

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

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

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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.

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Introduction

“Career[s] at once strange, exciting, and mysterious”: Presenting the Female Detective

Why, if one had the choice, would one create a female detective instead of a male, especially in the 1890s, when Holmes-mania was sweeping across England? How could she possibly succeed? (Kungl, *Creating* 1-2)

This is no common case ... There is a mystery and romance behind it – a tangled skein which a Lecoq or a Sherlock Holmes would have been proud to unravel – and I think I have a clue. (Sims, “Diamond” 94)

It may be said that the value of the detective lies not so much in discovering facts, as it does in putting them together, and finding out what they mean. (Forrester, “Tenant” 33)

The profession of “the little-known people called Female Detectives” is “at once strange, exciting, and mysterious” (18). This is how professional sleuth Mrs. Paschal describes her career in the first story of William Stephens Hayward’s collection *Revelations of a Lady Detective* (1864). This description provides a fitting introduction to the study of the female detective. It overtly registers the idea that, in nineteenth-century Britain, it was deemed unusual and unconventional for a woman to pursue professional detective work. Furthermore, Hayward’s descriptions imply that the female detective, herself, is a mystery. This literary figure merits critical inquiry for precisely this reason; the female investigator remains “mysterious” and “little-known” (Hayward 18) in contemporary studies of detective fiction, much as she was perceived by nineteenth-century readers.

In 2000, Birgitta Berglund claimed that female characters had rarely been detectives: “women in detective stories have been victims, or they have been perpetrators, but they have not ... been given the most important part to play” (138). Yet, women feature, albeit sporadically, as protagonists of detective stories and novels from the mid-nineteenth century and into the present day. At least twenty professional female detectives appeared in British

literature between 1864 and 1901 (Slung, *Crime* xix). In this thesis, I examine the representation of the female detective in late-nineteenth-century short fiction and consider her narrative and ideological function within both the fiction and culture of *fin-de-siècle* Britain. Opening with a reference to Mrs. Paschal signals my divergence from critical approaches which consider Sherlock Holmes to be the “most significant . . . hero” of the genre (Knight 63). Rather than reading women sleuths as gender variations of a male character type, I argue that this character provides a means of exploring femininity in British *fin-de-siècle* culture: a type of femininity that neither relies upon the conventional marriage plot of Victorian literature, nor fully subscribes to the tropes of other *fin-de-siècle* genres such as New Woman fiction. Female detective stories offer an alternative to dominant narrative patterns.

Women are not depicted as professional sleuths in British detective fiction before the 1860s. There are, however, many examples of amateur investigators in some genres such as the Gothic. Maureen T. Reddy finds continuities between representations of Gothic heroines and female detectives. Despite recurring patterns of feminine incarceration and victimisation, the Gothic heroine also “acts as a detective,” exploring and escaping her place of imprisonment (191). Anne Radcliffe’s *The Mysteries of Udolpho* (1794) is one example. In the mid-to-late-nineteenth century, female characters in other genres were depicted performing detection. Catherine Crowe’s *The Adventures of Susan Hopley; or Circumstantial Evidence* (1841) features the investigations of maidservant Susan. Over the course of this three-volume novel, Susan and three other female characters investigate crimes including missing persons, abduction, imprisonment and murder; however, they are not professionals. Later in the century, Wilkie Collins created Marian Halcombe in *The Woman in White* (1860), Magdalen Vanstone in *No Name* (1862), and Valeria Woodville in *The Law and the Lady* (1875). These heroines all undertake investigation, but they are motivated to do so for

personal reasons and are amateurs, not professionals. Each permanently relinquishes her agency as a detective by the end of her narrative.

The professional female detective first emerged in British fiction during the 1860s. This decade saw the publication of Hayward's *Revelations of a Lady Detective* and Andrew Forrester Junior's *The Female Detective*. Ambiguities and omissions in publishing records have caused disagreements regarding the precise publication dates of these collections. Kathleen Gregory Klein and Joseph Kestner argue that Hayward's *Revelations* was published in 1864, whereas Patricia Craig and Mary Cadogan, and Michelle Slung claim that this was a reprint of an 1861 edition (M. Sims, "Hayward" 3). The later year is the most widely accepted (Gavin, "Feminist" 259); therefore, I base my analysis on the premise that Hayward's *Revelations* was published in 1864 and preceded Forrester's *Female Detective* by only a few months. Critics concur that Forrester's book was published in 1864, but are not agreed upon the identity of its author. In his introduction to the British Library's recent publication of the collection (2013), Mike Ashley claims that the collection could be the pseudonymous work of writer and editor James Redding Ware (1832-1909) and that the surname Forrester was inspired by the name of two retired London police officers. Brothers Daniel and John Forrester were well-known as "bounty hunters" and "enquiry agents" during the mid-nineteenth century (Ashley ix). Stephen Knight also questions the authorship of *The Female Detective*. He proposes an "unidentified Mrs Forrester" as a "candidate for female authorship," noting that the writer named Andrew Forrester Jr. also produced several early works of detective fiction in the case-book style (34, 36).¹ The true identity of the author is still unclear. Regardless of the precise dates and identities of their authors, it remains that Hayward's Mrs. Paschal and Forrester's Female Detective 'G' are the first professional female sleuths to feature in British fiction.² I argue that this makes them significant figures in the history of female-detective fiction, and the detective genre more generally. I also contend

that Mrs. Paschal and 'G' set literary patterns that recur in representations of the *fin-de-siècle* female detective.

Detective fiction, like all cultural forms, closely interacts with the socio-political discourses and anxieties prevalent at the time of production (Clarke 181). The fictional female detective is not immune to these influences and is shaped by a complex combination of social, moral, institutional and gendered practices (Kestner 1). Foremost amongst the influences on portrayals of female sleuths is the exclusion of women from the British police force, from its inception in the 1820s until the First World War. The Metropolitan Police Act established police officers in London in 1829 and the plain-clothes Detective Branch, Scotland Yard, was formed in 1842. This was followed by the establishment of the Criminal Investigation Department (CID) in 1878 (Shpayer-Makov, "Revisiting" 173). Women were excluded from these institutions and absent from the forces until 1883 when two women were employed as guards for female prisoners (Kestner 5). Even then, they were not employed as police officers.

Since there was no direct employment pathway to the CID, it was not until women were permitted to become police officers that they could become detectives. The restriction of women's roles in the CID is evident in the appointment of Miss Eilidh MacDougal in 1905; she was employed solely to take statements in sex cases (Kestner 6). Historians have speculated that women, mainly the wives of police officers, may have performed some tasks considered unsuitable for men. In addition to guarding female prisoners and taking statements from women, children and victims of sexual crimes, women may have conducted searches of female suspects (Shpayer-Makov, *Ascent* 82-3). Women may also have been employed to gather incriminating information and evidence. However, there is currently insufficient primary evidence to support claims that women participated in this field and performed work of this kind (Shpayer-Makov, *Ascent* 83).

Official records do not register women's participation in detective work before 1915 when they were permitted to join the police force (Klein 16). Advertisements in the *London Times*, however, show that female private detectives operated from the mid-1890s onward. An advertisement for Slater's Detective Offices in December 1895 describes "a full and efficient staff of male and female representatives" ("Slater's" 1). The same paper advertises the "large staff of experienced assistants, both male and female," employed by the Legal and Universal Detective and Private Inquiry Offices ("Legal" 1). The "Personal" section of the *Times* in April 1896 refers to "a Grievous Wrong ... righted by IONA, the successful Lady Detective" and provides an address for an office in Regent Street ("Iona" 1). Similar advertisements appear in the early-twentieth century, with an increasing number of independent female agents. Kate Easton, "The Lady Detective," has "a staff of Male and Female Assistants" that "undertakes every description of Detective Work" at an office in Shaftesbury Avenue; this advertisement appeared in the *London Times* in February 1907 ("Easton" 1). Female detectives are also referenced in other news articles. In Chapter Two, I consider the *Times*'s report of a case in which the defendant was a female ex-employee of Slater's Detective Agency ("Apperley" 12). References in the popular press show that the fictional detectives studied in this thesis have counterparts in historical actuality, despite their omission from official documentation.

The absence of women from the CID meant that detective work was largely deemed a "mannish profession" (Slung, *Crime* xix). This was also due to the nature of the work. In the nineteenth century, applicants to the police force had to meet stringent physical requirements and candidates had to pass a health and fitness examination to be recruited (Shpayer-Makov, *Ascent* 82). Hence, a high regard for physical fitness, strength, and endurance became part of the institutional structure of the police force and these qualities were accepted as natural attributes of male officers. Since they were drawn from the general uniformed ranks, agents

in the CID shared these qualities. Socio-scientific discourses concomitantly generated and maintained the conceptual connection between masculinity and the skills essential to detective work.

In *The Descent of Man* (1871), Charles Darwin posited “a fixed polarity of male and female characteristics” (Boumelha, *Hardy* 16), resulting in the classification of those physical and mental characteristics required by detective work as masculine. Darwin posited that the male body was superior to the female in its physical form, strength, and endurance. He also claimed that the biological differences between men and women could be interpreted as evidence of differences in their mental faculties and argued that man’s greater size and strength indicated the greater development of their mental abilities, such as “observation, reason, invention, [and] imagination” (453, 874). These remarks referenced long-standing beliefs, dating from seventeenth-century rationalist philosophy, that logic and rationality were masculine attributes.

In the seventeenth century, the Cartesian Man of Reason emerged as the symbol of “reflective consciousness” and ideal masculinity (Lloyd 111); thereby, male judgment was associated with “objective and universal” reasoning (Jagger 130). Socio-scientific, philosophical and medical discourses in the nineteenth century drew on and expanded the gendering of mental abilities. Evolutionary biologist and physiologist George Romanes wrote about the “Mental Differences Between Men and Women” (1887) and echoed Darwin’s claims; weighing less than a man’s brain, women’s brains had inferior intellectual powers (654-5). Such work took the greater size and strength of male physiognomy as evidence of men’s intellectual superiority. Thus, both types of skill valued by the British police forces, physical and mental fitness, were emphatically masculine attributes in the nineteenth-century imagination. The apparent objectivity of scientific theory gave legitimacy to the idea that

biology determined gender attributes (Boumelha, *Hardy* 12) and created a culture in which the investigator was designated a male role.

Women, in contrast, were ascribed intuition and emotionality. Nineteenth-century ideals of femininity included sentimentality, delicate sensibility and non-logical modes of thinking (L. Richardson 106). These ideals were debated in *fin-de-siècle* discourses on gender ideology and the Woman Question. In his 1894 treatise *Revolted Woman: Past, Present, and To Come*, author and illustrator Charles George Harper uses socio-scientific discourse to argue against gender equality. He argues that women are “irresponsible creature[s] who cannot reason nor follow an argument to its just conclusion”; they also have limited control over their emotions (ix). Harper represented demands for gender equality as hysterical outbursts and, thus, sought to destabilise the legitimacy of these claims. Harper’s remarks show that women were not only institutionally prevented from performing official detection; socio-scientific discourse represented them as physically and mentally unsuited to this work.

The gendering of mental abilities was registered on an institutional level in the nineteenth century. Primary education for boys and girls became compulsory in the 1870 Education Act (Willis 58). The mid-to-late nineteenth century did see improvements in tertiary education, with women’s residence halls established at Cambridge (Girton, 1869, and Newnham, 1871) and Oxford (Lady Margaret Hall, 1878, and Somerville, 1879). In 1878, London University became the first in Britain to admit women to degree courses. Despite these changes, female students were not awarded degrees at the major universities until the twentieth century (Willis 58). The organisation of these institutions reflected doubts about women’s intellectual capacities and their abilities to withstand the rigours of intellectual stimulation. This concern was informed by the perception of women as “sentimental beings prone to hysteria” with limited control over their faculties (L. Richardson 106).

In 1895, Harper identified various “byways” of women’s emancipation as “the Hospital Nurse’s career; the . . . profession of Lady Journalist; the Woman Doctor; the Female Detective; [and] the Lady Members of the School Board” (2-3). By citing detective work as an example of women’s professional emancipation, Harper associates the female sleuth with the progressive politics of the late-nineteenth-century women’s movement and suggests that it was a means by which women made a claim for equality with men in the professional sphere. Harper also suggests that these professional roles contrast with nineteenth-century ideals and expectations of respectable femininity (Young, “Petticoated” 16). According to the mid-nineteenth-century ideology of ‘separate spheres,’ woman’s proper place was in the home rather than the public space of the professions, commerce and labour. Nineteenth-century ideology distanced women from professional *milieux*, and presumed that they were incapable of the skills that these activities required: reason, judgment, activity and knowledge of the world. Detection takes the woman into public space, as illustrated in George Sims’s “The Mysterious Millionaire” when detective Dorcas Dene performs surveillance “under a lamp-post in Berkeley square at midnight” (116). Dorcas’s public appearance seems antipathetic to the nineteenth-century feminine ideal of the ‘Angel in the House.’ It is this discursive environment that leads Kungl to question, as referenced in the epigraph to this chapter, why authors would create a female detective (*Creating* 1-2).

The interconnections between the British police-detective, socio-scientific discourse, and gender ideologies illustrate the validity of Kestner’s argument that a complex combination of socio-cultural and discursive forces influenced representations of the female detective (1). I argue that literary influences are equally important factors in the depiction of these characters. Hayward’s Mrs. Paschal and Forrester’s ‘G’ introduced patterns of representing professional female investigators in British fiction almost thirty years before their *fin-de-siècle* counterparts appeared. However, these characters are frequently

overlooked in preference of comparisons to male detectives, who are treated as standard character types against which female detectives appear unfamiliar and surprising to nineteenth-century readers and twenty-first-century critics alike. Especially striking is the *Times Column of New Books and New Editions* introduction of “a Female Sherlock Holmes” in April 1894 (12). This was C. L. Pirki’s Loveday Brooke of *The Experiences of Loveday Brooke, Lady Detective*. Similarly, *The Athaeneum* described “a Sherlock Holmes in petticoats, pretty, refined and piquant” in 1900 when Matthias McDonnell Bodkin’s *Dora Myrl, The Lady Detective* was published; Dora is an “adorable ... new kind of detective,” it states (“Petticoats” 347). These advertisements offer a potent image of the female detective by portraying her as the embodiment of both Holmesian and feminine attributes. They imply that Loveday and Dora are female versions of a male archetype. These advertisements invite multiple readings. Primarily, they show that the *fin-de-siècle* female detective appeared at a time when “Holmes-mania was sweeping across England” (Kunzl, *Creating* 1-2). Secondly, nineteenth-century discourse contrasted femininity (signified by ‘petticoats’) with detective work (signified by Holmes). Finally, the literary detective was perceived by *fin-de-siècle* culture as a male character type. What remains unacknowledged in these advertisements, however, is that Loveday and Dora inherit the independence and professionalism of earlier women characters, Mrs. Paschal and ‘G.’ My thesis acknowledges that the *fin-de-siècle* detective performs important ideological work through taking up these qualities.

It must also be noted that by the *fin de siècle*, it was an established trope of the detective genre that “the detective-hero solves crime ... [and] unravels the tangled complications of murder and intrigue” (Klein 1). Sherlock Holmes, himself, subscribes to the masculine qualities described above. His profession is symbolically rendered through his physical and mental attributes. Watson describes how “his very person and appearance were such as to strike the attention of the most casual observer” and “in height he was rather over

six feet” (Doyle, *Scarlet* 20). Holmes’s intelligence represents the perceived superiority of male reasoning and the developing respect for, and value of, scientific analysis in the late-nineteenth century. So, when “opening a novel about a private investigator,” nineteenth-century readers not only anticipated finding “logic, action, ratiocination, violence, crime, [and] scientific methods,” but implicitly attributed these to a male protagonist (Klein 4). A number of female sleuths who appeared within the pages of short-stories and novels in late-nineteenth-century Britain show that the patterns of representing detectives are neither consistent, nor limited by the sex of the character. Examples include serial characters such as Grant Allen’s Lois Cayley and Hilda Wade (*Miss Cayley’s Adventures*, 1899, and *Hilda Wade*, 1900), Baroness Orczy’s Lady Molly (*Lady Molly of Scotland Yard*, 1910), and Anna Katherine Green’s Amelia Butterworth (*That Affair Next Door*, 1897) and Violet Strange (*The Golden Slipper and Other Problems for Violet Strange*, 1915). Other detectives made single appearances, such as Miriam Lea in Leonard Merrick’s 1888 novel *Mr. Bazalgette’s Agent* and Nora Van Snoop in “The Stir Outside the Caf  Royal,” a short story written by Clarence Rook for the *London Harmsworth Magazine* in 1899.³

In this thesis, I examine three professional female detectives: Loveday Brooke, of Catherine Louisa Pirkis’s *The Experiences of Loveday Brooke, Lady Detective* (1893 and 1894); Dorcas Dene, of George Robert Sims’s *Dorcas Dene, Detective: Her Life and Adventures* (1897); and Florence Cusack, of Elizabeth Thomasina Meade’s Florence Cusack stories (1899-1901). I focus on these characters because they represent a specific character type: an upper-middle class, professional, private detective who is the protagonist of the detective plot. Each character eschews domesticity “for long enough to give [herself] a recordable career” (Slung, *Crime* xvi). They are neither women performing “amateur detection” to avenge or exonerate their husbands, nor “helpful sidekick[s]” of male sleuths (E. Miller 47). They are professional women who pursue detective work and reject the most

common romance (or marriage) plot of Victorian fiction. As Elizabeth Carolyn Miller describes in her analysis of Loveday Brooke, “though [the female detective] may find pleasure in the thrill of her occupation, the primary motivation behind her detective work is to be paid” (47). Even Dorcas Dene, a married woman, financially supports her family and derives enjoyment from “strange tales of crime, and the unraveling of mysteries” (Sims, “Council” 7). For Florence Cusack, “the life [of a detective] is fraught with the very deepest interest” (Meade, “Bovey” 259). Meade’s depiction of her character’s interest in crime-solving is matched by my own interest in examining the depiction of these three detectives.

The methodology of this thesis is underpinned by an analogy between the depiction of fictional detective work and the performance of literary criticism. My thesis borrows the analogy between literary criticism and detection from the realms of psychoanalysis, as essayed by Jacques Lacan in his influential “Seminar on ‘The Purloined Letter’” (1956). Lacan conceives a parallel between the materiality of Poe’s letter and the text itself and proposes that the reader is asked to act as a detective: to decipher “Dupin’s real strategy” of obtaining the letter from the Minister (54). Lacan considers Poe’s story to be an allegory of the act of analysis. Many critics have based their analyses of detective fiction on Lacan’s approach, such as Shoshana Felman in her 1977 reading of Henry James’s *The Turn of the Screw*, and John Irwin’s work on the analytical detective story (1994). Felman analyses the text through the lens of psychoanalysis and argues that James’s governess functions as a detective whose method is that of reading; by extension, the governess is the “dramatization of ... the reader” (Felman 176). Like Felman, Irwin subtly utilises the analogy between critical reading and detective work. These methodologies form the backdrop for my work on female-detective stories.

There is more explicit treatment of the parallel between the fictional detective and literary critic in the works of Donald Shupe and S. E. Sweeney. Their arguments and

observations inform the structure of my thesis. In “Representation Versus Detection as a Model for Psychological Criticism” (1976), Shupe posits that literary texts are “puzzles” and he claims that the “detective-critic” searches for clues, “no matter how small and insignificant,” when he or she is “unravelling the mystery” (431-2). I treat literary techniques in the way Shupe describes and consider metaphors, analogies, symbolism and references to contemporary ideologies, as clues to the representation of the female detective. These clues function analogically to the tangible and intangible clues identified by fictional sleuths. I follow the “tangled skein” (Sims, “Diamond” 94) of figurative language to elucidate depictions of the female detective and, like Forrester’s ‘G,’ I piece facts together to discover their significance (“Tenant” 33).

