Fiction 1, 3, 29, 127
 Hume, Fergus
 Hagar of the Pawnshop 178
 *The Mystery of a Hansom
 Cab* 2, 18, 21–2, 100,
 138, 165
 Huskisson, William 106, 112
Illuminated Western World 161
Incognita 76–7
 James, Henry 72, 100
 James, Michael 171
 Drama in Design 171
 James, P. D. 1
 Jameson, Anna
 Winter Studies 128
 Jeaffreson, John 77
 Jewsbury, Geraldine 57, 113
John Bull 44
 Keddie, Henrietta 107
 Kemble, Fanny 52, 61
 Kerner, Justinus
 The Seeress of Prevorst 58
 Kestner, Joseph
 Sherlock's Sisters 3
 Kidderminster, Anne 31–4, 36,
 47–8, 73
 Kidderminster, Thomas 31–3
 Kingsley, Charles 123
 Kingsley, Henry 123
 Geoffrey Hamlyn 122
 Kipling, Rudyard
 'The Smuggler's Song' 50
 Klein, Kathleen Gregory
 Great Women Mystery Writers 3
 The Woman Detective 3
 Knight, Stephen 169
 Knowles, Richard Brinsley 98
 Knox, Ronald 111
Ladies' Companion, The 128
 'Lady, A',
 Life in the Australian Bush 128
 Lafler, Janet 6
 Lake, Deryn 20
 Lang, John 75–6, 121, 123, 141
 Botany Bay 122
 'The Detective' 122
 The Forger's Wife 122, 126
 'The Ghost Upon the Rail' 120–2
 The Secret Police 75–6
 Langbein, John 10–11
 *The Origins of Adversary Criminal
 Trial* 11
 Torture and the Law of Proof 10
 Larken, Geoffrey 49–53, 55, 62–3
 Leahey, Caroline 103, 123
 The Broad Arrow 122

- Leakey, Emily 102–3
 Clear Shining Light 102–3
 Lecoq, M. (fictional detective)
 67, 168
 Lecter, Hannibal 30
 Leek, Mary 129
 Le Sage, A.
 Gil Blas 7
 Lewes, George 88–9
 Lewis, Matthew
 The Monk 30
 Lincoln, Abraham 153
 Linton, Eliza Lynn 104
 ‘The Girl of the Period’ 26
 My Literary Life 26
Little Detective, The (play)
 see Hazlewood, Colin
 The Mother’s Dying Child
 Livermore, Mary
 A Woman of the Century 163
London Gazette 32
London Journal 36, 123
Lost Will, The (play) see Pitt, George
 Dibdin *Susan Hopley*
 Lovelace, Ada 54
 Lowell, James Russell 70
 Lucas, Samuel 112
Ludgate Monthly 178
 Ludlum, George
 The Mysterious Murder 18
 ‘M., E. C.’
 ‘Experiences of a Detective’ 123
 Maida, Patricia
 Mother of Detective Fiction 182
 Maio, Kathleen 159
Manchester Times 62
 Mann, Jessica
 Deadlier than the Male 3
 Manning, Frederick 13, 28
 Manning, Maria 13, 28
 Marchi, Emilio de
 The Priest’s Hat 64
Maria Marten (play) 17
 Marple, Miss Jane (fictional
 detective) 41–2, 142, 161
 Marten, Maria 15–17, 121
 Massina, Alfred 135, 138
 Masson, David 52
 Matriani, Francesco
 The Blind Woman from Sorrento 64
 Maxwell, John 87–9, 92–5, 97
 Maxwell, Mary Anne 88, 97–8
 Mayer, S. R. T. 158–9
 Mayhew, Henry
 *London Labour and the London
 Poor* 28, 77
 Mayo, Isabella Fyvie 104, 108
 Meade, L. T.
 Detections of Miss Cusack 178
 melodrama 18, 24, 43, 86
 Meredith, George 112–13
 Meredith, Louisa 120
 Minerva Press 29, 43
 Mitchell, Henry 126, 141
Mofussilite 121
 Moir, J. K. 127, 141
 Molière
 Scapin 118
 Morris, William 172, 175
 Morse, Richard 147–8
Mount Alexander Mail 125
 Müllner, Adolph
 ‘Der Kaliber’ 21, 24, 45, 55
 mysteries 24, 65
 ‘A Mysterious Affair’ see Victor, Metta
 Too True
National Police Gazette 154
 Nemesis (goddess) 31, 36, 42, 47,
 73, 97
 Nesbit, Edith 115
Newgate Calendar 8–11, 14, 18–20,
 23–4, 99, 120
 Newgate novel 24, 30, 65, 81, 109, 176
New Monthly Magazine 109–13
 New Woman novel 177, 185
New York Times 171, 176–7
New York Weekly 162
News of the World 13
 Norton, Caroline 105, 148
 O’Brien, Fitzjames
 ‘What Was It?’ 59
 Ocuish, Hannah 11
 Oliphant, Margaret 93, 101,
 117–18
Once a Week 112

