

**“Petticoated Police,” “Intimate Watching” and Private
Agency(ies)**

**Reading the Female Detective of
Fin-de-siècle British Literature**

Genevieve L. Seys

School of Humanities
Department of English and Creative Writing
The University of Adelaide

March 2016

Contents

Abstract	iii
Statement of Originality.....	v
Acknowledgements.....	vi
Introduction	
“Career[s] at once strange, exciting, and mysterious”: Presenting the Female Detective.....	1
Chapter One	
“Thread[s] of Connection”: Vision, Visibility and the Investigative Gaze in <i>The Experiences of Loveday Brooke, Lady Detective</i>	28
Chapter Two	
“Dashing Metamorphoses”: Disguise and the Detective Plot in George R. Sims’s <i>Dorcas Dene: Her Life and Adventures</i>	57
Chapter Three	
“Wonderful” Intuitions and “Chains of Reasoning”: Reason and Logic in the Detections of Florence Cusack.....	91
Conclusion	
“A Golden Age” for Female Detectives?.....	125
Notes	132
Bibliography	133

Abstract

In April 1894, the *Times Column of New Books and New Editions* introduced to its readers “a Female Sherlock Holmes” (12). This was Loveday Brooke, in C. L. Pirakis’s collection *The Experiences of Loveday Brooke, Lady Detective*. Loveday is one of many professional female detectives who traversed the pages of short stories, both serialised and in collections, during the British *fin de siècle*. The advertisement suggests that Loveday was portrayed as a female version of a masculine character type, typified by Holmes. In this thesis, I question this assumption as part of my literary ‘investigation’ of the *fin-de-siècle* female detective.

Currently, there is only a small body of work on the nineteenth-century female detective and she remains “mysterious” and “little-known,” as William Stephens Hayward describes his protagonist in *Revelations of a Lady Detective* (1864). This thesis employs ‘investigation’ as a structural and methodological framework to perform its own literary analysis and to make an original contribution to extant critical literature. Investigation provides an effective mode for the examination and articulation of how this figure is portrayed.

The narrative trajectory of this thesis shares the key stages of the fictional female detective’s investigation: the identification of evidence, consideration of its significance and meaning, and deduction based thereon. I read three collections of short stories, each featuring a professional female detective, published in Britain between 1893 and 1901, and treat the literary techniques in these texts as ‘clues’ to representation. Thus, double meanings, metaphors, and analogy, are the proof of a complex chain of “legal, social, moral, institutional and gendered practices” that shaped the representation of female detectives (Kestner 1). In Chapter One, I use vision and related concepts in the analysis of C. L. Pirakis’s Loveday Brooke. The second stage of my literary investigation focuses upon disguise and I read George R. Sims’s *Dorcas Dene, Detective: Her Life and Adventures* (1897). Dorcas’s

facility with disguise transcends mere detective work as it is also portrayed as a means of negotiating *fin-de-siècle* social mores. The final chapter considers the ratiocinations performed by Florence Cusack in the fiction of L. T. Meade (1899-1901). I consider the interaction between the female detective and contemporary discourses about women's mental faculties.

Each chapter explores a different element of the female detective's investigation, revealing the ways in which Pirkis, Sims and Meade use elements of the detective plot to engage with, and subtly counter, contemporary gender discourses. Each detective transcends the proposed status of a "Female Sherlock Holmes," as each is an important character in her own right. The detective plot essays female professionalism and independence, expanding the roles allocated to women in nineteenth-century British fiction.

Statement of Originality

I certify that this work contains no material which has been accepted for the award of any other degree or diploma in my name, in any university or other tertiary institution and, to the best of my knowledge and belief, contains no material previously published or written by another person, except where due reference has been made in the text. In addition, I certify that no part of this work will, in the future, be used in a submission in my name, for any other degree or diploma in any university or other tertiary institution without the prior approval of the University of Adelaide and where applicable, any partner institution responsible for the joint-award of this degree.

I give consent to this copy of my thesis, when deposited in the University Library, being made available for loan and photocopying, subject to the provisions of the Copyright Act 1968.

I also give permission for the digital version of my thesis to be made available on the web, via the University's digital research repository, the Library Search and also through web search engines, unless permission has been granted by the University to restrict access for a period of time.

Genevieve L. Seys

March 2016

Acknowledgements

I wish to extend my especial thanks to Dr. Mandy Treagus, for her supervision of this project from its inception to the final revisions. For her support, encouragement, and reassurance in my moments of doubt, I am truly grateful.

To Dr. Maggie Tonkin, my co-supervisor, I express my thanks for her insightful comments and considered responses to my work throughout this project. Despite the infrequency of my requests for help, it was a great support for me to know that both of my supervisors were there for me when I needed it the most.

This project was inspired by my long-held love of language and literature, enigmas and mysteries. For this, I thank my Mum, Gillian Seys: the one who taught me to read, and fed my voracious appetite for books and puzzles. I cannot thank her enough for her unquestioning support, love, and confidence in me. She has been my comfort in times of doubt, and my anchor when all seemed uncertain.

In this project, I was constantly encouraged and inspired by Madeleine Seys: PhD, mentor, and beloved sister. I thank her for her keen insights, advice, for sharing her passion for nineteenth-century literature, and for understanding the challenges I faced during the writing process.

For his unceasing love and faith in my abilities, I thank my father Lyndon Seys. For reassuring me when I questioned my choices and helping me to see the value in my work, I am truly grateful.

I give thanks to my dearest friend, Lucia Moschis, for her unwavering interest in the exploits of three nineteenth-century female detectives and one twenty-first-century literary critic. Our conversations, shared over endless cups of tea, fortified and inspired me through the best and worst of times.

Thanks must also go to the members of the Department of English and Creative Writing at the University of Adelaide who have heard excerpts of this work over the past two years. In particular, I thank Dr. Heather Kerr, as it is upon her recognition and support that I chose to take this path in the first place.

My thanks would not be complete without reference to the serendipitous moment of discovery in a bookshop, in 2012. Coming across *The Penguin Book of Victorian Women in Crime*, I knew that this was a puzzle that I would have to unravel.