A series of essays in *The Cunning Craft* (1990) also inform my methodological approach. Writing on detective fiction and narrative theory, S. E. Sweeney contends that the detective novel is paradigmatic for the function of all types of narrative because it is inherently self-reflexive. “In its formal elements, such as sequence, suspense, and closure, as well as in its content, the detective story dramatizes the workings of narrative itself,” he claims (3). Sweeney’s reference to “all narrative” includes literary criticism. For critics such as Shupe, this problematises the critical process. If “detective fiction is ... preoccupied with establishing linear sequences,” then so too is literary analysis; this suggests that “the work admits of a true solution” (Shupe 432). Martin Kayman, likewise, voices the concern that critics are forced to create “orderly and totalizing narrative[s] leading from origin to explanatory conclusion” on the presumption that there is a ‘true’ or ‘correct’ interpretation of a text (3). This is a clear methodological problem and I seek to avoid this through the structure of my thesis. I use three concepts – vision, disguise, and reason – as the foci of the three chapters. Each term has multiple meanings and I read *fin-de-siècle* female-detective stories for the use and depiction of the various forms that these concepts take. Hence, the very

structure of my thesis is not linear. By applying each term in various ways, I invite several interpretations of the texts. This opens up meaning, rather than moving toward a single interpretation. I concur with Sweeney's argument that detective fiction is "concerned with the reading of signs at all levels of plot and narration" (9) as Pirkis, Sims, and Meade have a subtle use of language which invites their treatment as clues to the influences upon representations of the female detective.

Throughout this thesis, I use the terms detective, sleuth and investigator interchangeably to describe this figure and her real-life counterparts. I append a feminine qualifier to each word in order to specify the sex of the individual to whom I refer; this is necessary as the focus of this thesis is the representation of the *female* protagonist and an exploration of how the detective plot is used to articulate forms of femininity and female experience. I use 'female' and 'woman' to avoid using the term 'lady' because it implicitly confers a title upon the detective, suggesting an elevated social position and conflating her professional status with her class. While the social status of these characters merits critical attention for the insights it provides into the social structure of *fin-de-siècle* Britain, this is not the purpose of my study. Rather, I focus on the ideological functions of the detective plot and depiction of the investigative process. Elizabeth Miller (2005) coins the phrase "She-Dick" to describe the *fin-de-siècle* female detective as a way to avoid the gender binary suggested by terms such as "lady detective" (48). She claims that the term qualifies the 'male' category of detective with the feminine and class-specific 'lady' (48). Furthermore, Miller's wordplay on the male anatomy effectively undermines gender normativity (48). Despite its aptness in her study, I reject this phrase because it references the detective Dick Tracy, of American popular literature. My focus is upon British literature.

My selection of primary texts illustrates the range of authors who wrote female protagonists into the detective plots of late-nineteenth-century fiction. Often, histories of

detective fiction foreground male authors, naming Edgar Allan Poe, Wilkie Collins, and Arthur Conan Doyle as forefathers of the genre (Sussex 185). A brief outline of such histories illustrates both their validity and the oversights made therein. Narratives of the genre's development frequently begin with Edgar Allan Poe's detective Chevalier C. Auguste Dupin (Sussex 2; Worthington, *Rise* 1). Critics concur that Poe essayed "the ratiocinative mode" of detection in three short stories (Klein 15): "The Murders in the Rue Morgue" (1841), "The Mystery of Marie Rogêt" (1842) and "The Purloined Letter" (1844). Moving through the nineteenth century, Poe's stories are followed by Charles Dickens's *Bleak House* (1852-3); it featured the first police detective in British fiction, Inspector Bucket. This is followed by Emile Gaboriau's Monsieur Lecoq stories (1860-1880s),⁴ Wilkie Collins's *The Moonstone* (1868) and Arthur Conan Doyle's Sherlock Holmes stories (1887-1927).⁵ The normative history emphasises the contribution of Poe, Collins and Doyle to the detective genre and gives prominence to their creations. In this genealogy, the authors and their characters are predominantly male.

Female detectives receive more attention in surveys of popular fiction. The most comprehensive surveys date from the 1970s and 1980s when female detectives were studied as part of the feminist recovery of "a forgotten tradition of women writers, many of whom were previously merely considered 'popular'" (E. Miller 49). This recovery explored the scope of gender bias, regarding authors and characters, in literary criticism (Miller 49). Patricia Craig and Mary Cadogan take this approach in *The Lady Investigates* (1981), as do Kathleen Gregory Klein in *The Woman Detective: Gender and Genre* (1988) and, to a lesser extent, Michele Slung in her introduction to the anthology of female detective stories *Crime on Her Mind* (1975). Craig, Cadogan and Klein also perform extensive work on the interrelation of gender and genre in these monographs. Many critics focus specifically on female protagonists created by female authors. Jessica Mann's *Deadlier Than the Male: An*

Investigation into Feminine Crime Writing (1981) is one example. In her dissertation *Investigating the Female Detective: Gender Paradoxes in Popular British Mystery Fiction, 1864-1930* (2008), Anna Dzirkalis examines female authorship and argues that mystery fiction enabled women writers to seek “authority in the public realm” (3-4). Carla T. Kungl, similarly, explores how women writers used the detective figure to “write women into positions of authority” and argues that these authors “increased the pressure upon the continually contested sites of the representation of women” (*Creating* 10). I take a different approach because I analyse works by both men and women. My selection of texts is based on the identity of the protagonists, rather than those of their creators.

My approach also diverges from the treatment of female protagonists in the critical literature on detective fiction. Histories of the genre generally include brief references to female protagonists as shown in Stephen Knight’s *Crime Fiction Since 1800: Death, Detection, Diversity* (2010) and Heather Worthington’s *Key Concepts in Crime Fiction* (2011). Yet, these works lack in-depth textual analysis and treat the female as an anomaly and novelty in a male-dominated field, rather than an important figure in her own right. Lucy Sussex has revised approaches in this field to include female authors and some female protagonists. Her *Women Writers and Detectives in Nineteenth-Century Crime Fiction: The Mothers of the Mystery Genre* (2010) shows early crime-writing to be both a male and female domain (2). Sussex reconceptualises the normative history of the genre to include such writers as Catherine Crowe. Similarly, Carla Kungl bases her dissertation (2000) and monograph *Creating the Fictional Female Detective* (2006) on the premise that merely half of the critical terrain is covered because critics focus on either female writers or authors – rarely both. Her work fills this gap for the period between 1860 and 1940. More recently, Kate Watson’s dissertation *The Hand That Rocks the Crime Fiction Cradle* (2010) redresses the absence of female writers from histories of crime and detective fiction. Watson delineates

a history of women's crime writing, arguing that female detectives enabled women writers to "inscribe their criminal interests" (45).

A brief review of the critical field shows that work has been done on the nexus of female authorship, the literary marketplace and the female detective, since the publication of Kungl's work. Notably, Adrienne Gavin reads Pirkis's *Loveday Brooke* stories as the means by which Pirkis sought "respect for professional achievement instead of categorization or restriction based on gender" ("Pirkis" 149). Loveday embodies the professional female writer's foray into the public realm of *fin-de-siècle* Britain where she is judged by her work, not her femininity (Gavin 141). My thesis builds on this body of work and gives prominence to authors and characters who have received scant critical attention, despite their popularity in the nineteenth-century. In doing so, I share the perspective taken by Clare Clarke in *Late Victorian Crime Fiction in the Shadows of Sherlock* (2014).

Clarke argues that the approach most often taken in analyses of Victorian crime writing, and the normative histories that result, both require significant revision in order to address the "formal and moral diversity" of the genre (2). Hence, she examines detective stories by currently-overlooked writers such as Fergus Hume, Arthur Morrison and Guy Boothby. Clarke's monograph is part of a recent interest in hitherto lesser-known and disregarded works of Victorian crime fiction. This interest is gradually eroding the belief that "Victorian detective fiction is a genre which pivots on Collins's, Dickens's and Doyle's *oeuvres*" (Clarke 4). I share Clarke's belief that the normative history of detective fiction limits our understanding of the genre to predominantly male authors and characters. By analysing detective stories with female protagonists, I highlight the diversity of characterisation and the ideological functions it provides in nineteenth-century detective fiction. However, it is not my intention to perform an exhaustive survey of the genre. This has already been satisfactorily completed, such as in Colleen Barnett's *Mystery Women: An*

Encyclopedia of Leading Women Characters in Mystery Fiction (2006). Accordingly, in this thesis, “*Petticoated Police*,” “*Intimate Watching*” and *Private Agency(ies)*, I demonstrate the importance of female protagonists in British detective and *fin-de-siècle* fiction and argue that the detective plot articulates female experience.

My thesis draws on Kestner’s much-cited work on nineteenth- and early-twentieth-century female detectives: *Sherlock’s Sisters: the British Female Detective, 1864-1913* (2003). Kestner argues that this figure was born of a complex combination of socio-cultural and socio-political forces (1). He conducts a detailed survey of short stories and novels in order to uncover the ways in which these practices intersected to form the female detective. The study is structured chronologically and each detective is analysed in isolation, so that each character may be considered in detail. While Kestner provides shrewd insights into the social forces governing the representation of the female sleuth, there is an inherent contradiction in his approach. The title of the monograph positions the female detective as secondary, and defines her in terms of her relationship, to the male detective. I suggest an alternative. The female investigator remains the primary focus of my thesis and the term ‘petticoated police’ is placed in quotation marks in its title, not only because it is a direct citation of William Hayward’s *Revelations* (18), but also because it plays on the meaning of ‘petticoated.’ The phrase ‘petticoated police’ encapsulates the complexities of representing a female detective: “To be a member of the police is to exert authority and possess ‘force,’ whereas to be petticoated means to be limited in one’s abilities” (Young, “Petticoated” 19). Petticoats symbolise the physical and social obstacles encountered by the female detective as she performs investigations in a society which attributed detective skills to men, and encumbered women with voluminous clothing for aesthetic gratification.

I set out to challenge literary histories which consider Doyle’s Sherlock Holmes as the paradigmatic literary detective. First appearing in 1887,⁶ Holmes has become the archetypal

detective-hero: that is, a “thinker and observer, the man of action as man of science” (M. Sims, *Witness* xxx). Over four novels and five volumes of short stories, Doyle created a detective whose intellectual abilities are inherently linked to his gender, to the extent that his performance of investigation becomes a performance of masculine ratiocination. The immense popularity of Doyle’s protagonist expanded the interest in and readership of detective fiction and, hence, provides an important backdrop for the texts studied in this thesis. Nevertheless, reading the female detective as a gender variation of a male prototype – a Sherlock Holmes in petticoats – is problematically reductive. This approach fails to account sufficiently for the female detectives of the 1860s and their representation as skilled professionals. This is a further reason for my focus on the concepts of vision, disguise and reason; each was already present in the female tradition of the detective genre before Holmes appeared, suggesting that they are not innate qualities of a male character.

My approach to nineteenth-century gender ideology is informed by Mary Poovey’s approach in *Uneven Developments: The Ideological Work of Gender in Mid-Victorian England* (1988). She considers gender as a site of the formation and contestation of ideology and argues that it is inherently double (1-3). The prevailing ideology over a particular historical period may appear to be consistent and coherent; however, in reality, beliefs and discourse are variable and “fissured by competing emphases and interests” (3). Ambivalences and ambiguities in discourse make the female detective “a fantastic composite” of gendered qualities and literary tropes (Klein 56). This composite identity distinguishes her from the Victorian heroine.

Female protagonists are subject to characterological and narrative patterns in the Victorian novel, where the heroine’s narrative fate and identity are articulated in terms of her relation to male characters: “by fathers, husbands, or seducers” (Young, *Culture* 119). The Victorian heroine is depicted as “domestic, subservient, and dependent, both financially and

emotionally” (Young 119). She begins her narrative trajectory with romance, which leads to marriage and her being ensconced in the domestic sphere (Young 123-4). Marriage thus functions to bring contentment to the heroine and narrative resolution for the reader (Kungl, diss. 1; L. Richardson 17). The limits placed upon the Victorian heroine were restrictive and “the standard happy ending” for the heroine is her marriage (Young 123). Repetitions of this narrative pattern in nineteenth-century literature mean that few female protagonists are shown moving beyond the boundaries of domestic space and when they do make this departure, most return to the security it signifies (Young 120). The problems faced by the Victorian heroine are encapsulated by the narrative fates of two well-known heroines. Charlotte Brontë’s *Jane Eyre*, despite her independence and determination, conforms to the dominant socio-cultural script of the mid-nineteenth century by marrying Mr. Rochester. The deviant (and criminal) behaviour of Mary Elizabeth Braddon’s sensational heroine of *Lady Audley’s Secret* (1862) is tempered by her questionable sanity; the sexualised type of femininity she represents is contained when Braddon relegates her to a Belgian asylum and kills her soon after.

In their depiction of women as detective agents, the stories analysed in this thesis are not realist; that is, they do not subscribe to Victorian realism’s “project of representing in some typical form the real conditions of social existence,” as Penny Boumelha describes (“Realism” 84). As discussed, women were not employed in the British CID and very few are officially recorded as private detectives. Boumelha’s interrogation of realist narrative in “Realism and the Ends of Feminism” (1982) shows that mid-century British literature limited the narrative conclusions available to women protagonists, the most popular being marriage or death (84). Critics have read these endings as creating, reproducing and imposing the limited opportunities available to actual women throughout the nineteenth century: “That is,

they have tended to see a final marriage as a cop-out and a final death as victimization of the heroine” (Boumelha, “Realism” 85).

My study of professional female sleuths shows that this figure disrupts patterns of characterisation and narrative, enabling writers to essay a mode of femininity that is circumscribed neither by marriage nor romance. Hayward’s Mrs. Paschal and Forrester’s ‘G’ show that as early as the 1860s, authors were experimenting with new narrative forms in writing female detectives. Pirkis, Sims and Meade, *inter alia*, draw on this history of representation. Their protagonists undertake what I describe as ‘detective agency.’ This describes a woman’s independent performance of detective work. The most widely accepted definition of the phrase ‘detective agency’ understands it as a bureau or headquarters of investigation, but I consider this as secondary to the representation of the female detective. From the 1860s to the *fin de siècle*, female investigators are independent agents and their autonomy is of primary significance. Therefore, I use ‘detective agency’ to describe the female investigator’s performance of professional detective work unless otherwise specified.

The narrative possibilities of the Victorian heroine, as set out by Boumelha, offer limited means of constructing women’s independence and professionalism; accordingly, the means of essaying a narrative that is driven by neither romance nor marriage, are few within the bounds of nineteenth-century realism. As the nineteenth century progressed, however, authors experimented with alternate modes of femininity and plots for their heroines in genres such as Sensation Fiction. As Lynn Pykett describes, authors of Sensation Fiction endeavoured to “find a form ... in which to represent and articulate women’s experience, and women’s aspirations and anxieties” (5-6). Depictions of “bigamous or adulterous heroines,” such as Braddon’s Lady Audley and Aurora Floyd (of *Aurora Floyd*, 1863), and “complicated plots of crime and intrigue” as in Collins’s *The Woman in White*, resist the structure of the conventional marriage plot, instead emphasising mystery, crime and deviant

femininity (5). Braddon, especially, explores alternative forms of femininity to the dominant model of femininity symbolised by the ‘Angel in the House’ (5). Deriving her name from Coventry Patmore’s famous poem (1854), the Angel in the House was an important figure in nineteenth-century gender ideology and embodied feminine passivity, subservience, and domesticity (Langland 290-1).

Authors of Sensation Fiction rejected the conventional marriage plot, but it was still complex for writers to depict “a respectable economic, intellectual or spiritual place for the unattached woman” due to the socio-cultural and political realities faced by British women (Slung, *Loveday* viii). In conjunction with women’s disenfranchisement and the ideology of ‘separate spheres,’ women were placed on the sidelines of professional and political life during the early-to-mid-nineteenth century. Women’s access to education was restricted, as noted earlier (Willis 58), and employment opportunities were, in the main, limited to domestic service or governessing. At the middle of the century, it was recognised that the single woman was becoming an increasingly significant part of British society. The 1851 census reported that 400,000 women had neither spouse nor family to support them and, therefore, were forced to seek paid employment; predominantly from the middle classes, these women were perceived as “surplus” to society (A. Richardson xxxvi). In an article first published in the *National Review* (1869) and later as a pamphlet, William Rathbone Greg registers the gender imbalance in the British population. By asking, “Why are Women Redundant?” Greg claims that the surplus of women “occupies non-valid roles in society” (Slung, *Loveday* vii). To Greg’s questioning of the surplus female population and their roles, historians and literary critics respond that this situation arose because ideology and institutional structures forced women to “stand on the sidelines” (Slung, *Loveday* vii).

From the 1860s onward, British women had become increasingly vocal and visible in the public sphere through the women’s movement (L. Richardson 13); however, it was not

until the *fin de siècle* that “women were entering the city with fresh eyes, observing it from within” (Parsons 6). By 1891, the excess population of women had risen from 400,000 to 900,000 and it was increasingly recognised that these “surplus” women would have to seek paid employment for financial support (A. Richardson xxxvi). This drove debates about gender ideology and roles. Discursive questions about the nature of femininity, women’s social roles, and women’s political rights, coalesced into the Woman Question (Slung, *Loveday* vii). Throughout the *fin de siècle*, participants in the Woman Question strongly debated issues such as enfranchisement and education, with supporters advocating for political and legal “ownership of the self,” female independence and equality with men (L. Richardson 106).

In 1891, 4,500,000 out of the 13,000,000 female population in Britain were employed in the workforce (A. Richardson xxxvii). This statistic reveals the symbolic Angel in the House for what she truly was: an unattainable symbol of ideal femininity (Kestner 30). The large proportion of British women who were employed also illustrates the gradual erosion of ‘separate spheres’ within nineteenth-century gender ideology (A. Richardson liv). There are many literary representations of this shift such as in George Gissing’s *The Odd Women* (1893). Protagonists Miss Barfoot and Rhoda Nunn manage an institution teaching secretarial skills to young middle-class women. Gissing overtly addresses contemporary social anxieties and the strength of both sides of the Woman Question when he describes how Miss Barfoot receives a letter from a young male clerk who believes that women are “invading” his profession; it is “written by some clerk out of employment, abusing her roundly for her encouragement of female competition in the clerkly world” (Gissing 177). Miss Barfoot advocates women’s right to professional employment on equal footing with men as Gissing writes that “Miss Barfoot held, that there was much more to be urged on behalf of women who invaded what had exclusively been the man’s sphere, than on behalf of the men who

began to complain of this invasion” (177). This remark reveals the rigour of both sides of debates over gender ideology.

Advocates of equality in professional realms had strident detractors, as represented in the fiction of the late-nineteenth century. The adventure plot of Bram Stoker’s *Dracula* (1897) unites the male protagonists and while he affords her narrative agency, Stoker excludes Mina Harker from active participation in the adventure narrative: “Mrs. Harker is better out of it. Things are quite bad enough to us, all men of the world, and who have been in many tight places in our time; but it is no place for a woman,” Dr. Seward says (329-30). Thus, Stoker suggests that women are neither suited, nor was it appropriate for them, to pursue professional work outside of the domestic sphere. Women who did so were, as LeeAnn Richardson argues, deemed guilty of “arrogations of power” and endangerment of masculine domains (58).