- Orczy, Baroness
Lady Molly of Scotland Yard 178
- Ousby, Ian
Bloodhounds of Heaven 2
- Owen, Robert 77
- Palmer, T. A. 102, 114
East Lynne (play) 102
- Panek, Leroy
Probable Cause 159
- Paretsky, Sara 1, 4, 36
- Patmore, Coventry
 'The Angel in the House' 28, 102, 184
- Pearl, Cora 76
- 'Pelham, Camden'
Chronicles of Crime 14
- Pepys, Samuel 7–8
- 'Peters, Ellis'
Cadfael series 20
- Pirkis, Catherine
The Experiences of Loveday Brooke 178
- Pitaval, François Gayot de
Causes Célèbres et Intéressants 8, 19, 29
- Pitt, George Dibdin
Susan Hopley (play) 49, 83–4
- Pixérécourt, René Charles Guilbert de 18, 86
Le Chien de Montargis 36
- Poe, Edgar Allan 1–3, 5–7, 19, 24–5, 44, 46, 64, 66, 70, 78, 83, 117, 123, 145, 147, 153, 165, 176, 182, 185
 'The Murders in the Rue Morgue' 6, 13–14, 24–5, 45–6, 181–2
 'The Mystery of Marie Roget' 6, 25, 82
 'The Purloined Letter' 6, 24–5, 68, 82
- Poirot, Hercule (fictional detective) 169
- Police Gazette* (Victoria) 140
- police procedural *see* casebook genre
- Post, Melville Davisson 71
- Prest, T. P.
Susan Hopley 49
- Price, Thomas 105
- Putnam, George 164, 167–8, 170, 176
Putnam's Monthly Magazine 160
- Quarterly Review* 41
- Queanbeyan Age* 160
- 'Queen, Ellery' 182
- Radcliffe, Ann 26, 29–31, 35, 185
The Mysteries of Udolpho 18–19, 30, 35, 185
The Romance of the Forest 29
A Sicilian Romance 19
- Radcliffe, William 29
- Ransom, Teresa 41
- Reade, Charles 82, 101
- Reeve, Clara 30
- 'Regester, Seeley' *see* Victor, Metta
- Revelations of a Lady Detective* 72–9, 142, 185
 'The Mysterious Countess' 74, 78
- Reynolds, G. W. M. 85
The Mysteries of London 24
- Reynolds, John
The Triumph of God's Revenge 10
- Reynolds's Newspaper* 72
- Richardson, William 10
- Richmond* 21, 34, 45, 67, 125, 167
- Riddell, Charlotte 115
- Robin Goodfellow* 92
- Rohlfs, Charles 170–5, 179–81
- Rohlfs, Roland 181
- Rohlfs, Rosamund 181
- Rohlfs, Sterling 181
roman policier 68, 80, 189
- Ross, Cheri 157
- Rossetti, Dante Gabriel 49
- Rudd, Martha 96
- Ruskin, John 171
- Russell, William *see* 'Waters'
- Russell, William (murder victim) 14–15
- St Aubert, Emily (fictional character) 30, 34–6, 185
- Sala, George 83–4, 97
- Sand, George 86, 145
Mauprat 44
- Sandusky Daily Register* 151
- Saturday Journal* 157

- Saturday Review* 183–4
 Saunders and Otley (publishers) 45–6
 Sayers, Dorothy 1, 116
 Wimsey, Peter (fictional character) 67
 Scott, Walter 126, 144
 sensation genre 62, 65, 68, 81–2, 94–5, 99, 101, 113–14, 124, 129, 153, 165, 176, 183
 Sergeant, Adeline 62, 65
 Shakespeare, William 83, 106, 170, 173, 179
 Much Ado About Nothing 20
 Richard III 9
 Shelley, Mary 2
 Frankenstein 18
 Sikes, Wirt 146, 155, 158, 163
 Simenon, Georges 11–12
 Simpson, James 52
 Sisters in Crime (Australia) 141
Sixpenny Magazine 92
 'Skittles' (Catherine Walters) 76
 Skittles 76
 'Sleuth, Old'
 The Lady Detective 178
 Lady Kate 178
 La Marmoset 178
 Slung, Michele 159
 Smith, Charlotte 30
 The Romance of Real Life 18–19, 29
 Smith, Sydney 51
 Spiritualism 58–62
 Spofford, Harriet Prescott 68–72, 125, 154, 166, 185
 'In a Cellar' 70–2
 'In the Maguerriwock' 72
 'Mr Furbush' 68, 70–2, 154
 Spofford, Richard 72
 Stevens, John 50–1
 Stevens, Mary Nash 50
 Stirling, Edward
 Lilly Dawson (play) 57–8
 Stowe, Harriet Beecher 142
 Uncle Tom's Cabin 130, 149, 157
 Street and Smith (publisher) 162
 Sue, Eugène
 Les Mystères de Paris 18, 24
Table Talk 140
 Talfourd, Thomas 29
 Taylor, Tom
 Plot and Passion 75–6
Temple Bar 88, 92, 95
 Thackeray, Isabella 96
 Thackeray, William Makepeace 52, 96
 Therbusch, Anna Dorothea 26–7
 thief-taker 12–13, 35, 56, 122
Times, The 14–15, 20, 61, 76, 99, 105, 112
 Tinsley, W. (publisher) 111
 Toms, John 36
 Townsend, John 39
 Trollope, Anthony 37, 99, 124
 Trollope, Frances (Fanny) 37–44, 66, 82, 124, 184–5
 Domestic Manners of the Americans 37
 Father Eustace 110
 Hargrave 41–4, 46, 124
 Jessie Phillis 42–4, 66, 180
 The Refugee in America 37–41, 44, 158, 180
 Trollope, Rose 124
 'Trollope, Francis' *see* Féval, Paul
 true crime 7–11, 18–19, 24, 29, 36–7, 82, 126, 155
True Relation of a Horrid Murder, A 33
 'Tytler, Sara' *see* Keddie, Henrietta
 Upfield, Arthur 139
 Victor, Florence 147
 Victor, Frances 145–53, 163
 Anizetta 146
 Poems of Sentiment and Imagination 148
 'Romantic Husband' 151
 The Women's War with Whiskey 153
 Victor, Henry 153
 Victor, Metta 2, 142–63, 164, 185
 as anonymous:
 Too True 160–1, 176
 as Metta Fuller:
 Fashionable Dissipation 148