Gissing also comments on contemporary anxieties about women’s role and participation in the professional sphere and the consequences for British society through the depiction of Rhoda Nunn. His *The Odd Women*, like the contemporary debates about women’s role and social function, revolves around women’s relationship to work, domestic responsibilities and respectability. Rhoda Nunn advocates for women’s right to engage in independent professional lives freed from domestic expectations. She is a self-proclaimed ‘odd woman’; as she remarks, there are “so many *odd* women – no making a pair with them” (Gissing 48). Rhoda represents a great number of heroines in British fiction who were represented as seeking professional careers in preference to traditional models of marriage.

The ‘odd woman’ of mid-to-late-nineteenth-century fiction was the depiction of a “middle-class, unmarried, working woman without a fortune to support herself” and is generally portrayed as “forced into her situation through a lack of money or sudden death of friends” (E. Miller 54). She enabled writers to articulate the experiences of and opportunities

available to “the unattached woman,” a process which was fraught with complexity in the nineteenth and into the twentieth centuries (Slung, *Loveday* viii). Thus, we see the crucial similarities between texts such as Gissing’s *The Odd Women* and *fin-de-siècle* female-detective stories. Like Gissing’s Miss Barfoot and Rhoda, Loveday, Dorcas and Florence pursue professional careers and embody “female competition” in a masculine domain (Gissing 177).

Two detectives analysed in this thesis resemble the ‘odd woman’ in their choice of professional careers over marriage. Pirkis’s Loveday, in particular, has many of the ‘odd woman’s’ qualities. She undertakes detective work because she is “thrown upon the world penniless and all but friendless” and lacks “marketable accomplishments” (Pirkis, “Black” 2). Meade’s Florence also undertakes detection to generate an income, but her motives are mixed and ambiguous. Meade writes that she is also “under a promise, which [she] must fulfil” (“Bovey’s” 259). Florence’s promise remains concealed throughout the series. As Dorcas is depicted as married at the beginning of Sims’s collection, she is not the archetypal ‘odd woman’ of Gissing’s description; however, like the ‘odd woman,’ Dorcas is depicted as responsible for financially supporting herself due to unforeseen circumstances. Her husband has become blind after an illness and can no longer work as an artist, and Dorcas has the additional responsibility of caring for her mother and their bulldog Toddlekins. Dorcas’s detective work is their sole source of income.

Loveday, Dorcas and Florence all resemble another popular figure of late-nineteenth-century Britain: the New Woman. The New Woman was named by Sarah Grand in her essay “The New Aspect of the Woman Question” for the *North-Atlantic Review* (1894) and was a “discursive response to ... the late nineteenth-century women’s movement” (Ledger 1). She was, *inter alia*, “a feminist activist, a social reformer, a popular novelist, a suffragette playwright, a woman poet” (Ledger 1). This multifaceted figure expressed concerns about

women's educational and employment opportunities, the competing demands of paid and domestic work, sexual morality, and freedom (Ledger 1). More as a discursive construct than an actual woman, the New Woman was "splashed across the press and entered the world of fiction with astonishing rapidity" (A. Richardson xxxiii). Depictions of the New Woman in fiction and the popular press challenged patriarchal dominance by advocating the expansion of women's roles and opportunities (Ledger 6).

The New Woman represented a new, progressive form of womanhood and the possibility of independence, professionalism and intellectualism for women. She shares this with the female detective. As contemporaries of "social purists, rational dressers, striking match-girls, smoking and cycling New Women" (A. Richardson xxxi), the working girl, and the female shopper (Parsons 43), female sleuths play an important role in *fin-de-siècle* culture. Each of these figures appeared on the streets of fictional and actual Britain as representatives of the socio-cultural shifts occurring in historical actuality and symbolise the increasingly "female presence" in public space during this period (Parsons 43). They are significant "images of urban women within the city" (Parsons 43). In novels, periodical literature and the press, the New Woman brought women's rights and concerns to the forefront of the social consciousness. The subgenre of New Woman fiction featured heroines who contravened and challenged the restrictions of Victorian gender ideologies (Pykett 9-10). In doing so, they participated in debates about the definition of woman, her nature, power and social function. As Lyn Pykett posits, New Woman fiction depicts, replicates or modifies "the contemporary discourses on 'woman'" and provides its readers with an opportunity to consider these discourses (10). New Women writers, Pykett argues, sought new, and frequently reworked existing, narrative forms to articulate women's experiences (194).

In extant scholarship, female detectives are read as versions of the New Woman because they are depicted as professional women who pursue careers in the public sphere

(Dzirkalis 47; Gavin, “Pirkis” 138) and, Sims’s Dorcas excepted, choose a career over marriage. Descriptions of Dora Myrl in Bodkin’s collection of short stories *Dora Myrl, The Lady Detective* illustrate the similarities between these figures. When Dora is introduced to the reader in “The False Heir and the True,” her dress strongly resembles the practical clothing worn by New Women: a “tailor-made dress” with a “short skirt” and “tan cycling-shoes” (Bodkin 1). Dora is also highly educated, having completed a medical degree and achieved the status of “Cambridge Wrangler” (Bodkin 1). Bodkin’s description is not altogether consistent, however; Dora is also described as “a dainty little lady” who has “nothing of the New Woman, or for that matter of the old, about [her]” (Bodkin 1-2). Thus, Bodkin registers the ambivalence toward the New Woman at the *fin de siècle*. The dual nature of Bodkin’s representation speaks to the complexity of representing a professional woman during the British *fin de siècle*. I suggest that the identity of female detective enables authors such as Bodkin to unite the independence and professional interests of the New Woman and more familiar forms of nineteenth-century femininity in a single figure. As the following chapters show, writers of these female-detective stories do not generate “the general effect” of the New Woman novel as defined by Pykett. The New Woman novel, she contends, “suggest[s] the impossibility of woman’s situation ... women’s lives are presented as inherently problematic, and unhappiness is the norm” (148). For Loveday Brooke, Dorcas Dene and Florence Cusack, this is not the case.

I commence my literary ‘investigation’ with Chapter One: “Vision, Visibility and the Investigative Gaze in *The Experiences of Loveday Brooke, Lady Detective*.” I utilise the semantic variations of the term ‘vision,’ reading Pirkis’s collection within Victorian Britain’s mania for “all things visual” (Hendrey-Seabrook 76) and the contingency of detective work upon observation. The female detective is not merely cast as an observer and Chapter Two addresses this idea in through an analysis of the disguises used by George R. Sims’s Dorcas

Dene in *Dorcas Dene, Detective: Her Life and Adventures*. Having collected evidence through physiological sight, and avoided the gazes of suspects and observers, female detectives then use deduction to resolve mysteries and crimes. Chapter Three, “‘Wonderful’ Intuitions and ‘Chains of Reasoning’”: Reason and Logic in the Detections of Florence Cusack,” takes this final stage as its focus.

Just as Loveday says of her final case, “Missing!,” depictions of the *fin-de-siècle* female detective “present . . . interesting intricacies” (Pirkis 89) for the literary critic. It is thus that I take on the case and, like a detective, piece together the clues to her complex representation.

Chapter One

“Thread[s] of Connection”: Vision, Visibility and the Investigative Gaze in *The Experiences of Loveday Brooke, Lady Detective*

Our knowledge is piecework, that is, it must be produced piece by piece in a fragmentary way ... In the external world everyone sees more or less the same thing, and yet not everyone can express it. (Schelling 88)

With these three pieces before me, it was not difficult to see a thread of connection between the writer of the ... letter and the thief who wrote across the empty safe at Craigen Court. (Pirkis 13)

The Victorians were fascinated with the act of seeing, with the question of the reliability – or otherwise – of the human eye, and with the problems of interpreting what they saw. (Flint 1-2)

In “The Black Bag Left on a Door-Step,” the first story of C. L. Pirkis’s *The Experiences of Loveday Brooke, Lady Detective* (1894), Loveday describes how “all in a flash, the whole thing became clear to me” (12). Her remark encapsulates the subtle, yet comprehensive, depiction of vision in this collection. Throughout, Pirkis draws on the semiotic multi-valence of the term ‘to see,’ employing it to describe Loveday’s identification and examination of evidence, and her insight into crimes and mysteries.

The *Oxford English Dictionary* provides no fewer than sixteen definitions for ‘see,’ illustrating the variety of its uses and connotations. The literal meaning denotes perception with the human eye; it further refers to imaginative sight as in dreams or visions (OED). Figuratively, to see is “to perceive mentally (an immaterial object, a quality, etc.)” and “to apprehend by thought (a truth, the answer to a question)” (OED). This verb provides a useful vocabulary for representing and analysing the *fin-de-siècle* female detective. The recurrence of vision as a theme throughout Pirkis’s collection evidences her engagement with nineteenth-century conceptions of and interest in human sight, its reliability, and function. In this chapter, I argue that Pirkis participates in the “Victorian obsession with all things visual”

(Hendrey-Seabrook 76), using this fascination to depict a female protagonist who is led to cognitive insights and the narrative conclusion by her physiological sight. Loveday embodies the conceptual shift from the *camera-obscura* notion of a detached observer, to the nineteenth-century conception of sight as contingent upon the viewer's physical and social position (Spengler 159). The final facet of vision in Pirkis's text is its literary function. In this chapter, I argue that references to sight direct the narrative along the lines of detection, rather than romance.

Catherine Louisa Pirkis (1839-1910) wrote six short stories which were published in the periodical the *Ludgate Monthly* in February to July of 1893. In February 1894, the stories were published as a collection by Hutchinson & Co. along with a seventh – “Missing!” (Gavin, “Pirkis” 139). The London *Times*'s “Column of New Books and New Editions” advertised the collection in April 1894, promoting Loveday as “a Female Sherlock Holmes” (12). The advertisement also emphasised the novelty of the stories: “there are few more clever stories of the kind, and they are written with a remarkable amount of verve, a number of graphic illustrations being an excellent addition to the text” (“Female” 12). When serialised and collected, the texts were published under the name C. L. Pirkis, lending a degree of anonymity to the author. Pirkis's use of her initials signifies a “demand . . . to be judged for her work” rather than on the basis of her sex, and Gavin argues that this approach to publication eased the movement of this female writer into the “formerly male territory” of detective fiction (“Pirkis” 149, 139).

Pirkis made this foray, having published her first novel, *Disappeared from Her Home*, in 1877. Over the course of her writing career, Pirkis published over twelve novels and various short stories, many of which are romances; some depict crime and mystery, but Loveday is her only female detective (Gavin, “Pirkis” 141). Critics have speculated that her writing was driven by financial necessity because her husband Frederick Edward Pirkis

retired from the navy, where he held the position of fleet paymaster, in 1873. This was a year after their marriage. Frederick Pirkis then dedicated himself to canine welfare and the anti-vivisection movement. His interests appear to have influenced the literary output of his wife as C. L. Pirkis wrote for Frances Power Cobbe's anti-vivisection Victoria Street Society from 1881. Both Pirkis and her husband were also heavily involved in establishing and promoting The National Canine Defence League in 1891 (Gavin, "Pirkis" 141). These biographical details suggest that Pirkis was a politically and socially aware and active member of society. Her status as the first British female author to create a female detective supports my conjecture. Loveday is considered the most significant female detective in British literature for this reason (Ashley, *Storytellers* 119).

The narrator of the collection introduces Loveday as a professional detective employed by Mr. Dyer of the Lynch Court Detective Agency in London. From the opening description of Loveday, vision is a crucial aspect of characterisation and narrative construction. The narrator observes that Loveday is "best described by a series of negations. She was not tall, she was not short; she was not dark, she was not fair; she was neither handsome nor ugly" (2). Her remarkably blank exterior renders Loveday altogether nondescript. She is not defined by her appearance, but by her vision. Pirkis resists objectifying Loveday either as a sexualised figure or object of aesthetic interest. Rather, Loveday is notable for her visual acuity. References to her examination of crime scenes and subsequent formation of insight recur throughout the collection. These do not merely depict Loveday's investigative methods; Pirkis employs Loveday's gaze to direct the narrative along the lines of a detective plot.

Before applying vision as a conceptual and analytic tool to Pirkis's collection, it is necessary to understand the history of vision as represented in nineteenth-century detective fiction. Three figures are key to this history: Arthur Conan Doyle's Sherlock Holmes,

William Hayward's Mrs. Paschal (*Revelations of a Lady Detective*, 1864) and Andrew Forrester's 'G' (*The Female Detective*, also 1864). Holmes was, and continues to be, a highly popular figure who is famed for his visual acuity and ability to solve mysteries through observation and empirical analysis. In *A Study in Scarlet* (1887), Holmes avers that he can determine a man's profession through visual examination: "by a man's finger-nails, by his coat-sleeve, by his boots, by his trouser knees, by the callosities of his forefinger and thumb, by his expression, by his shirt cuffs – by each of these things a man's calling is plainly revealed," he states (22). Holmes's keen vision typifies the scientific approach to crime-solving that makes him "the ultimate detective" for many critics (Knight 62-3); however, he was not the first literary detective to bear these skills. It is rarely recognised that two female detectives with keen vision and interpretive skills appeared in 1864. Hayward's Mrs. Paschal in *Revelations of a Lady Detective* and Forrester's 'G' in *The Female Detective* form the basis of a female-detective sub-genre (Craig and Cadogan 16) and evidence a tradition of female detectives with keen sight and insight, beginning almost twenty years before Sherlock Holmes appeared. Prefiguring Holmes' close scrutiny, Hayward implies that physiological sight enables the formation of insight. Mrs. Paschal states that:

I had seen a few things in my life which appeared scarcely susceptible of explanation at first, but which, when eliminated by the calm light of reason and dissected by the keen knife of judgment, were in a short time as plain as the sun at noonday. (39)

Throughout the collection, Mrs. Paschal uses observation to identify and interpret material evidence. In "The Mysterious Countess," she is engaged by her superior, Colonel Warner, to determine the suspicious source of the wealth of the Countess of Vervaine. Mrs. Paschal enters the household disguised as a lady's maid and this disguise enables her to observe the Countess "with the greatest care and closeness" (21). Her surveillance enables Mrs. Paschal to literally and figuratively trace the origins of the Countess's wealth. Mrs.

Paschal pursues the Countess through a subterranean passage between the house and the South Belgrave Bank where she “watch[es] ... my lady” (29) steal gold ingots from a bank vault. Hayward bases this investigation on the premise that the visible world contains and yields information for the detective to interpret. Human sight is used to develop its figurative counterpart: insight. Pirkis inherits and develops this depiction of sight in her Loveday Brooke stories.

Forrester’s depiction of surveillance in *The Female Detective* also forms an important background to Pirkis’s fiction. ‘G’ states in the “Introduction” to the collection that “the woman detective has far greater opportunities than a man of intimate watching ... of keeping her eyes upon matters near which a man could not conveniently play the eavesdropper” (4). Speaking in the first person, “with the voice of frankness and authority” (Slung, *Crime* xvii), ‘G’ registers the belief that women are naturally deemed less suspicious than men and that this equips them for surreptitious activities such as surveillance. In “Tenant for Life,” ‘G’ poses as a dressmaker and milliner and gains admission to the Shedleigh household under the alias ‘Miss Gladden.’ Her successful acquisition of evidence and discovery of fraud in this case endorses the belief that women were considered naturally less suspicious than men in the nineteenth-century, making them effective sleuths. As Miss Gladden, ‘G’ observes the Shedleigh household and gathers vital evidence: “each moment I picked up some new little fact that might be useful to me” (60). Forrester, like Hayward, introduces key tropes to female-detective stories. His concept of ‘intimate watching’ has a dual meaning. It refers to close scrutiny and the surveillance performed in private spaces.

Thus far, I have emphasised the depiction of human sight as the detective’s means of collecting and examining evidence and their authors’ means of defining female protagonists by their skill rather than their appearances or marriageability. In taking this line of argument, I diverge from the dominant reading of vision in female-detective stories. Extant criticism

interprets vision as the symbolic negotiation of gender and power. The most comprehensive analysis of vision in female-detective stories occurs in Kestner's *Sherlock's Sisters* and his approach typifies the work done on this aspect of the genre. Kestner claims that female detectives share one activity: "surveillance over [nineteenth-century] culture, including its men, women, public institutions and private domestic spaces" (226). By exercising a professional gaze, these women appropriate male power and challenge the patriarchal administration of criminal investigation (Kestner 18-9).

Critics such as Kestner take 'the gaze' as a sexualized form of male power. This definition is drawn from Laura Mulvey's theory in her landmark essay "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema" (1975), first published in *Screen* and later in Mulvey's collected works *Visual and Other Pleasures* (1989). Mulvey represents the visual exchange as a gendered binary arrangement in which 'the gaze' is an inherently male subject position from which men derive and wield power; women are, in turn, disempowered and passive objects of this gaze (Mulvey 16-20). Mulvey uses a Freudian understanding of the gaze as both scopophilic and narcissistic. It comprises the viewer's voyeuristic appreciation of the female form, as well as the viewer's identification with the male subject of the text. Mulvey's text responded to Second Wave feminism of the 1960s and participated in the attempt to uncover "domains of women's experience hitherto considered non-political and revealed the hidden power structures at work there" (Chaudhuri 4). By highlighting the gender bias in Hollywood cinema and the need for a way to register and express female experience, Mulvey's work forms an important part of feminist film theory of the 1970s and continues to influence literary critics today. Yet, I argue that her dualist concept of the gaze does not allow for the multiplicity of looks and their functions in female-detective stories. Mulvey's theory was developed as a means of interrogating narrative cinema and she has since acknowledged its limited applicability to studies of written texts. Furthermore, the application of this theory to

fin-de-siècle female-detective stories is anachronistic as it requires that writers of previous centuries “meet present-day expectations of political awareness” (Robinson 33). For these reasons, and because critics have already dealt extensively with the symbolic, empowering potential of female vision, I posit an alternative methodology in my interpretation of Pirkis’s *Experiences of Loveday Brooke*.

Both Kestner’s and my approaches to female-detective stories are valid. Indeed, Hayward’s *Revelations* can be read as portraying the gaze as a source of empowerment for Mrs. Paschal. In the first interaction between Mrs. Paschal and Colonel Warner, Hayward uses the gaze to convey Mrs. Paschal’s confidence and self-assurance in a professional situation. Mrs. Paschal relates that:

I met the glance of Colonel Warner and returned it unflinchingly; he liked people to stare back at him, because it betokened confidence in themselves, and evidenced that they would not shrink in the hour of peril, when danger encompassed them, and lurked at front and rear. (19)

Her gaze extends beyond a suggestion of empowerment because it represents professionalism and detective skill. In contrast, Pirkis does not use overt descriptions of Loveday’s gaze to depict a direct challenge to male authority. For example, Pirkis writes that Loveday “show[s] no disposition to take out her note-book and receive her ‘sailing orders’” from her employer Mr. Dyer (“Black” 2). She depicts Loveday asserting intellectual equality and professionalism through direct speech. The exchange is verbal, not visual, and Pirkis describes this as one of many situations in which Loveday and Dyer “[a]re wont, so to speak, to snarl at each other” (3). This episode reveals the necessity of considering other forms and functions of vision as represented in the text. By looking beyond the visual exchange as a gendered and binary expression of power, I provide a useful addition to the extant literature.

Loveday performs many types of visual acts: surveillance, close scrutiny, and insight. I conduct a “semiology” of these “looks” similar to Birgit Spengler’s approach in *Vision*,

Gender and Power in Nineteenth-Century American Women's Writing (38); that is, an analysis of the multivalent forms of Loveday's gaze. I employ a general definition of 'gaze' and use it interchangeably with terms such as look, stare and glance. By broadening the definition of 'gaze,' I uncover the significance of Pirkis's nuanced, sometimes ambiguous, representation of vision. I consider Loveday Brooke within the context of *fin-de-siècle* Britain and read her representation in terms of socio-cultural mores and developments, in contrast to Kestner's use of feminist and psychoanalytic theory.

In *The Experiences of Loveday Brooke*, the gaze is primarily associated with professional acumen rather than the detective's sex. Pirkis uses contemporary understandings of vision to construct the non-gendered gaze of the detective. A brief history of conceptions of vision illustrates this point. Foucault identifies a paradigmatic shift in the modes of vision conceived in the late-eighteenth- and early-nineteenth centuries. Scientific and social spaces and knowledge were gradually reorganised, resulting in the modernisation of the subject during this period (Foucault 305; Crary 15). Simultaneously, the visual economy of Western society shifted from an emphasis on the spectacle to surveillance (Foucault 14). In accordance with Foucault's conception of surveillance, understandings of vision at any moment in history are shaped by social, cultural, and political forces. My analysis is informed by Foucault's theory that the essential nature of vision does not alter, whereas the forces that govern its representation and deployment shift markedly.

Historians trace significant changes to concepts of vision to the early-nineteenth century. In his *Techniques of the Observer* (1990), Jonathon Crary analyses conceptions of observation and the viewer. His study is based on the Foucauldian understanding that the beginning of modernity was marked by a shift in the organisation of social space, knowledge, power and visual practices. I draw on Crary's work for an understanding of these complex dynamics. From the late-sixteenth to the late-eighteenth century, "the structural and optical

principles of the *camera obscura*” were employed to discursively represent the function and position of the observer in the visible world (Crary 27). The *camera* was an optical apparatus that consisted of a rigid, linear system which incorporated the viewer into its structure, fixing them in a static position and directing their gaze toward a specified object (Crary 136-7). As a tangible device, it was a means of observing the visual field (Crary 28). Rationalist and empiricist discourses took the *camera obscura* to symbolise the acquisition of truth from observation. As an optical device and discursive representation, it posited “a detached observer whose quasi-monocular vision function[ed] as a source of objective knowledge” (Spengler 159). The early-nineteenth century saw a shift away from this conceptual model.

European science, particularly physiology, developed a knowledge of the human eye which suggested a close relationship between physiognomy and perception (Crary 79). The works of empiricist scientists such as Augustin Jean Fresnel, Pierre Flourens, and Johannes Müller, and theorists such as Johann Wolfgang von Goethe and Arthur Schopenhauer gradually relocated sight out of the *camera* to the “empirical immediacy of the observer’s body” (Crary 24). Scientists and philosophers rejected the Cartesian understanding that an observer was divorced from the world which they observed; instead of “disembodied [and] monocular” observation, early-nineteenth-century thinkers conceived an embodied form of vision (Spengler 11). During this period, it was recognised that vision was not attached to the objectivity of the monocular *camera* and, therefore, it was deemed subject to the idiosyncrasies of the viewer. Human sight thus accrued the possibility of unreliability, fallibility, and the subjectivity of individual perception. In his influential work *Handbuch der Physiologie des Menschen* (1833), Müller posited an arbitrary relation between visual stimulus and human sight, describing the potential for humans to “*misperceive* ... [and] an eye that renders differences equivalent” (Crary 90). This notion persisted throughout the century as Richard Proctor’s 1883 article “The Photographic Eyes of Science” illustrates.

Proctor claims that “the eye of man is defective” and he describes “the retina, with all its defects, physical and physiological” (462). Human sight was conceived as an embodied activity and, therefore, was interpreted as a potentially fallible and unreliable source of information.

The subjective nature and potential fallibility of human sight fascinated the Victorians. Therie Hendrey-Seabrook, for instance, remarks upon “the Victorian obsession with all things visual” (76). In *The Victorians and the Visual Imagination* (2000), Kate Flint observes that nineteenth-century Britain was captivated by visual acts and argues that this interest sparked questions about the reliability of the eye and what it perceived (2). Therefore, the changes in conceptions of the observer that Crary dates from the 1820s continued as the *fin-de-siècle* approached. These changes spread from scientific and theoretical discourses into social and cultural life where they manifested as an interest in “the very practice of looking, and ... the problematisation of that crucial instrument, the human eye” (Flint 2). The British public had increasing access to visual information through the invention of photography in 1839 and this offered a new form of “visual knowledge” (Flint 3). Other optical technologies include the kaleidoscope (1815), phenakistiscope (1833), stereoscope (1838), ophthalmoscope and laryngoscope (1840s) and the increasing refinement of the microscope and telescope (Flint 30; Crary 5). Vision was also an increasingly dominant mode of cultural consumption from the mid-nineteenth century onward. This is evidenced by the expansion of the illustrated press (Flint 3). Similarly, the 1851 Great Exhibition was predicated on the visual display of a huge variety of exemplary models. It was intended to “educate the public in matters of taste” (Steinbach xvii), and provided aesthetic pleasure by inviting the close scrutiny of material objects.

New discoveries and technologies emphasised the binocular nature of human sight and registered its subjective and temporal nature. In scientific theories such as Goethe’s work

on the afterimage, the human body was depicted as responsible for producing certain images.⁷ By identifying visual idiosyncrasies, sight was increasingly perceived as dependent upon individual attributes (Crary 16). This “new science of vision” (Spengler 358) forms an important backdrop to the appearance of the female detective in the late-nineteenth century. Within discourses of vision that acknowledge its fallibility, Pirkis endows Loveday with acute vision and the ability to see what others cannot. In a world where “everyone sees more or less the same thing,” as Schelling theorised, Loveday produces solutions to mysteries “piece by piece” (88). Thus, her intellectual superiority is affirmed. Other characters, such as Mr. Dyer and Scotland Yard detectives, view the same tangible items of evidence and access the same information; however, only Loveday is invested with the ability to express the connections between these facts.

Loveday’s detective skill is conveyed by her “one noticeable trait” (Pirkis, “Black” 2). She has a habit of “dropping her eyelids over her eyes till only a line of eyeball show[s]” while she is thinking (2). Loveday “appear[s] to be looking out at the world through a slit, instead of through a window” (2). This image recurs throughout the collection to indicate moments of ratiocination and the identification of vital evidence. Pirkis introduces this gaze and its significance in “The Black Bag Left on a Door-Step” in which Loveday investigates the theft of Lady Cathrow’s jewels from Craigen Court. Loveday travels to Craigen Court by train and for the first half of the journey, reads “a small volume bound in paper boards, and entitled, ‘The Reciter’s Treasury’” (5). Pirkis suggests that the volume has yielded vital evidence because Loveday “lay back in the carriage with closed eyes, and motionless as if in sleep or lost in deep thought” (5). Having gained evidence through physiological sight, Loveday closes her eyes and develops insight into the mystery. This is the first of several instances in the collection where she carefully regulates her sight after having used it to gather information. Later, she examines the crime scene and converses with the housekeeper

at Craigen Court. When Loveday learns that an acquaintance of the Cathrow family is a skilled actor and reciter, her “eyelids drooped so low that she literally looked out through ‘slits’ instead of eyes” (7).

Loveday’s closed eyes draw the reader’s attention away from her performance of observation, towards her cognitive processes. Pirkis indicates that the detective has gathered sufficient evidence through physiological sight, enabling her to form insight into the mystery. By emphasising her vision at the moments I have described, Pirkis establishes a system of signs for Loveday’s discovery of evidence and ratiocination. These signs function as textual ‘clues’ to help the reader to identify moments of discovery and ratiocination in the detective plot. In conjunction with the narrator’s description of Loveday’s “altogether nondescript” features (2), these references show that Pirkis defines Loveday by her ability to use vision, rather than her physical appearance or attractiveness. Hence, Loveday’s gaze is associated with her work and professionalism, rather than her sex.

Contemporary advertisements for *The Experiences of Loveday Brooke* in the *London Times* suggest that she is a gender-variation on a male character type. Indeed, Loveday does share her visual acuity with Sherlock Holmes. In *A Study in Scarlet*, Holmes identifies the means of death through visual, tactile and olfactory senses: “his nimble fingers were flying here, there and everywhere ... So swiftly was the examination made, that one would hardly have guessed the minuteness with which it was conducted,” Watson observes (29). Similarly, the narrator in Pirkis’s “The Murder at Troyte’s Hill” describes how Loveday

make[s] a thorough and minute investigation of the room. Not an article of furniture, not an ornament or toilet accessory, but what was lifted from its place and carefully scrutinised. Even the ashes in the grate, the debris of the last fire made there, were raked over and well looked through. (21)

The parallels between representations of Holmes and Loveday show that visual scrutiny is a recurrent trope of nineteenth-century detective fiction, registering the Victorian fascination

with vision and visual knowledge (Flint 1-2; Hendrey-Seabrook 76). The narrator's description also recalls Mrs. Paschal's examination of the Countess "with the greatest care and minuteness" (Hayward 34). Loveday's performances of acts of examination signal her association with a tradition of detectives, female and male, who use sight to identify and interpret evidence. As Hayward's and Pirkis's texts demonstrate, it is not merely the well-known Holmes who forms deductions "by ... accurate and systematic examination" (Doyle, *Scarlet* 23).

Like Doyle, Pirkis endorses a positivist belief in the detective's unique ability to solve crime and, thereby, close the narrative. Ronald Thomas observes that the typical detective plot is driven the detective's aim to "explain an event that seems to be inexplicable to everyone else" (2). Detective plots are based on the premise that the truth will, by the *dénouement*, be reached by the investigator (Thomas 2). In *The Experiences of Loveday Brooke*, Loveday reaches the truth through her scrutiny of evidence and development of insight, showing that Pirkis uses the depiction of vision to construct the detective plot and structure the narrative. Pirkis directs the reader's attention to Loveday's keen vision and, in turn, this quality allows Loveday to conduct professional detective work. This depiction contrasts with that of Victorian realist heroines whose narrative "options" are "reduce[d] to either marriage or death" (Boumelha, "Realism" 84).

Vision and narratological strategies are closely connected. As Kestner argues, the subjectivity of the female detective is governed by narrative voice and perspective (17). Autotelic narration is the ultimate expression of empowerment and agency as the female protagonist, thereby, tells her own story. Narration by a second party limits her agency as it allows another character to frame her experiences. Pirkis's *Loveday Brooke* stories are told in the third person by an omniscient narrator and follow Loveday's investigations. Critics such as Kestner claim that Pirkis reduces Loveday's agency by mediating her experience through a

third agent. I offer another interpretation of Pirkis's narrative style and argue that third-person narration is essential to the ideological function and entertainment value of the detective plot.

Throughout the collection, the third-person omniscient narration centres on Loveday and her activities. Readers are narratively prevented from 'seeing' Loveday's methods and, thereby, the details of the mystery until the very end. They cannot solve the mystery alongside Loveday as the narrator withholds significant items of evidence (Hendrey-Seabrook 83). This is a common trope in nineteenth-century detective fiction which functions to maintain mystery and suspense (Hendrey-Seabrook 84). Withholding the details of her methods and intentions also provides contrast between the reader's ignorance and Loveday's knowledge. This narrative technique establishes Loveday's intellectual superiority and visual acuity. At the *dénouement* of each story, Loveday is prompted by a male character, frequently Mr. Dyer, to deliver her explanation of the mystery and divulge her investigative methods. "Invit[ed] ... to share the minutiae of her detective process" (Hendrey-Seabrook 85), Loveday delivers a coherent narrative of each of her cases, constructed from material and intangible evidence. She conveys her professionalism and authority through these displays of her knowledge. Mr. Dyer, police-detectives, and other male characters are frequently unable to understand her methods. Pirkis uses the vocabulary provided by vision to achieve this. For example, in "A Princess's Vengeance," Major Druce states that "I can't see that she can possibly have found out anything" (53). Pirkis portrays Loveday's male counterparts as deficient in acuity, both visual and intellectual.

References to Loveday's scrutiny and identification of evidence also show that Loveday's gaze can be read as a narrative tool. These references structure the detective plot by drawing the readers' attention to key moments in the case and emphasising Loveday's investigative prowess. In "A Princess's Vengeance," Loveday is engaged to investigate the mysterious disappearance of Lucie Cunier, amanuensis to Mrs. Druce. In order to gain

information about the Druce household, Loveday observes Mrs. Druce and her friend Lady Gwynne at an afternoon tea subsequent to Lucie's disappearance. When Loveday is introduced to Mrs. Druce and Lady Gwynne as the detective investigating Lucie's disappearance, the narrator describes how: "simultaneously, a glance flashed from Mrs. Druce to Lady Gwynne, from Lady Gwynne to Mrs. Druce, and then, also simultaneously, the eyes of both ladies rested, though only for an instant, on the ... hat lying on the chair" (Pirkis 52). The gazes of these women direct Loveday's attention to the hat as a source of evidence and she follows this clue to a milliner's where she finds the final piece of information to solve the case. In this episode, Loveday acquires information about relationships between individuals and their possessions. Hence, visual exchanges enable Pirkis to create the framework of a detective plot, guiding Loveday from the discovery of evidence to interpretation and solution.

Thus far, I have shown that vision is a vital means by which Loveday gathers evidence and forms insight. Through this acuity, Pirkis endows Loveday with the positivist power of solving crimes and mysteries. References to vision also provide a structure for the detective plot as they convey the connections between vital items of evidence and moments of discovery and cogitation. In the following section of Chapter One, I argue that Loveday is also portrayed as aware of the social norms that governed women's visibility in nineteenth-century Britain; that is, "the Victorian precept [for the woman] not to make herself visually conspicuous" (Spengler 217). There are subtle references to these mores throughout Pirkis's short stories as evidenced in a close analysis of Pirkis's "The Black Bag Left on a Door-Step," "The Redhill Sisterhood" and "A Princess's Vengeance." The complication of each detective plot is provided by the types of cases Loveday investigates and by the problems that contemporary conceptions and codes of vision present to her performance of detective work.

While Pirkis depicts Loveday as possessing a keen gaze, she also lays Loveday open to the gazes of others and shows that her position as an observer is unstable and mutable (L. Richardson 135). In doing so, Pirkis problematises the relationship between subject and object positions in the visual exchange. This is particularly observable in “The Redhill Sisterhood.” In this story, Loveday is engaged by Inspector Gunning to investigate a “[case] of suspicion” (31). A man called John Murray contacts Scotland Yard because he suspects that the non-denominational Redhill Sisterhood are involved in a series of “country-house robberies” and he suggests to the Inspector that the sisters should be “closely watched, and constant vigilance ... exercised” (32). Loveday is employed because, according to Mr. Dyer, “in cases of mere suspicion, women detectives are more satisfactory than men, for they are less likely to attract attention” (31). His remark is evidence that women in *fin-de-siècle* Britain were deemed less likely to be suspected of detective work than men. Pirkis further develops the mode of observation that Forrester posits in *The Female Detective*, in which ‘G’ averred women’s ability to perform “intimate watching” (4). To Forrester’s suggestion that women attract less attention than men, Pirkis adds self-awareness to representations of the female detective, portraying Loveday as alert to both her status as an embodied observer and the potential that she may be under scrutiny.

In the stories preceding “Redhill,” Loveday’s position as observer is unchallenged. “The Black Bag Left on a Door-Step” is solved through her ability to trace seemingly unrelated objects back to a single culprit. A black bag and the letter it contains, the ‘Reciter’s Treasury,’ and a curate’s costume are attributed to Harry Emmett, jewel thief and expert in adopting disguises. Loveday discovers that Emmett gained admission to Craigen Court, disguised as a curate, and stole Lady Cathrow’s jewels. Similarly, “The Murder at Troyte’s Hill” depicts Loveday’s close scrutiny of interior and exterior *mise en scène*. In both stories, she is unobserved while searching and performing surveillance; either disguised or concealed,

Loveday acquires information through watching without being seen. The embodied nature of vision functions unidirectionally in Loveday's favour.

The *camera obscura* model of vision that predominated throughout the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries posited that sight was an activity in which the observer was divorced from the visible world. It "disembodie[d] vision and sunder[ed] the act of seeing from the physical body of the observer" (Spengler 20). In the process, views were disconnected from their immediate surroundings. By the nineteenth century, however, sight was understood as a corporeal activity and "observation [was] increasingly tied to the body" (Crary 98). Pirkis engages with and relies on this concept in her representation of Loveday's investigation. Vision is a complex "negotiation of dynamic variables" (L. Richardson 128-9) in which Loveday uses her visibility as well as her vision to bring the case, and thereby the narrative, to its conclusion.

When Loveday arrives in Redhill with Inspector Gunning, she and Gunning suspect that a "tall, powerfully-built man" is following them and watching their movements (33). Pirkis depicts a close relationship between location and vision – "one's point of view and what one sees" (L. Richardson 129) – as Loveday develops a series of strategies to conduct investigation whilst remaining unseen by this man. When performing surveillance over the Sisterhood, the narrator describes how

a side-door of one of the shops that stood at the corner of the court ... offer[ed] a post of observation whence she could see without being seen, and here Loveday, shrinking into the shadows, ensconced herself in order to take stock of the little alley and its inhabitants. (34)

Pirkis expresses the contemporary belief that vision is an embodied act as Loveday is shown to be aware that she must remain unseen for her surveillance to be successful. Believing that she is screened from view, Loveday gathers information from the scene and "congratulated herself on her good fortune in having seen so much in such a brief space of time" (35).

However, Pirkis complicates the representation of Loveday's position as observing subject, and her ability to solve the case, by exposing her to surveillance. Whilst watching over the street and its inhabitants from her "sheltered corner," Loveday has been the object of the man's gaze: "here she was, as it were, unearthed in her own ambush" (35).

Loveday's own visual acuity is used to identify the agent of her surveillance. The narrator expresses a positivist belief in Loveday's visual acuity and identification of the man by stating that "there was no possibility for anyone, with so good an eye for outline as Loveday possessed, not to recognize the carriage of the head and shoulders," despite the fact that the man "gave her no time to make minute observations" (35). It is the same man she and Inspector Gunning observed at their arrival in Redhill. Here, the visual exchange functions in two directions and the embodied nature of vision does not work to Loveday's advantage alone. In fact, Pirkis uses it to depict significant obstacles to her investigation. The narrator states that "Loveday's work seemed to bristle with difficulties ... during the whole time she had stood watching those Sisters, that man, from a safe vantage point, had been watching her" (35).

Pirkis further problematises the investigation through Loveday's acquaintance with George White, a man whom she encounters when investigating the Redhill Sisterhood's possible involvement in the "country-house robberies" (32). White approaches her and asks for her professional assistance, claiming that his *fiancée* has been persuaded to join the Sisterhood against her true wishes. White asks for Loveday's assistance in effecting his *fiancée*'s escape. During the conversation, "Loveday stood watching [White]" (39) and this visual reference directs the readers' attention to his appearance, indicating that Loveday is acquiring information. Such references to Loveday's gaze function as 'clues' to her suspicions and intentions. Throughout her encounter with White, glances subtly convey the acquisition of information and White's attempts to manipulate Loveday's perceptions. When

White claims that he is a reporter, “he gave a glance towards his side pocket, from which protruded a small volume of Tennyson’s poems” (37). He deliberately employs his gaze to direct Loveday’s eye toward this object. In turn, Loveday’s gaze directs the reader’s attention. She watches White attempt to use his pocket and “find the space there occupied” by another object (39). While the significance of her observation is withheld, the reference to Loveday’s gaze indicates that she has obtained a significant clue to White’s true identity. Loveday professes to assist White and engages him, as a return favour, to assist her investigation and observe the Sisterhood, telling him of her suspicion that they have her under surveillance.

In reality, the narrator later reveals, Loveday is exploiting the disjunction between appearances and reality. She engages White to “lull the suspicions of [his] gang, and seem to walk into their trap” (45). The narrator states that “Loveday, from the window, watched [White] ... Was it her fancy or did there pass a swift, furtive glance of recognition between him and the [man]?” (42). This look subtly implies that White is associated with the man watching her. It redirects the reader’s attention away from the Sisterhood, toward White and his associates, and suggests that Loveday has become suspicious of White. These references to Loveday’s vision are clues to her control of the case and, thereby, her dominance over the detective plot.