- Fresh Leaves from Western Woods* 148
The Last Days of Tul 146
Mormon Wives 149–50
Poems of Sentiment and Imagination 148
The Senator's Son 148
 'The Silver Lute' 144
 'The Spirit of My Song' 147
 'The Tempter' 146
- as Metta Victor:
- Alice Wilde* 152
The Backwood's Bride 152
The Dime Cook Book 151–2
The Dime Recipe Book 151–2
Dora Elmyr's Worst Enemy 163, 165
The Gold Hunters 152
Maum Guinea 152
Uncle Ezekiel 152
- as 'Seeley Regester':
- The Dead Letter* 1, 142, 153–65, 168, 170
The Figure Eight 161–3
- Victor, Orville 150–4, 161, 163
- Dime Dialogues* 152
History 159
- Victoria, Queen 82, 114, 124
- Vidocq, Eugène 21, 39, 46, 67, 74–5, 86, 121, 142, 156
- Mémoires* 21–2
 Vizetelly, Henry 165
- 'W. W.' *see* Fortune, Mary
- 'Waif Wander' *see* Fortune, Mary
- Wallace, Edgar 174
- Walstab, George 123–4, 141
- Looking Back* 123–4
- Ward, Henrietta 61, 102
- Warne, Kate 178
- Warren, Samuel 74
- 'Passages from the Diary of a Late Physician' 66–7, 77
- 'Waters' 34, 62, 66–8, 77, 86, 88, 120, 123
- Experiences of a Real Detective*
 'Murder under the Microscope' 68
 'Recollections of a Police-Officer' series 62, 66, 68
- Wellesley Index* 92, 109
 Wells, Carolyn
The Technique of the Mystery Story 176
- Westminster Review* 41
 Wheeler, Edward
New York Nell 178
- Whitson, John 163
- Wield, Inspector *see* Field, Charles
- Wilde, Oscar 99
- Willard, Frances
- A Woman of the Century* 163
- Williams, John B.
- Leaves from the Notebook of a New York Detective* 154
The New York Detective Police Officer 68
- Willis, Nathaniel 146
- Wills, William 60, 67
- Wilson, George 127, 129, 136
- Wimsey, Peter (fictional character) *see* Sayers, Dorothy
- Winn, Dilys
- Murderess Ink* 2–3, 43, 159
- Wolff, Robert 83
- Wollstonecraft, Mary 2
- Woman with the Yellow Hair, The* (anthology) 92
- Wood, Charles 102, 104, 115, 119
- Memorials of Mrs Henry Wood* 102–3, 104–10, 112, 118–19
 'Mrs Henry Wood' 102–3, 105–7, 109–11, 116
- Wood, Ellen 4, 28, 62, 80, 82, 101–19, 166, 184–5
- 'The Aunt and Niece' 112
The Channings 115–18, 157
 'A City's Desolation' 105, 112
 'Coming Out of Exile' 111
Court Netherleigh 105
Danesbury House 109, 112
 'A Dark Deed' 110
 'The Diamond Bracelet' 111
East Lynne 102, 105, 109, 112–15, 118
 'Featherston's Story' 108
 'Going Into Exile' 111
The House of Halliwell 111
 'An Imperial Visit' 110

- 'The Lady's Well' 110
A Life's Secret 118
Mildred Arkell (novel) 106–8, 112
'Mildred Arkell' (short story) 112
Mrs Halliburton's Troubles 115–16, 157
'Out in the Streets' 108
Roland Yorke 116–17
'The Self-Convicted' 110–11, 118
'Seven Years in the Life of a Wedded
Roman Catholic' 109
The Shadow of Ashlydyat 108–9
'Three Hundred a Year' 108–9
- 'The Tour of David
Dundyke' 112
'What Became of Him?' 112
Within the Maze 114
'A Word to England' 110
Wood, Henry 102, 108, 114
Wood, Mrs Henry *see*
Wood, Ellen
Woodward, K. 173–4
Zangwill, Israel 176
Zweig, Stefan 74