Loveday is a “surveilling woman” and this visual agency challenges nineteenth-century expectations of femininity (E. Miller 52). Miller argues that Loveday “combines a professional skill understood in her time as male with opportunities to be invisible made possible by her gender and class” (E. Miller 48). While the intersection of class and gender in Pirkis’s writing merits critical inquiry, I am chiefly interested in the ways in which Pirkis depicts Loveday as able to become invisible through her familiarity with nineteenth-century conceptions of vision. Pirkis creates narrative possibilities for Loveday to perform detective

work through this visual code. In her final explanation of “The Redhill Sisterhood,” Loveday explains to Mr. Dyer that White and John Murray have colluded to incriminate the Sisterhood as a cover for their commission of the country-house thefts. Loveday reveals that she suspected George White and his confederates all along and watched over them whilst pretending to survey the Sisterhood and professing a need for White’s assistance. Engaging White was a strategy to deflect attention from her true suspicions. Thus, Pirkis analogises Loveday’s control of the investigation as her scrutiny. Loveday’s status as an embodied observer is crucial to this depiction. The proximity to White, gained through her professed engagement of his aid, enables her to obtain material evidence and insight into the series of thefts. At the conclusion of the case, Loveday reveals that when conversing with White, she saw that the object in his pocket was “a soft coil of electric fuse” (45). This evidence enabled her to connect him to the only electric-lit house in the district: North Cape. Thus, Loveday deduces that this is the next house to be targeted by the gang of thieves, and she advises Inspector Gunning accordingly. Loveday informs Dyer that “I saw by the persistent way in which Wootten Hall was forced on my notice that it was wished to fix my suspicions there. I accordingly did to all appearance” (45). This appearance is given to Loveday’s “spies” (45) and to the readers. Yet, as I have shown, Pirkis leaves textual ‘clues’ to Loveday’s insights and strategy through visual metaphors and allusions.

“A Princess’s Vengeance” is another story replete with looks that convey significant information. In this case, Loveday is employed by Major Druce to investigate the disappearance of Lucie, amanuensis to his mother, because the police at Scotland Yard have “as good as dropped [the case]” (46). Several circumstances make the case unusual: “[Lucie] had taken no luggage—not so much as a hand-bag—with her. Nothing, beyond her coat and hat, has disappeared from her wardrobe”; a photograph of the missing girl has been stolen; and the Major “appears confident that a crime of some sort has been committed” (47).

Loveday agrees to investigate the disappearance and immediately embarks upon observation and surveillance in the Druce household from which Lucie disappeared.

Loveday instructs Major Druce to ensconce her in “some quiet corner, where I can see without being seen” (50). Pirkis depicts her as aware that her visibility within the Druce household will compromise her task because it would alert the inhabitants to the presence of a detective. Loveday surveys the drawing room for the duration of an afternoon tea, ensconced in a “quiet nook” (50). This strategy is based on an understanding of vision as an embodied act. Loveday’s surveillance is simultaneously dependent upon her physical presence in the drawing-room and her ‘invisibility.’ The embodied nature of Loveday’s vision is symptomatic of the nineteenth-century understanding of it as a subjective practice which is mediated by an individual’s physiological idiosyncrasies. In her analysis of nineteenth-century American female-detective stories, Spengler argues that successful detectives are those who take their physical and social positions into account (11). Spengler explains that an ignorance of both the embodied nature of vision and “their own involvement in the world they observe” are depicted as “source[s] of error” in nineteenth-century women’s detective plots (9-10). Loveday’s concealment of her body is portrayed as a preventative measure against her identity affecting the progress of the case. Hence, Pirkis demonstrates that the known presence of a detective would alter the suspects’ behaviour and, thus, hinder the investigation.

The position Loveday takes enables her to “command a fair view of both drawing-rooms” (50) and continuously observe its inhabitants without their knowledge. She engages in the type of surveillance and observation that Forrester’s ‘G’ describes as “intimate” (4), inheriting this investigative method from her predecessor. It is ‘intimate’ by two definitions; she is an observer within private, domestic spaces and also watches closely. A particular object of her attention is Mr. Cassimi, whom Major Druce suspects of involvement. Loveday

reassures Druce that she “kept [her] eyes” on him: “I have been studying Mr. Cassimi,” she states (56, 51). The narrator’s description of Cassimi illustrates Loveday’s simultaneous performance of general survey and close analysis, much like the literary critic is required to employ. “Loveday could fancy that [Cassimi’s] black eyes ... would have shown to better advantage beneath a turban or fez’s cap,” the narrator states (50). At the same time, and despite the Major’s desire that she concentrate on Cassimi, “[Loveday’s] eye wandered” amongst the guests (50).

As in “Redhill,” Loveday does not remain ‘invisible’ for the whole story. Pirkis uses the revelation of Loveday’s identity to drive the detective plot to its conclusion. Loveday instructs Major Druce to present her to the assembled company “under [her] own name” (51). While Druce protests that “it would be better to preserve your incognita a little longer” (52), Loveday instructs him thus: “please add my profession, and say that I am here at your request to investigate the circumstances connected with [Lucie’s] disappearance” (52). In contrast to her previous strategy of ‘invisibility,’ Loveday deliberately makes herself conspicuous as a professional female detective. When introduced to Mrs. Druce and Lady Gwynne, she uses their reactions to this revelation as a means of gauging their involvement in the mystery.

In the ensuing interaction, Loveday sees “a glance flash ... from Mrs. Druce to Lady Gwynne, from Lady Gynne to Mrs. Druce, and then ... on the big picture hat lying on the chair” (52). As I have noted previously, this exchange overtly suggests that both women know something of Lucie’s disappearance and that the hat is related to the mystery. The narrator withholds Loveday’s interpretations of this glance; nevertheless, this episode registers the transmission of important information between the ladies, and is intercepted by the detective. The visual exchange functions as a silent form of communication and evidence of relationships between characters and objects. The ‘look’ directs the detective plot as it

leads Loveday to locate and interview the milliner who created Lady Gwynne's hat; this is a significant step forward in the solution of Lucie's disappearance.

The story concludes with a retrospective reconstruction of the events leading up to the disappearance. Loveday discovers that Mrs. Druce, Major Druce's *fiancée*, and Lady Gwynne have arranged Lucie's marriage to the Druce's butler, Lebrun, to remove her from the house and the Major's amorous overtures. The three women also arrange Lucie's employment to Lady Gwynne's French milliner and her removal to Paris. A number of visual exchanges alert Loveday to this situation. She deduces that Lebrun resents the Major's admiration of Lucie: "I never saw a man bestow a look of hatred as he threw at you," Loveday tells the Major; "as I saw that look I said to myself, there is someone ... whom that man hates with a deadly hatred" and this prompts her to "scrutin[s] Lebrun closely" (56). From Lebrun's jealousy, Loveday deduces that he is involved in the case. Furthermore, she notices that he wears a ring on his finger, indicating his betrothal. Likewise, glances between female characters function as clues; when "[Mrs. Druce] and Lady Gynne exchanged glances, and then both simultaneously threw a nervous look at Lady Gynne's hat" (57), Loveday deduces that they are implicated in a plot to remove Lucie from the household. The narrator's initial description of this glance is a clue to Loveday's acquisition of evidence. This instance of Loveday's attention to detail moves the plot forward. The narrator reports that "as [Loveday] had stood waiting to be introduced to Mrs. Druce, [she] had casually read the name of Madame Céline on the lining of the hat" (57). This guides her next step: to interview Madame Céline.

Extant criticism focuses on the female detective's vision as a source of feminine empowerment, whereas this reading of "A Princess's Vengeance" shows that Loveday derives evidence from using her acute vision and from observing others' visual exchanges. Her professionalism as a detective is emphasised in this process. When Loveday reveals her

identity at the afternoon tea, Mrs. Druce is not surprised that Loveday is a female detective, but that a detective is present at all: “I am not accustomed to the presence of detectives in my house,” she states (52). The presence of a detective, not specifically a female one, disrupts Mrs. Druce’s calm reserve and provokes her betrayal of key information. Loveday derives information from observing this reaction; thus, Pirkis depicts surveillance and observation as contingent on contemporary notions of vision which contrast with the detached and monocular *camera obscura*. Pirkis interweaves contemporary understandings of vision into her depiction of Loveday and her investigative methods.

While Loveday does not use her femininity to cause fissures in Mrs. Druce and Lady Gwynne’s calm veneers, her sex is still an issue in this story because “the body that produces vision is always a gendered body” (Spengler 81). In nineteenth-century Britain, a woman’s visibility was associated with sexuality and her presence in public space was understood to advertise sexual availability, thereby compromising her respectability (Rosenman 37). Ellen Bayuk-Rosenman argues that nineteenth-century Britain was a “society which called prostitutes ‘public women’” and this nomenclature belies a latent belief that a woman’s appearance on the street was equated with her “cast[ing] off the sheltering modesty of domestic space” and “tak[ing] on contaminating sexual meanings” (36-7). Women’s access to public space was limited by this ideology. Through her depiction of Loveday’s embodied observation, Pirkis communicates nineteenth-century behavioural codes regarding visibility. The detective plot requires that Loveday remain ‘invisible’ to avoid arousing suspicion; at the same time, Victorian sociological codes would associate her visibility with impropriety. Thus, Pirkis expresses contemporary social mores by analogising them as obstacles to investigation. Vision provides Pirkis with a vocabulary and literary tool for engaging with these social concerns. Moreover, by allowing her protagonist to control her own visibility,

Pirkis subtly suggests that Loveday maintains authority over the case by a more subtle means than a technique such as first-person narration.

Many stories in *The Experiences of Loveday Brooke* are structured around two main plot strands, or mysteries, that become increasingly intertwined as the *dénouement* approaches. Unlike her male counterparts, Loveday is frequently able to ‘see,’ or perceive, the connections between these strands. This is evident in her identification of Harry Emmett as the jewel thief in “The Black Bag Left On a Door-Step,” as discussed earlier in this chapter. The narrative of Pirkis’s “Drawn Daggers” is also multi-stranded. It opens with a conversation in which Dyer presents two cases to Loveday. Mr. Hawke has received a series of letters with daggers drawn on them, and a valuable necklace has gone missing from his house. Loveday and Dyer closely scrutinise the letters and the daggers drawn thereon; however, there is a subtle difference in their methods. Unlike Dyer, Loveday uses a magnifying glass. This conveys her awareness of the need for enhanced vision; the magnification of small details by the use of the glass indicates their importance as clues to the mystery. Furthermore, Loveday examines the envelopes in which the letters arrived, showing that she analyses all items connected to the case, despite their ostensible insignificance. Close analysis enables Loveday to identify the daggers as heraldic motifs rather than drawings of weapons.

Despite Dyer’s protestations that the missing necklace is an unrelated matter, Loveday considers its connection to the letters and this ultimately leads her to solve the mystery, thus confirming the superiority of her detective skills. Surveillance and first-hand examinations of the Hawke residence aid the formation of Loveday’s insight. Her visual acuity and perceptiveness enable her to “see ... thread[s] of connection” and form “chain[s] of evidence” (Pirkis, “Black” 13; “Daggers” 80). Her ability to interpret material evidence for subtle clues is analogised as a literal reading of it. Loveday consults a book on heraldry from the British

Library when examining Hawke's letters. Pirkis suggests, thereby, that Loveday possesses superior insight into the mystery.

This brings us back to the quotation that opens this chapter. Schelling posited, in 1815, that the essential nature of the material world does not alter, whereas the visual perception of that world is inherently subjective. The evidence which Loveday uses to solve the mystery is available from the crime scene and the letters, and Pirkis constructs the narrative to position Loveday alone as able to interpret it. The necklace was stolen from the guest bedroom where Miss Monroe, the daughter of a close acquaintance of Mr. Hawke, is staying. Miss Monroe's bedroom has already been searched by her guardian and the maid, registering the idea that the visible world is open to the examination of all: "everyone sees more or less the same thing" (Schelling 88). However, they do not elicit evidence from this *mise en scène*. Loveday closely scrutinises Miss Monroe's bedroom and constructs a coherent explanatory narrative of the mystery from fragments of evidence. The objects on display, their arrangement and condition inspire a sudden revelation: "as I stood there, looking at that room, the whole conspiracy pieced itself together, and became plain to me," Loveday states (68). Hence, her knowledge of the case is "piecework," as Schelling described (88). In this text, vision has clear epistemic implications. Visual scrutiny enables Loveday to literally 'see' the link between each element of the story. Her cognitive insight into the relationship between outwardly unconnected objects, persons and events, is formed through physiological sight.

The narrative structure of "Drawn Daggers" emphasises Loveday's superior intellect. At the conclusion of the story, she describes the events which led to the appearance of the letters and disappearance of the necklace. Loveday tells Mr. Hawke that "I have to thank those 'drawn daggers' ... for having, in the first instance, put me on the right track" (67). Pirkis uses Loveday's examination of the letters as the basis for the detective plot and to

propel Loveday's investigation toward its solution. Loveday's researches confirm that the heraldic motifs on the letters are coded messages sent between Miss Monroe and her maid, who collaborate to arrange Miss Monroe's secret elopement. The necklace was sold to fund her departure. This explanation forms the *dénouement* of the detective plot, emphasising the idea that Loveday alone could interpret the evidence available for all to see. There are further references to this idea in "The Ghost of Fountain Lane" where detective Mr. Clampe only "begin[s] to see" how a fraud was committed when Loveday explains it to him at the end of the story (83). Through the narrative she constructs from material and verbal evidence, Clampe and the readers alike are brought to 'see' the nature of the mystery and Loveday's methods of investigation.

Pirkis uses the vocabulary provided by nineteenth-century discourses on vision to drive the detective plot and convey Loveday's investigative skills. In doing so, she provides an alternative to the dominant narratives of female experience in Victorian literature. The heroines of nineteenth-century literature typically follow a romance plot, exiting this plot only to marry and "enter the domestic sphere"; their social statuses and narrative fates are determined by their relationships with male characters (Young, *Culture* 119). As she is a detective, Loveday's independent, professional activities forge a very different path across private and public spaces.

Praising Loveday and her investigative abilities, Mr. Dyer states that "she has the faculty – so rare among women – of carrying out orders to the very letter" (3). However, Loveday frequently challenges his authority. In "The Murder at Troyte's Hill," for example, Inspector Griffiths desires "[Loveday's] sharp wits at work inside the house" and tells her that "what [Scotland Yard] want you to do is to go straight into the house ... and find out what's going on [in] there" (15; 19). Instead, Loveday complements her search of the interior with thorough examination of the grounds where she discovers vital evidence. By exercising

her gaze within and outside of the house, Loveday symbolically refuses to accept Griffiths's control of the detective plot. Since the narrator follows her search for evidence, these visual acts determine the trajectory of the case and counter the Victorian stereotype of the "oppressed and submissive Victorian woman" (Slung, *Loveday* xi). Loveday is similarly instructed to perform surveillance in "The Redhill Sisterhood" and her final explanation of the case to Mr. Dyer reveals that she suspected George White and his confederates all along, and she watched over them whilst pretending to survey the Sisterhood. Pirkis conveys her control of the investigation through an analogy between Loveday's acts of scrutiny – that is, developments in the investigation – and the forward progression of the detective plot.

Thus, Loveday's vision represents more than woman's appropriation of male power, as Kestner suggests. It signals Pirkis's participation in a tradition of depicting women with keen vision and analytical skills: Hayward's Mrs. Paschal and Forrester's 'G.' Pirkis depicts Loveday's use of vision as the means of identifying and scrutinising evidence. Each item of evidence leads Loveday to the next clue, forming the narrative structure of the detective plot. Pirkis uses contemporary understandings of human vision to structure the plot around Loveday's detective agency, rather than a pursuit of romance or marriage. Loveday's keen gaze and examination of evidence keep the reader's attention fixed upon her status as a detective and direct the plot from problem, to investigation, and then resolution. In doing so, Pirkis posits a form of detective work that relies on the visible world to yield information and evidence; this visible world includes objects, *mise en scène* and visual exchanges.

The visual field is open to all characters, female and male detectives alike, but not all characters are able to see the connections between events and objects, beyond superficial analysis. Loveday's knowledge is not that of "a detached observer whose quasi-monocular vision functions as a source of objective knowledge" (Spengler 159). Pirkis bases her depiction of Loveday's evidence-gathering in "mobility and exchangeability," unlike the

“stable and fixed relations in the *camera obscura*” (Crary 14). This registers the interest in human vision and its reliability that manifested during the nineteenth century (Flint 1-2).

The embodied form of vision that Loveday pursues, this contemporary understanding of human sight, facilitates the depiction of a detective whose physiological sight is an individual skill unique to her – a physiological and cognitive ability which renders her intellectually capable of resolving crime. Ultimately, Pirkis endorses Loveday’s physiological vision as a means of developing cognitive insight. It is also symbolic of Loveday’s narrative control. By keeping the reader’s gaze focussed on the detective plot, rather than a romance, Pirkis offers a new way of seeing *the fin-de-siècle* female protagonist: as an observer, independent agent and detective. The narrative Pirkis offers prompts me to further question the relationship between social expectations of feminine respectability and the activity required in detective work. How did authors contend with the potential disjunction between expectations that women should avoid being “visually conspicuous” (Spengler 217) with the forays into public space regarded as essential to detective work? Chapter Two considers these questions in a reading of George Sims’s *Dorcas Dene, Detective: Her Life and Adventures*.

Chapter Two

“Dashing Metamorphoses”: Disguise and the Detective Plot in George R. Sims’s *Dorcas Dene: Her Life and Adventures*

[Magdalen] has a natural gift for assuming characters, which I have never seen equalled by a woman; and she has ... trained her talent for disguising herself to the highest pitch. (Collins, *No Name* 186-7)

What sort of a woman was she who brought this action ... a common spy, not a police detective who hunts down criminals in the interest of the law, but a person who devoted herself to obtaining evidence of adultery &c., at £ per week. (“Paulowna” 6)

The detective story is something of a masquerade. Setting false trails for the reader and presenting them with what is not what it might appear, the detective thriller has at its heart duplicity and performance; not only on the part of its characters but the author, too. (Peach 105-6)

Private detective Dorcas Dene, of George R. Sims’s *Dorcas Dene: Her Life and Adventures* (1897), is skilled in the art of disguise and dissimulation. Throughout this collection of short stories, she goes undercover as a parlourmaid, gypsy, street musician, American tourist, and German *Frau*. The authenticity of her appearances relies upon her “chamaeleon-like skills” as an ex-actress (Dzirkalis 253). The calibre of these is evident when the narrator, Mr. Saxon, sees her dressed as a gypsy in “The Haverstock Hill Murder”: “it [is] an astonishing disguise,” he exclaims (185).⁸ By depicting Dorcas disguising her appearance, Sims offers a solution to the obstacles that nineteenth-century conceptions of vision present to detective work – and Dorcas’s investigations specifically. In Chapter One, I argued that human vision and the potential to be seen were conceived as embodied capacities. Accordingly, Dorcas can neither see without being seen, nor appear in public alone without attracting attention. This chapter examines Sims’s depiction of the tension between socio-cultural mores which do not

accept the “visually conspicuous” woman (Spengler 217), with the appearances in public space necessary to investigation.

In this brief introduction to Sims’s *Dorcas Dene* stories, it is already evident that the author had an interest in the socio-cultural climate of *fin-de-siècle* Britain: namely, the ways in which gender ideology was changing the reception of women in public and private spaces. An overview of Sims’s work also reveals a keen interest in the sights, conditions and experiences of people living on London’s streets in the late-nineteenth century. In 1896, a series of “biographical sketches” of famous authors and public figures was published by Spottiswoode & Co. Called *Pen, Pencil, Baton and Mask*, compiled by the interviewer Helen C. Black. In the note to the text, Black writes that many of the “biographical sketches” in this work had never been published, whereas some had “r[u]n as a series in *Lloyd’s Weekly*” and others in the *World, Black and White, The Sketch, The Queen, St. Paul’s, and The National Press Agency*. Sims was one of the writers interviewed therein, and Black’s sketch reveals a dramatist and author of short stories: a highly successful practitioner of “slum journalism” (Dzirkalis 47-8) who, nevertheless, described himself as “ha[ving] no genius – only wishes he had” (Black 92).

Black reports that Sims described himself as:

A humdrum, old-fashioned, quiet individual, who has met with no adventures: never was in a railway accident, never wrecked at sea, and the only romance that he ever experienced was when he was once pitched out of his trap and alighted on his head, and even then he was not injured enough to be in any way interesting. (92)

Despite this modesty, Sims was the author of many successful works of social inquiry and criticism, such as his first book *The Social Kaleidoscope*. Published in 1881, it sold 30,000 copies in its first year (Black 94). This text resulted from Sims’s professed determination to “study life and character in all its phases among the poor, visiting workhouses, slums, casual wards, and every place where he could sound to the depths the inner world of sorrowing

humanity” (Black 94). The graphic depiction of the social conditions of the British poor and working classes made “[Sims’s] name ... a household word in the East End of London, as elsewhere” (Black 94). His work resulted in the establishment of a Royal Commission to investigate the problems he identified (Kemp, Mitchell and Trotter n.p.).

This success came after thirteen years of rejections from publishers, and a small column in the *Weekly Dispatch* entitled “Waifs and Strays” (Black 94). Dzirkalis argues that Sims’s work on London’s social conditions registers a parallel between the performance of social investigation and detection; as a social investigator, Sims “shed light on the mysteries of the metropolis” by “collecting clues from the terrifying yet compelling urban landscape” and making deductions from his observations to “explain some of the city’s more troubling phenomena” (Dzirkalis 226). This method closely resembles the detective process depicted in his *Dorcas Dene* narratives.

It cannot be said that Sims only produced serious works of social critique. Over his writing career, he also produced theatre reviews, poetry, and dramas such as *Lights O’London*. First performed in 1881, this is reported to have grossed £72,000 by 1894 (Kemp, Mitchell and Trotter n.p.). His short fiction includes two collections of stories featuring detective Dorcas Dene; the first was published in 1897 and the second, in 1898. The second volume of these stories, while I do not analyse it in this thesis, illustrates the popularity of his protagonist (M. Sims, “George” 178). While Pirkis’s Loveday Brooke and Meade’s Florence Cusack stories were published in periodicals, Sims’s stories appeared only as collections. Each of Dorcas’s cases in the volume comprises multiple chapters; the first four cases span two chapters each, and the final story extends over three.

In this chapter, my discussion of these stories utilises the concept of disguise. Like vision, it is an inherently multifaceted term and Sims represents it as performing three functions. Disguise involves the concealment of Dorcas’s identity through sartorial alteration,

and the exploitation of the behaviours expected of women (Dzirkalis 53). In addition to the alteration of her appearance, Dorcas is shown to engage in the 'disguise' of pertinent facts in her investigations with the purpose of restoring social equilibrium. The literal and figurative uses of disguise have a final complement within the narrative: disguise as a metafictional technique. Sims registers the complex process of creating a female detective by depicting Dorcas in the active construction of alternative identities and by endowing her with awareness that socio-cultural expectations of femininity may hinder her detective agency.

There is a history of depicting disguise in Sensation Fiction and detective stories in the mid-to-late-nineteenth century and this informs my analysis of Sims's collection. By beginning this chapter with a brief history of disguise and its function within plots of investigation, I show that it is a means of representing investigative techniques and negotiating female identities. The fiction of Wilkie Collins is particularly significant in this history. In Collins's *No Name* (1864), protagonist Magdalen Vanstone is orphaned and disinherited by law. The plot is driven by her pursuit of her inheritance and revenge upon the man whom she regards as its wrongful recipient, Noel Vanstone. Collins portrays Magdalen's ability to alter her appearance and conceal her identity as crucial to her project. As Captain Wragge notes in the epigraph to this chapter, Magdalen's abilities are depicted as surpassing the manipulation of her appearance: "[Magdalen] has a natural gift for assuming characters" (Collins 186). She is skilled in using disguises. Throughout the text, disguise becomes associated with duplicity and subterfuge. Collins suggests that it requires the assumption of the voice, manners and behaviours of another; it is "an experiment in deception" (187) and a theatrical act. In this portrayal, Collins establishes key notions of disguise in nineteenth-century literature.

Magdalen uses these methods to conceal her identity and obtain access to spaces in which, presenting as Miss Vanstone, she would arouse suspicion. She adopts the guise of her

governess, Miss Garth, and infiltrates Noel Vanstone's household where she observes his interaction with his housekeeper, Mrs Lecount. In this episode, Collins indicates that disguise was inextricably linked to notions of theatricality and duplicity in the popular imagination of mid-nineteenth-century Britain. This has further significance because Magdalen's use of disguise expresses her awareness of others' deceptions, such as when she detects Mrs. Lecount's insincerity: "[Mrs. Lecount] a little overstrained the tone of humility in which she spoke... a little overacted the look of apprehension" (207). The narrator states:

If Magdalen had not seen plainly enough already that it was Mrs. Lecount's habitual practice to decide everything for her master in the first instance, and then to persuade him that he was not acting under his housekeeper's resolution, but under his own – she would have seen it now. (207)

Magdalen's mastery of performance enables her to see beyond the housekeeper's *façade*.

Like Magdalen Vanstone, Sims's Dorcas Dene has a "talent for disguising herself" (Collins 186-7). Dorcas is portrayed as using this talent in her professional capacity. In this, Sims draws on the early female detectives of Hayward's *Revelations of a Lady Detective* and Forrester's *The Female Detective*. Published in the same year as Collins's novel, these collections site the depiction of disguise in the detective plot of professional agents. Unlike Collins's Magdalen, Mrs. Paschal and 'G' are professionals; they are neither amateurs driven by personal gain nor "wom[e]n forced into amateur detection" to seek revenge or to avenge a relative (E. Miller 47). Forrester describes how private detective 'G' develops a guise called "Miss Gladden" to conceal her true identity: "My friends suppose I am a dressmaker," 'G' states in the "Introduction" (2). She uses this alias as "a skeleton-key in opening big doors" and it gives her vital entry to private spaces, such as in "Tenant for Life" (Forrester 35). 'G' enters the Shedleigh household, posing as "Miss Gladden," and eavesdrops and performs surveillance over the inhabitants. Hayward's Mrs. Paschal obtains access to private spaces by similar means. In "Incognita," for example, she goes undercover as a lady's maid in order to

perform surveillance and gather evidence without alerting the subject of her inquiry to her identity as a detective. Hayward shares Collins's depiction of disguise as a theatrical skill. Mrs. Paschal avers that "like an accomplished actress, I could play my part in any drama in which I was instructed to take a part" ("Countess" 19). Also like Collins, Hayward conveys the belief that detection requires even greater skill than acting. Mrs. Paschal describes her investigations as "dramas of real life, not the mimetic representations ... [of] the stage" (19). Thus, Mrs. Paschal uses theatrical skills to execute investigative strategies such as undercover surveillance.

Together, Collins, Forrester, and Hayward establish disguise as a deliberate alteration of the appearance. Their texts show that nineteenth-century culture registered it as a theatrical skill used to manipulate others' perceptions. Moreover, a facility for disguise extends to an awareness of when it is used by others. The *Oxford English Dictionary* definition of the verb 'disguise' also has these associations. It is defined as a process of altering "the guise, or dress and personal appearance ... so as to conceal identity; to conceal the identity of by dressing as some one or in a particular garb" (OED). It is further described as "[changing] the appearance of (anything) so as to mislead or deceive as to it; to exhibit in a false light; to colour; to misrepresent" (OED). These subtle nuances provide Sims with a concept and vocabulary with which to portray Dorcas's investigations and detective methods, whilst simultaneously engaging with contemporary views of duplicity and detection. In "The Diamond Lizard," for instance, Dorcas is criticised by Mr. Charrington for having "come spying" in his household, disguised as a parlourmaid (Sims 107).

My approach to Sims's collection addresses a neglected aspect of nineteenth-century female-detective stories because the extant criticism seldom explores the concept of disguise. One exception is Anna M. Dizrkalis in her dissertation: *Investigating the Female Detective: Gender Paradoxes in Popular British Mystery Fiction, 1864-1930* (2007). Dizrkalis

interrogates the depiction of theatricality in Sims's *Dorcas Dene* stories and argues that Dorcas uses her skills as an ex-actress to pursue professional detection and interpret others' actions (47, 253). Her analysis is based on a comparison of the female detective and other late-nineteenth-century character types: the *flâneur*, New Woman, female social investigator, and male detective, as represented by Sherlock Holmes. Reading Dorcas as a nineteenth-century social investigator, Dzirkalis concludes that the female social investigator and detective both intervene in "the domestic stories of others" (230). This argument suggests that the social service Dorcas delivers represents the legitimisation of female professionalism and detection in British *fin-de-siècle* culture.

Works preceding Dzirkalis's dissertation are less rigorous. In *Sherlock's Sisters* (2003), Kestner claims that female detectives are skilled at donning and identifying disguises. His analysis of this aspect is brief and proceeds from an assumption that women have "expertise in understanding clothing as costume" (20). Kestner merely considers disguise as a talent possessed by *fin-de-siècle* female detectives such as Bodkin's Dora Myrl (1900); he neither investigates the underlying reasons nor implications of this. Likewise, Craig and Cadogan (1986) read theatrical skills as a necessary means of acquiring evidence. Comparing Hayward's Mrs. Paschal and Forrester's 'G' to the perceived archetype of literary detectives, Sherlock Holmes, they conclude that female detectives are represented as more skilled in disguise and performance: "Sherlock Holmes ... and others had no difficulty in altering their distinctive features at will, but their flair for disguise is a pallid affair compared with the dashing metamorphoses of the early lady investigators" (16). Similarly, Slung (1975) acknowledges that nineteenth-century female detectives are "independent and audacious, skilled at disguise, and courageous in the face of danger" (*Crime* xvi), but her analysis does not extend far beyond this statement.

Implicit within this scholarship is an assumption that the sex of the female sleuth naturally disguises her detective agency and facilitates the acquisition of evidence. It is frequently presumed that “to be observant, all a lady detective had to do was to remain silent and be carried along by the authoritarian assumptions of the men in the case ... A female detective would ... be welcomed behind doors closed to her male counterparts” (M. Sims, “Introduction” to *Penguin* xiii). My brief histories of fictional female detectives and Sensation Fiction suggest an alternative line of inquiry. The use of disguise by Magdalen Vanstone, Mrs. Paschal, and ‘G’ suggest that assumptions of feminine delicacy and propriety do not necessarily screen their detective activities from suspicion. If this were so, Mrs. Paschal’s maidservant disguise in “Incognita” would be redundant. Nineteenth-century female detectives frequently conceal their identities through disguise and have the capacity to subtly merge into the background, as critic Michael Sims argues (“Introduction” to *Penguin* xiii). My analysis provides the close analysis of this depiction that is absent from the extant scholarship on female-detective stories.

Dorcas is part of a genealogy of literary women who use disguise and deception to penetrate mysteries, and follow a detective plot. This is illustrated in her investigation of a missing person in “The Council of Four/The Helsham Mystery.” In this case, Dorcas is engaged by Lady Helsham to investigate the disappearance of her son, Lord Helsham. Lady Helsham suspects that “it is a case of *cherchez la femme*,” fearing that he has formed a “disastrous *mésalliance*” with a woman (3). Sims constructs this case to display Dorcas’s discretion; Lady Helsham fears public scandal and is anxious because “the matter has already been guardedly referred to in the gossip column of the society papers” (3). Dorcas uses sartorial disguise to simultaneously prevent the spread of gossip and to “make headway with the case” (Dzirkalis 253).

At the opening of this story, it is evident that Dorcas is skilled in acting and the adoption of sartorial disguises, as the narrator Saxon recalls that:

When I first knew Dorcas Dene she was Dorcas Lester. She came to me with a letter from a theatrical agent, and wanted one of the small parts in a play we were then rehearsing at a West End Theatre. (1)

This recollection depicts the characters as associates of the theatre and establishes that, like Mrs. Paschal and Magdalen Vanstone, Dorcas has theatrical talents to draw upon in her detective activities. Dorcas's most successful role is the part of an "old hag": "everyone talked about her realistic and well-studied impersonation," Saxon recalls (2). Dorcas's past equips her with mastery over methods of representation, and others' perceptions of her identity. Having worked as an actress, she is also conversant in dissemblance and subterfuge, both of which were regarded as "evils" associated with theatre, women's wiles, and detection, in the nineteenth century imagination (Young, "Petticoated" 20). Hence, when Dorcas is required to covertly investigate the relationship between Lord Helsham and an actress called Nella Dalroy, she has the skill required to pose as an actress in the same "great gypsy drama" in which Nella performs (19).

By depicting the candidate for Lord Helsham's *mésalliance* as an actress, Sims shows that Dorcas's theatrical career informs her present skill set. She uses Saxon's connections in the theatre to obtain "the use of [the] stage for her own purposes, disguised as a gypsy super" (19). Dorcas's disguise is a deliberate deception intended to hide her investigation from informants and observers. Her theatrical skills and knowledge of the theatre enable her to penetrate the secrets of the case: she literally and figuratively "get[s] behind the scenes" of the mystery (21). She observes and eavesdrops on conversations between the actresses, telling Saxon that "I was able to watch Miss Dalroy narrowly" and "managed to overhear a little of the conversation" between Nella and her fellow performers (21, 22). This information confirms her hypothesis that Nella is "the lady in the case" (18).

As in Collins's *No Name*, theatrical abilities endow Sims's protagonist with insight into others' performances. Dorcas creates an authentic character, as Saxon acknowledges when she appears in costume without telling him first: "I stared up in astonishment. A dark-skinned old gipsy woman, such as one meets on the racecourses, had come into the room" (17). It takes considerable time before "the truth suddenly flashed upon me," Saxon admits (17). By giving Dorcas knowledge of the dynamics of representation, Sims conveys her awareness of the possible disjunction between appearances and reality. Whereas the audience is convinced by Nella's acting, Dorcas sees beyond the surface of her performance (Dzirkalis 253) and deduces that Nella is veiling the grief, caused her by Lord Helsham's disappearance, in the "tearful scene she was playing" (22). Dorcas concludes that Nella is involved with Lord Helsham, but did not aid his disappearance. Sims leaves a subtle clue as to the reasons for Lord Helsham's disappearance in the description of the background to the case.

Lady Helsham, too, is an ex-actress: "the late Lord Helsham married a young Scotch lady who was a member of a traveling opera troupe" (25-6). This suggests to the reader, as it does to Dorcas, that her actions may also be performances. Lady Helsham's theatrical skills suggest her ability to hide a fraud; Sims's portrayal suggests that it requires a detective with an equal knowledge of performance to penetrate this secret. Despite denying involvement in the case, Lady Helsham knows why her son has disappeared and she is indirectly responsible. As Dorcas has theatrical abilities and is aware of the performative nature of social behaviour, she deduces that Lady Helsham has used own her theatrical skills to conceal "a substitution plot" (Dzirkalis 254). Soon after the birth of Lord Helsham, his father died and the estate was passed down through the male line. Lady Helsham exchanged her daughter with her sister's son to secure the Helsham title, property and income. With his coming-of-age imminent, Lady Helsham reveals the fraud to her son in an attempt to convince him to marry his cousin and legitimise his claim to the property. Outraged, "[Lord Helsham] quitted the house, but he

feared to tell the truth, because he would be giving his mother up to a long term of penal servitude” (37). Lord Helsham perceived that his only choices were perpetuating the fraud, incriminating his mother, or committing suicide. As Dorcas tells Saxon, “his death would allow the title and estates to pass to the rightful owner without the fraud being discovered and the guilty parties punished” (37). Lord Helsham flees as he is afraid to commit suicide and instead seeks refuge at his biological mother’s house; this is the mystery behind his disappearance.

The fraud remains, leaving both Lord and Lady Helsham at risk of criminal charges. Having used sartorial disguise to discover this “skeleton in the Helsham family cupboard” (32), Dorcas resolves the conflict by verbally ‘disguising’ the secret. She stages Lord Helsham’s suicide and facilitates his escape to America with Nella, who is now his *fiancée*. The scandal is ‘disguised,’ as Dorcas describes:

I knew that for the young man’s sake the real Lord Helsham would spare the guilty mother if possible. I persuaded [Lord Helsham] to let me take his watch and clothes. I selected a place as far away from the hiding place of the missing man as possible. (37)

The truth – Lady Helsham’s fraud – is successfully concealed. Saxon demonstrates the success of the plot when he describes having read and believed newspaper reports of Lord Helsham’s ‘suicide’ until Dorcas reveals her methods to him. Lord Helsham and his prospective bride “will be able to live happily” in America; Lady Helsham “has decided to live abroad” in secrecy; and the new Lord Helsham is content to receive title, income and property, provided that he obtains “a written confession from all concerned” (38). Despite the illegality of Dorcas’s actions – she and the new Lord Helsham are, as Saxon identifies, guilty of “compounding a felony” (38) – Sims depicts them as legitimate detective practices. Thereby, he suggests that subterfuge and legally questionable methods are justifiable when they are used to protect upper-class privacy and resolve intra-familial conflict. Being

employed by Lady Helsham, one of the “guilty parties,” Dorcas says, “it would have been unprofessional of me to give them to justice” (38). Dorcas confirms this when she tells Saxon that “no good would have been served by prosecuting [Lady Helsham and her sister]” (38). Rather than undermining her professionalism, deception is depicted as a vital part of Dorcas’s work.

In their work on Victorian crime and criminality, Andrew Maunder and Alice Moore argue that the British upper and middle classes began to feel “overwhelming anxieties ... at the prospect of losing respect and status” in the mid-nineteenth century (7). These anxieties were expressed through narratives of the exposure of family secrets, public scrutiny and scandal in Sensation Fiction, detective fiction and other popular genres. Sims provides social commentary on these class-based issues by depicting Dorcas’s techniques as duplicitous. Dorcas says that “if everybody did the legal thing and the wise thing, there would be very little work left for a lady detective,” indicating that Sims positions the female detective between the law and the resolution of crime within the British upper classes (39). He simultaneously depicts the value placed on privacy and respectability by the aristocracy and questions the cost that Dorcas’s recourse to stratagem exacts on nineteenth-century moral codes.

In the beginning of the collection, Sims constructs a premise that Dorcas, as a private investigator, will respect and maintain her clients’ privacy. The first chapter features a conversation between Saxon and his solicitor, who remains unnamed. The solicitor is also acquainted with Dorcas and tells Saxon that she “has been mixed up in some of the most remarkable cases of the day – cases that sometimes come into court, but which are far more frequently settled in a solicitor’s office” (“Council” 3). The solicitor has engaged Dorcas to investigate Lord Helsham’s disappearance, describing the situation to Saxon thus: “Our own inquiries having failed, I ... decided to place the case in her hands, as it was Lady Helsham’s

earnest desire that no communication should be made to the police” (3-4). Sims introduces Dorcas as a means of resolving mysteries and shielding their subjects from public scrutiny. He reiterates this idea in the following case: “The Diamond Lizard/The Prick of a Pin.”

In this story, a diamond and ruby bracelet, pendant, and lizard-shaped brooch have “mysteriously disappeared from [Mrs. Charrington’s] jewel case” (82). The mystery is constructed as requiring discretion, Dorcas observing that “the matter was a delicate one” (82). Mrs. Charrington is advised by her solicitor to engage a “sleuthing lady”, rather than the police (Craig and Cadogan 23), and this indicates that a private female detective was perceived as being capable of greater discretion than the official forces. As represented in the previous story, “The Helsham Mystery,” the simultaneous investigation and concealment of a case is a complex process. Sims depicts disguise as the means of negotiating these parallel demands.

Dorcas describes “The Diamond Lizard” as “a very curious case” (81) because it involves intra-familial conflict and suspicion. Mrs. Charrington believes that her stepson Claude has stolen and pawned her jewellery because she saw him loitering in her bedchamber; he is also unexpectedly extravagant and reckless with his money, and attempts to conceal his spending from her. Hence, Dorcas is engaged to recover the jewels and “to be sure of [Claude’s] guilt or innocence” (86). Sims endows her with awareness that investigation requires prudence and caution through the depiction of her methods and her sanctioning of Mrs. Charrington’s action. Employing a female detective is “the wisest thing [Mrs. Charrington] could have done” Dorcas tells Saxon (82). “The position would be a terrible one,” she says, should Mrs. Charrington’s fears be confirmed or if a police presence in the Charrington house should alert Claude to her suspicions (86). Disguise is the means of avoiding this ‘terrible’ position and Dorcas’s development of this strategy is informed by, and further explores, the nineteenth-century conceptions of vision I outlined in Chapter One.

As discussed in reference to Pirkis's Loveday Brooke, the female detective's investigations are represented as contingent upon her awareness of "[her] own involvement in the world [she] observe[s]" (Spengler 9-10). In Pirkis's stories, Loveday consciously conceals herself in order to "see without being seen" ("Redhill" 34; "Princess" 50), suggesting that vision is an embodied act and that Loveday must negotiate this contingency when investigating. She cannot: see without being seen; detect without being detected; or acquire information without alerting suspects to her investigative methods and suspicions. Like Loveday, Dorcas's vision is tied to her body (Crary 98) and so her investigation of the disappearance of the jewels depends upon her presence in the Charrington household. Dorcas explicitly describes the necessity of her physical presence when she tells Saxon that "I had to be in the house to make my inquiries, and [Mrs. Charrington] consented that I should come as a parlour-maid" (81). Dorcas must also avoid alerting Claude to her identity as a detective as this would reveal his mother's suspicions. Dorcas colludes with Mrs. Charrington to conceal the mystery from private and public scrutiny: "[Mrs. Charrington] decided, if possible, to be sure of [Claude's] guilt or innocence before letting anyone – even her husband – know of her loss" (86) and "had not yet said anything to the servants" (86, 82). Therefore, Dorcas is able to go undercover as a parlourmaid unbeknownst to the rest of the household. Sims depicts her in the active construction and mediation of her identity as Dorcas avoids suspicion from observers by constructing a familiar image of femininity: the parlourmaid. Thereby, he concomitantly examines nineteenth-century ideas about employer-servant relations, privacy and respectability.

In my analysis of Dorcas's disguise, I draw on Anthea Trodd's approach in *Domestic Crime in the Victorian Novel* (1989) in which she analyses the literary representation of servant-employer relations. Trodd argues that the Victorian middle class was suspicious of domestic staff from the mid-century onward and perceived servants as "internal intruders and

... [potential] publicists to the outside world” (8). Sims engages with the contemporary anxiety that servants represented a threat to the privacy of their employers. Yet, his depiction is more complex than is suggested by Trodd’s dualist concept of “spying servants and spied-upon family” in nineteenth-century literature (McCuskey 360). Through the many connotations of disguise, Sims simultaneously depicts Dorcas as an agent of revelation and concealment.

Sims inherits the depiction of the parlourmaid disguise from Hayward’s *Revelations*, signalling Dorcas’s participation in a tradition of female detectives who have recourse to espionage when gathering evidence and resolving conflict. Hayward twice depicts Mrs. Paschal in disguise. In “The Mysterious Countess” and “Incognita,” she dons the costume and identity of a lady’s maid and describes it as “play[ing] the spy” upon her suspects (21; 247). She gathers evidence of her suspects’ guilt without their knowledge and uses it to resolve mysteries. Dorcas is one of many *fin-de-siècle* female detectives to use this investigative method as Pirkis’s Loveday Brooke and Bodkin’s Dora Myrl also go undercover in various disguises. Many of these represent “acceptable occupations for women” (Miller 59-60). In “Drawn Daggers,” Loveday poses as a lady house-decorator. As she states, all that the disguise requires to appear legitimate is that she “walk about [the] rooms with [her] head on one side and a pencil and note-book in [her] hand” (Pirkis 62). Disguise provides Loveday with access to domestic space and avoids arousing the suspicion with which detectives were often depicted as receiving.

Like Loveday, Dorcas disguises her professional identity, agency and intentions. Both characters exploit popular assumptions about female domestic workers in nineteenth-century Britain (M. Sims, “Introduction” to *Penguin* xiii). In her analysis of Pirkis’s collection, Elizabeth Miller describes the servant’s uniform as an ““invisible woman[’s]” costume because an “attitude of ... erasure, toward woman’s labour in the cultural consciousness” of

the nineteenth century (59-60). My analysis is based on this proposition. While idealised images of genteel femininity precluded women from undertaking domestic labour, the middle and upper classes relied on this work to maintain their standards of living (Miller 59). To deal with these irreconcilable demands, employers expected and required that female servants be an invisible presence in the Victorian home, producing a socio-cultural “blind-spot” (Miller 59). The contemporary treatment of female servants is registered through Sims’s choice of disguise. Dorcas becomes ‘invisible’ in the Charrington household when dressed as a parlourmaid due to the near effacement of female domestic labour in nineteenth-century Britain (Miller 59). Dorcas is able to gather evidence through surveillance, eavesdropping and observations of the servants because she is unseen by the Charringtons and unsuspected by the other servants.

Dorcas reports to Saxon that “I have had every opportunity for mixing with the servants and studying them” (87). Her disguise places her on social parity with the servants and enables her to engage in casual conversation. From this, Dorcas concludes that “I don’t believe for a moment that [the servants] are concerned in the matter” (87). She also overhears when the butler “came downstairs with a telegram” from Claude to a restaurant manager: “Reserve window table for two o’clock” (87). The butler’s remarks provide the information Dorcas requires to watch and follow Claude’s movements. Ostensibly idle gossip with the servants provides vital evidence of Claude’s innocence. While usually pressed for money, Claude has recently been seen by his stepmother with “a packet of banknotes” (84). She deems this as evidence that he has “abstracted ... and pawned” her jewellery (85), but through gossip with the footman, Dorcas learns that the banknotes are winnings from gambling. The footman avers that “only last week [Claude] backed a thirty-three to one chance, and won a couple of hundred” (105).

In general, servants do not play significant roles in nineteenth-century fiction; however, they are visible in plots involving crime such as Collins's 1868 novel *The Moonstone* (Trodd 46). Trodd conceptualises a binary between "spying servants and spied-upon family" (McCuskey 360) to explain how contemporary anxieties about the subversive potential of domestic staff were reflected in popular literature. Nineteenth-century crime narratives often depict the upper-classes as mistrustful of their staff and servants as potentially "alien and hostile" threats to their privacy, she claims (Trodd 46). As Mary Elizabeth Braddon writes in her 1862 Sensation novel *Aurora Floyd*,

Your servants listen at your doors, and repeat your spiteful speeches in the kitchen, and watch you while they wait at table, and understand every sarcasm, every innuendo, every look ... Nothing that is done in the parlour is lost upon those quiet, well-behaved watchers from the kitchen. (177-8)

This tension within employer-servant relations represented actual concerns in nineteenth-century Britain as householders were anxious to maintain their privacy from scrutiny and public opinion. Servants were regarded as the weak link in a chain between the family; "through servants' curiosity and gossip, the private affairs of the family become public knowledge: the master's business interests are disclosed, the mistress's confidences broadcast, the daughter's flirtations and son's debts exposed," it was feared (McCuskey 359-60). By dressing Dorcas as a parlourmaid, Sims also engages with these anxieties. Dorcas's investigations reveal intimate knowledge and secrets, symbolising the "mid-Victorian discomfort at the prospect of ... middle-class secrets being exposed to the public gaze" (Maunder and Moore 7). When in the guise of a servant, she represents the concern in nineteenth-century Britain that "private sins" may "become public transgressions" (Holland-Toll 572) through exposure to public scrutiny and opinion; by donning this disguise and going undercover, she also evokes contemporary anxieties about the invasion of privacy by police and private investigators.

By definition, disguise is implicitly linked to duplicity. I have noted that definitions of the term associate it with dissemblance, deception and misrepresentation (OED). In nineteenth-century Britain, it was feared that the police would use these methods when investigating crime and apprehending felons. From the inception of the police force (1829) and its detective division Scotland Yard (1842), the British public were concerned about the extension of police power into domestic life. Plain-clothed detectives, in particular, were linked with “the concept of a spy that was anathema to the English” (Worthington, *Rise* 137). In 1845, the London *Times* reported that “there ... always will be, something repugnant to the English mind in the bare idea of espionage. It smacks too strongly of France and Austria, and the powers it entrusts often to unworthy hands are liable to great abuse” (“Espionage” n.p.). The popular imagination associated the British police with the potential for subversive and mendacious activities, as perceptions of the forces were based on the French model, which was seen as a “spy system” reliant on informants and subterfuge (Worthington, *Rise* 110).

In fiction, detective work was portrayed as a form of espionage. In Forrester’s “Introduction” to *The Female Detective*, ‘G’ describes herself as “a female detective police sp[y]” (2). By conflating these terms, Forrester conveys the contemporary equation of detection with spying. He also demonstrates the implications of this for his protagonist: “society looks upon the companionship of a spy as repulsive,” ‘G’ states (2). This attitude towards detectives, and female detectives especially, persisted into the *fin de siècle* as illustrated by a report of court proceedings from 1895. The London *Times* reported the case “Paulowna Apperley (known as ‘Madame Paul’) vs. Price and Wife” during May and June, 1895. The defendant, Apperley, was accused of owing “money lent” and for “services rendered” (12) and the case was decided in her favour due to a lack of evidence. The initial report of the trial in May 1895 describes her as “a Polish lady, who was formerly employed by Slater’s Detective Agency, and afterwards worked on her own account” (12). This

detective agency was advertised in the *London Times* (1895) as having “a full and efficient staff of male and female representatives” (1). Further references to Apperley’s profession suggest that it was rigorously questioned by the prosecutor and used to cast doubt upon her credibility and moral character. The lawyer for the defence described the plaintiffs as “people of means and position, unlikely, therefore, to resort to dirty tricks,” whereas Apperley was described as “a private detective or spy, and by profession a person whose business it was to deceive others as to her true character” (12). The reportage of this case shows that in the British popular imagination, detective work is understood as a form of spying, subterfuge and dissemblance. As indicated in the epigraph to this chapter, detection was particularly suspicious when practiced by a woman. The second instalment of the trial reports that a solicitor in the Apperley versus Price case asked “What sort of a woman was she ...?” (6). Referring to her credentials as a private detective, he concluded that she was “a clever and unscrupulous female detective and woman of the world” (6).

The Apperley case shows that there are significant parallels between the reception and treatment of female detectives in the fiction and historical actuality of *fin-de-siècle* Britain. Sims references contemporary attitudes toward this figure in his depiction of Dorcas. Like the plainclothes detectives of Scotland Yard and nineteenth-century fiction, such as Doyle’s Sherlock Holmes, Dorcas uses precisely the methods that were feared and perceived as threatening by nineteenth-century Britons. By working undercover, she “conform[s] ... to the concept of a spy that was anathema to the English” as Worthington describes (*Rise* 137).

The uniformed police constables of the early-to-mid nineteenth century were largely employed to deter criminals by their conspicuous presence on London’s streets. Kestner and Knight concur that constables on patrol performed “visible surveillance” as “a constant threat [of arrest and punishment] to wrongdoers” (3; 30). Dressed in plain clothes, however, detectives blended with the general populace and were essentially “invisible to the public

gaze” (Worthington 139).⁹ As she is depicted as a private detective and exhibits the same ability to merge with the population and gather information without alerting suspects, Dorcas resembles the real-life detectives of nineteenth-century Britain. In “The Diamond Lizard,” Sims uses the parlourmaid identity to facilitate and enhance Dorcas’s acquisition of evidence. Through this disguise, he endows her with the “superior knowledge” of servants in Sensation Fiction where, “every detail of household life and the activities of the employer are under their alert scrutiny” (Trodd 47). Dorcas examines intimate, domestic spaces whilst invisible to Charrington’s gaze. For example, “she examine[s] the drawer in which the jewel-case was kept. It lay at the bottom of ... a chest near the bed” and she scrutinises the appearance of “the [bed]sheet which was turned over outside the counterpane,” finding a bloodstain (101, 102). Dorcas also eavesdrops on private conversations between the servants, performs surveillance and closely scrutinises the family. Yet, Sims’s depiction is ambivalent as his representation of disguise also renders Dorcas an agent of concealment. The parlourmaid disguise ensures that Claude Charrington remains unaware that Dorcas is a detective engaged by his mother to investigate her suspicions of him.

The mystery is also kept from public scrutiny. At the *dénouement*, Dorcas reveals her identity and this knowledge to Mr. Charrington. His response reflects the dominant belief in nineteenth-century Britain that servants pose a risk to privacy. He is angered by the detective’s violation of his privacy through subterfuge. Dorcas describes the encounter to Saxon, thus:

[Mr. Charrington] gave me a searching glance and his face changed. ‘This card says “Dorcas Dene, Detective”?’ he exclaimed. ‘But surely – you ... are very like some one I have seen lately!’ ‘I had the pleasure of being your wife’s parlour-maid, Mr. Charrington,’ I replied quietly. ‘You have dared to come spying in my house!’ exclaimed the barrister angrily. (107)

From examining the Charrington's bedchamber and observing the family, Dorcas discovers that Mr. Charrington took the jewellery. Faced with Dorcas's knowledge, Charrington confesses that the jewellery had belonged to his previous mistress. The mistress, now married to a Mr. Rinaldi, persuaded Charrington to pawn the items for her as her husband required the money: "the dodge succeeded two or three times," but the last time Charrington kept the jewellery wrapped in brown paper (109). Thus packaged, the jewels were identical to Mrs. Charrington's birthday gift and she received the lizard brooch in place of an intended present of diamonds and sapphires. Dorcas learns that Charrington took the jewels to have copies made because Mr. Rinaldi threatened him and "talked of law and exposure" (111). As Charrington kept this a secret from his wife, the jewels appeared to her to have been stolen. The seeds of this mystery were sown in the narrative past when Charrington took a mistress while married to his first wife; they flourished when Charrington concealed his indiscretion, submitted to blackmail, and "hesitated to say that a mistake had been made" (111).

Through her discovery, Dorcas realises the potential of both servants and detectives to infiltrate domestic areas and uncover the "private sins" of the British upper-middle classes (Holland-Toll 572). Charrington's anger that Dorcas has infiltrated his house expresses a latent distrust of both servants and detectives; however, it abates when Dorcas explains her intentions. Sims indicates that Dorcas's chief loyalty is to Mrs. Charrington and her wish that the case be resolved in secret. Dorcas informs Mr. Charrington that she intends to do "[her] best to find a means of explaining matters to [his] wife" in a way that will conceal his indiscretions (108). Having used a sartorial disguise to uncover the mystery, Dorcas is depicted using verbal disguise to resolve and hide it. In this, she requires Charrington's collusion and tells him that "I am bound to make an explanation of some kind to [Mrs. Charrington]. I have come to you to know what I shall say" (108). Together, Dorcas and Charrington 'disguise' the truth from Mrs. Charrington.

In her retrospective description of the case at the *dénouement*, Dorcas tells Saxon that “I arranged a story with Mr. Charrington” (112) to explain the mysterious disappearance of the jewellery and allay Mrs. Charrington’s suspicions of Claude. Dorcas protects the family’s privacy and respectability by carefully selecting the information she reveals to each individual, conniving with Charrington to deceive his wife in preference to “mak[ing] her unhappy by telling her the truth” (112). Charrington tells his wife that the items were imitations, and that he secretly took them to have copies made with authentic jewels. By fabricating this story, Dorcas prevents the spread of scandal and further conflict, verbally ‘disguising’ the truth. Unknowingly, Charrington thereby exonerates Claude from suspicion. Dorcas withholds the evidence of his innocence to prevent further conflict; the evidence, Claude’s gambling, would cause further discord as “Mr. Charrington is an irritable man, and inclined to be severe with his son” (83).

Verbal concealments further abound as Dorcas conceals Mrs. Charrington’s suspicions from Claude, deftly negotiating the potential conflict that would arise should he learn of it: “the bare idea that his stepmother could have thought him guilty would have been most painful to him. That is the sort of mistake one can never atone for,” Dorcas states (86). This remark justifies her use of disguise, dissemblance, and her infiltration of the Charrington household. The temporary invasion of privacy functions to resolve familial discord and ensures social equilibrium. Hearing his explanation, Mrs. Charrington tells her husband: “I was afraid there was a thief in the house ... And now – oh, how happy you’ve made me!” (113). Sims shows that detectives, like servants, are privy to intimate details of family life, penetrating the privacy of the Victorian home. However, this does not necessarily result in the exposure of these secrets. Verbal, along with sartorial disguise, becomes a legitimate detective method and means of protection from scandal.

Kayman argues that nineteenth-century female detectives are “not involved in routine activities or . . . with the enforcement of the Law in any statutory sense” (124). Indeed, Dorcas is a private agent in that she is not affiliated with an official bureau of detection. Dorcas’s independence and status as a private agent mean that she may use subterfuge and deception without answering to institutional control or requirements. With freedom from institutional control, Dorcas is depicted as able to use potentially duplicitous methods such as the disguise of the truth. The title ‘private agent’ has a secondary meaning when applied to Dorcas and her contemporaries. Like Mrs. Paschal and ‘G,’ *fin-de-siècle* female sleuths use their agency to investigate confidential matters with discretion, keeping these matters private. In the early stories of the collection, “The Helsham Mystery” and “The Diamond Lizard,” Sims portrays the investigation of interior, private spaces. These texts support Kungl’s claim that that authors of female-detective stories often placed their protagonists in circumstances “involving the household or other specialized women’s *milieus*” (30); although, Sims does not confine Dorcas’s investigations to private space. Subterfuge and deception, analogised as her “career of impersonation” (M. Sims, “George” 179), are located in public spaces in “The Haverstock Hill Murder/The Brown Bear Lamp.”

In this story, Sims uses Dorcas’s theatrical skills to address a variety of social issues (Kungl 2). He depicts her in the guise of a gypsy, rather than an actress portraying a gypsy as in “The Helsham Mystery,” to interrogate expectations of gendered behaviour. In particular, he explores the implications arising when a female detective appears alone in the public spaces of nineteenth-century Britain. This was a society that perceived a gendered division between public and private space. The domestic was considered as “a haven, a private domain opposed to the public sphere of commerce” and women were its “superintendents” (Langland 29; Poovey 10). In contrast, public and professional spaces were perceived as masculine. This ideology, combined with a shortage of professional work accessible to

women, restricted their access to public life and areas (Parsons 5). This was particularly so in the early-to-mid-nineteenth century; by the 1880s and 1890s; women began to enter areas hitherto closed to them. In historical actuality and in fiction, they undertook a variety of roles in public life such as the female shopper, working girl, and New Woman, images of femininity associated with modernity (Parsons 43).

The *fin de siècle* is frequently interpreted as a time of great change, and as a volatile period in which educational, professional and social roles for woman expanded at an unprecedented rate (A. Richardson xxxi). From the passage of the Married Women's Property Acts in 1870 and 1882, which ultimately gave married women the right to own property, to the raising of the age of consent in the Criminal Law Amendment Act of 1885, women's rights were at the forefront of British public consciousness. By the publication of Sims's *Dorcas Dene* stories in 1897, the Woman Question had reached prominence in British culture through campaigns for women's rights to suffrage, property and education (A. Richardson li, xxxviii). Significant changes to women's education had also occurred; by the *fin de siècle*, women were permitted to attend lectures and sit exams at Oxford and Cambridge (Willis 58). According to Dzirkalis, Dorcas embodies this expansion of women's roles (214). She enters a conventionally masculine profession, earns her own income, and performs her work in public and private areas, extending her sphere of influence from the domestic to urban London. Even so, Sims's representation of her also illustrates that limited views of female respectability and women's roles persisted in *fin-de-siècle* ideology, and references a nostalgia for the values and ideals of earlier decades that was felt by opponents of the Woman Question.

Nineteenth-century ideologies that equated visibility with sexual availability, as discussed in Chapter One, still held weight. The dominant social script dictated that women should not make themselves "visually conspicuous" as middle-class notions of respectability

considered that a woman who appeared in public “render[ed] herself the object of visual display” and, thereby, compromised her social respectability (Spengler 217, 213; Rosenman 37). The physical and social mobility of female detectives are hindered by these mores, particularly in view of beliefs that human sight was “tied to the body” (Crary 68, 98). In order to examine crime scenes and trace suspects, the female detective must traverse both private and public space; her physical presence is required for visual examination and scrutiny. Yet, social norms limited women’s agency in public. As a middle-class woman alone in public space, Dorcas would attract attention due to her contravention of expected female behaviour. She confronts these realities throughout the collection, and especially in “The Haverstock Hill Murder.”

“The Haverstock Hill Murder” opens with Saxon’s recollection of a visit to Kempton Park racecourse where he meets Inspector Swanage, of Scotland Yard. They discuss the Inspector’s current suspicions about a shady character, Flash George, who has reappeared at the racecourse after having disappeared following a “big jewel case – £10,000 worth of diamonds stolen” (Sims 175). Swanage confesses to Saxon that “we could never bring [the case] home to him” (175). The conversation also introduces Dorcas’s current case to Saxon and the reader. A woman has been murdered and Flash George was seen in the vicinity of the crime scene: “on the night that Mrs. Hannaford was murdered, Flash George ... was reported to have been seen by an inspector doing his rounds in the neighbourhood,” Swanage reveals (176-7). He tells Saxon that Dorcas, their mutual acquaintance, is investigating the murder. Sims leaves many subtle, yet important, clues in this interaction. He demonstrates that: Dorcas is acquainted with Scotland-Yard detectives; Flash George is crucial to the detective plot; and Dorcas is in command of a case which her male counterparts have not satisfactorily resolved. The police have investigated the murder and arrested Mr. Hannaford (Mrs. Hannaford’s second husband): “everything pointed to the supposition that the result of the

quarrel had been an attack by the husband – possibly in a fit of homicidal mania” (180). This description is given to Saxon by Dorcas, suggesting that she believes the police have a superficial interpretation of the case, even though they have supposedly “thoroughly investigated the affair” (187). Sims’s representations of her beliefs and approach to the case show that it is far more complex than the police suspect. Its resolution requires subterfuge and disguise.

From the beginning, Dorcas assumes a disguise. At Kempton Park, Swanage uses the location of an “old gipsy-looking woman with race cards” to point out Flash George to Saxon (175). Here, Sims’s language recalls to the reader a description of Dorcas in the first chapter as “a dark-skinned old gipsy woman, such as one meets on the racecourses” (“Council” 17). It is a subtle clue to the reader that unbeknownst to Saxon and Swanage, and despite their mutual acquaintance with her, the “gipsy-looking woman” is Dorcas (175). Her masquerade is so effective that neither penetrates her disguise. Sims emphasises Dorcas’s mastery over methods of representation when she later reveals her identity to Saxon: “What! You were that old gipsy woman? ... It was an astonishing disguise,” he exclaims (185). Sims thereby shows that Dorcas has “expertise in understanding clothing as costume or disguise” (Kestner 20) and successfully manipulates others’ perceptions.

The gypsy disguise demonstrates Dorcas’s ability to cross class and racial boundaries. I argue that Sims uses this identity to analogise her negotiation of social space and mores. Sims depicts Dorcas deliberately using the gypsy costume as a masquerade; she seeks to deceive observers, rather than identify with or as a member of a racial group. Hence, I read the gypsy as a tool used to investigate in public space rather than as a representation of the Romani. The choice of this identity is partly based upon Dorcas’s capacity for disguise as described in the first chapter. Saxon recalls that as an actress, Dorcas convincingly played an “old hag” (1). Investigating Lord Helsham’s disappearance in the following chapter, Dorcas

poses as an actress playing a gypsy. In “The Haverstock Hill Murder,” however, there are further valences to her disguise because she uses it to traverse public space without eliciting unwanted attention from observers, or the suspicion of her suspect Flash George.

Sims constructs this case and characterises its suspect as requiring her presence in public areas. Since George is “a gambler, a frequenter of racecourses and certain night-clubs of evil repute” (188), Sims structures the narrative to require that Dorcas create an appearance which will not attract attention when outside of the domestic. Rather than posing in one of the “various acceptable occupations for women” as I previously discussed (E. Miller 59-60), Dorcas uses her theatrical skills to exploit popular perceptions of the gypsy, concealing her detections through sartorial and verbal disguise (Dzirkalis 60). Having “shut the house up,” Dorcas tells Saxon, “[I] gave out that I had gone away, and took, amongst other things, to selling cards and pencils on racecourses” (188-9).

In nineteenth-century Britain and its literature, gypsies were considered as socially marginal figures due to their nomadic existence. From their arrival in Britain during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, gypsies were seen as “mysterious, if often feared, nomads who passed through, peddling their wares and plying their trades” (Bardi 108, Lee 7). They were “accepted and tolerated, if not fully welcomed” in most European societies during the nineteenth century (Lee 9). These understandings disguise Dorcas’s agency as a professional detective, enabling her to approach George on the street without arousing his suspicions. Expectations of gypsy trades also equip her with the tools to record evidence, as Dorcas tells Saxon:

When [George] pulled out that hundred-pound note I was at the rails, and I pushed my cards in between and asked him to buy one. Flash George is a ‘suspected character,’ and quite capable ... of trying to swindle a book-maker. The bookmaker took the precaution to open that note, it being for a hundred pounds and examined it carefully. That enabled me to see the number. I had sharpened

pencils to sell, and with one of them I hastily scribbled down the number of that note. (190)

Dorcas's suspicions of George are confirmed in this episode as she discovers that the banknote has not been in circulation since the death of Mrs. Hannaford's first husband, Charles Drayson. She regards this as suspicious and seeks further opportunities for eavesdropping and surveillance: "I have been following Flash George all the time ... I know where he lives – I know who are his companions," Dorcas tells Saxon (194). These activities also furnish her with vital evidence. Dorcas observes George "me[eting] a man ... outside the Criterion" and she describes how "I was selling wax matches, and followed them up, pestering them" (205). From their conversation, she deduces that George conspired with Drayson to retrieve the proceeds of a previous embezzlement. Dorcas overhears George making plans to meet Drayson and, thus, ambushes their meeting where Drayson is apprehended for the murder and confesses his guilt. Dorcas deduces that Drayson faked his own death, years ago, to avoid incarceration for embezzlement and secretly returned to obtain the proceeds, paying George for his assistance with "that hundred-pound note" (190). While collecting the money, Drayson was disturbed by Mrs. Hannaford and murdered her to conceal his crimes.

Throughout the case, Dorcas is not identified as a detective by her observers. Sims shows that Dorcas has successfully negotiated the means of representation; she changes her appearance sufficiently to prevent two acquaintances and a suspect from recognising her. The gypsy disguise facilitates Dorcas's access to public space, rendering her an unremarkable feature of the urban environment. "Conventionalized notions" (Dzirkalis 60) and perceptions of the female gypsy have disguised her investigation. She adroitly negotiates contemporary notions of female visibility and gendered behavioural codes by deliberately evoking an image of femininity which was seen as unremarkable in public space. As Michael Sims describes,

she is “carried along by the assumptions of the men in the case” (“Introduction” to *Penguin* xiii).

Sims underscores the existence of social boundaries through detective plots which require Dorcas to enter public spaces. Thereby, he suggests that women’s actions are shaped by the social fields in which they are performed (Dzirkalis 60). As an ex-actress and expert in using disguises, Dorcas knows when to perform the roles expected of her as a woman (Dzirkalis 61), and how to exploit these expectations to conceal her investigation. Her knowledge of social boundaries and active construction and mediation of multiple identities suggest a level of independence and autonomy associated with the New Woman. In literature and historical actuality, the New Woman provided alternatives to conventional images of femininity, such as “smoking in public, riding bicycles without escorts, or wearing ‘rational dress’” (Beckson 129). These behaviours suggested independence, self-determination, and the pursuit of equality in socio-cultural, educational, economic, and professional realms (Beckson 129). While Dorcas is not an explicitly New Woman, being married and devoted to her husband, she shares the New Woman’s desire for gender equality within masculine-dominated public *milieux* of the nineteenth-century (Beckson 137). Disguise literalises Sims’s process of representing a character who, like the New Woman, is in control of her own identity. This communicates Sims’s engagement with contemporary notions of femininity and his awareness of their socio-cultural and political determinants.

By altering her appearance, Dorcas determines who can recognise her, and when and where they may do so: she displays mastery over methods of representation and a conscious mediation of how she is received. This also enables Sims to address the complexities of creating an independent, active female protagonist. Dorcas represents the increasing number of women who were appearing in public space and participating in the urban life of *fin-de-siècle* Britain. The complexities caused by her visibility in public space analogically represent

the anxieties provoked by women's increasing independence and professionalism in this period. As Deborah Parsons observes:

Women's legitimate participation in city life was an extremely significant divergence from Victorian conventional belief and acquired a great deal of anxious attention from social commentators, who tended to regard women as becoming overwhelmingly present. (43)

In this context, Sims uses disguise as a metafictional technique to comment on the depiction of a female protagonist. The gypsy facilitates this process due to its history of inconsistent representation in Western literature.

In her work on nineteenth-century depictions of gypsies, Abby Bardi argues that this figure occupies an ambiguous "in-between" status because there is no consensus about the actual origins of the Romani (107).¹⁰ Various hypotheses about their origins have been proposed from the medieval and Renaissance periods onward (Hancock 182). A paucity of primary texts written by this group contributes to making the gypsy the locus for the imaginative reconstruction of identity (Lee 32-3). Ian Hancock summarises the effect of this uncertainty: "the very existence of this nebulous identity ... has contributed to the ease of its manipulation" (182). Authors have drawn on and expanded this identity, creating a "mythical ... stereotype" comprising elements of diverse Romani cultures: "the colorful caravans of the English Romanies, the fiddles of the Hungarian Romungere, the costumes of the Romanian Vlach-Romani women" (Lee 10). Thus, the literary figure is frequently dissociated from the racial and cultural group on which it is based.

A brief history of literary representations of the gypsy show diverse and complex representations in nineteenth-century literature (Bardi 106). Meg Merrilies in Walter Scott's *Guy Mannering* (1815) is portrayed as both mother and leader: "the outsize Gypsy leader [who] helped establish the figure of the androgynous – or masculinized – female Gypsy in nineteenth-century literature" (Nord, *Gypsies* 14). Later in the century, Charlotte Brontë's

Mr. Rochester disguises himself as a gypsy in *Jane Eyre* (1847), perpetuating a tradition of fictional gypsies who traversed the boundary between masculinity and femininity; Brontë's depiction of the gypsy as performance indicates an awareness of the mutability and constructed nature of this figure. In George Eliot's *The Mill on the Floss* (1860), Maggie Tulliver "had been so often told she was like a gypsy, and 'half-wild'" that she determines to "run away and go to the gypsies" because she perceives it as "the only way of escaping opprobrium, and being entirely in harmony with circumstances" (Eliot 104). From sixteenth-century drama to twentieth-century theatre, *commedia dell'arte* actresses have used the gypsy role or disguise to symbolise female emancipation and defiance of conventional gender roles (Radulescu 194). Sims contributes to this tradition by depicting Dorcas as a gypsy in "The Haverstock Hill Murder" and an actress dressed as a gypsy in "The Helsham Mystery," emphasising the construction of identity. Sims uses the gypsy as a representative of female identity and as a signifier of literary construction and to suggest Dorcas's mediation of her own identity. He references the process of representation by having Dorcas consciously employ disguise to facilitate the entry to public spaces where her presence as a lone middle-class woman would be deemed suspicious. She constructs the gypsy guise, an identity that nineteenth-century Britons associated with social liminality and nomadism, to cross social boundaries and appear in spaces regarded as inappropriate for women to enter according to Victorian middle-class ideology.

In *Dorcas Dene: Her Life and Adventures*, Sims uses a vocabulary informed by detection to construct a progressive type of female protagonist: the female detective. Disguise implicitly references the process of creating this figure. This is merely one facet of disguise in this collection, however. It is also a detective method as Dorcas's deliberate alteration of her appearance, for undercover operations, enables her to traverse private and public space. The parlourmaid disguise is the means by which Dorcas obtains access to "private sins" and

private spaces, and it allows her to prevent them from “becom[ing] public transgressions” (Holland-Toll 572). Through sartorial disguise, Sims suggests that Dorcas is an agent of revelation. Through verbal disguise, she is also an agent of discretion. Thus, Sims engages with and resolves contemporary anxieties about employer-servant relations. The gypsy disguise, conversely, gives Dorcas social mobility in public space. While the 1890s provided a “more receptive cultural context” for the female detective than previous decades as “readers were becoming accustomed to seeing women in new professional roles” (Dzirkalis 215), women still attracted notice when entering public life due to pre-existing associations between visibility, sexual availability and impropriety. Sims uses Dorcas’s disguise to express her negotiation of contemporary ideology.

Dorcas is intelligent and autonomous; she is depicted in the active construction and negotiation of her identity. However, Sims does not render her exclusively responsible for mediating her own subjectivity. The narrative perspective and voice temper her agency. In the first story of the collection, Sims introduces the narrator as “Mr. Saxon, the dramatist” (13) and his characterisation references the process of literary construction. Sims superimposes Saxon narrative perspective over *Dorcas Dene: Her Life and Adventures* as he narrates each story. The language, tone and content of Saxon’s narration reference his narrative function. For instance, he describes how “there was only one drawback to the pleasure I felt at being associated with Dorcas Dene in her detective work. I saw that it would be quite impossible for me to avoid reproducing my experiences in some form or other” (40). With Dorcas’s permission, he records her adventures and the stories are narrated in the style of Arthur Conan Doyle’s Sherlock Holmes stories. This style somewhat limits Dorcas’s subjectivity. In making this claim, I offer an alternative to Klein’s argument that Dorcas is “reduced as a detective” because she is assisted by male characters and includes her mother and bulldog Toddlekins in her “council of four” (Klein 63; Sims, “Council” 17). I contend

that Sims's narrative strategies, rather than the details of Dorcas's investigations, reduce the expression of her professionalism.

While Dorcas is depicted in the construction of her own identity, her agency and independence are filtered through Saxon's narration. Saxon directly transcribes his conversations with Dorcas and abides by her "one stipulation, that [he] will use the material in such a way as not to identify any of the cases with the real parties concerned" (41). Absent from the text are claims of veracity, suggesting that Saxon alters details of Dorcas's 'real' adventures and operates in his capacity as a dramatist when recording the stories. Thus, Sims expands women's roles in fiction, challenges societal norms, but shows an inability to break from them absolutely. Sims figuratively 'disguises' Dorcas's independence, autonomy and professionalism by positioning the readers to view her adventures through the lens of masculine perception. Since her autonomy and independence are products of Saxon's dramatisation, Dorcas "exercise[s] power in a way approved for Victorian women, despite the essential public nature of [her] activities" (Holland-Toll 571). Sims suggests that the stories, and Dorcas, are Saxon's fabrications. By thus limiting her agency, Sims assuages anxieties produced by progressive images of femininity, such as the New Woman, and their influences on *fin-de-siècle* British culture. Dorcas is an independent woman of 'private agency,' but only as depicted by Saxon.

As the description of Paulowna Apperley illustrates, female detectives were also viewed with suspicion in the popular press. The solicitor asks "What sort of a woman was she ...?" (6). My discussion of disguise goes some way to answer this question in reference to Apperley's fictional counterpart. The *fin-de-siècle* female detective is a woman who is professionally and publicly successful; she has knowledge of representation and an ability to exploit expectations of femininity to avoid unwanted attention and suspicion. While Sims depicts a protagonist who is "independent and audacious, skilled at disguise, and courageous

in the face of danger” (Slung, *Crime* xvi), the narrative is “something of a masquerade,” as Linden Peach conceptualises (105). Dorcas’s autonomy and independence are ‘disguised’ by Saxon’s narrative authority. She thus becomes an actress in Saxon’s drama, subject to his narrative reconstruction of her ‘adventures.’ Chapter Three takes up the theme of construction as it explores the female detective’s construction of ‘chains of evidence’ and the reasoning behind this method.

Chapter Three

“Wonderful” Intuitions and “Chains of Reasoning”: Reason and Logic in the Detections of Florence Cusack

It is a singular thing, but in my mind coming events cast their shadows before they actually occurred. I invariably had an intuition that such and such a thing would happen before it actually took place. (Hayward, “Countess” 28)

All experience tends to show that woman shines in intuition, man in judgment; that woman is strongest when impelled by emotion, man when impelled by will. (“Mental Differences” 416)

[Female investigators] trade on natural deductive abilities, or on what might be termed a practical application of their never-to-be-doubted “women’s intuition,” this quality eliciting alternate scorn and admiration from colleagues, clients, and criminals alike. (Slung, *Crime* xix)

In William Hayward’s *The Revelations of a Lady Detective* (1864), Mrs. Paschal informs the reader that “I invariably had an intuition that such and such a thing would happen before it actually took place” (28). These intuitions inform her investigative strategies. In the opening story of the collection, “The Mysterious Countess,” Mrs. Paschal bases her decision to follow the Countess through a subterranean passage on “the conviction that [she] should make some important discovery that night” (28). Mrs. Paschal subsequently witnesses the Countess stealing gold ingots from the South Belgrave Bank; thus, Hayward confirms her intuitive powers. These powers are confirmed in “The Nun, the Will, and the Abbess” when Mrs. Paschal determines that Evelyn St. Vincent is a prisoner, not a willing resident, in an abbey. Despite reports of Evelyn’s devoutness, Mrs. Paschal is “impressed with the idea that the

poor girl was the victim of foul play” (150). By basing Mrs. Paschal’s methods on instinct, Hayward attributes the skill of the female detective to her intuition. She gains insight into crimes, offenders, and underlying motives, ostensibly without performing deduction. Given Hayward’s depiction of this early female investigator, it is not surprising that criticism of her descendant – the *fin-de-siècle* female detective – reads intuition as “a major instrument” used by female sleuths (Craig and Cadogan 16).

Beginning this chapter with a close analysis of Hayward’s writing introduces the tradition of perceiving women as emotional and intuitive, and men as logical and rational. Hayward’s characterisation of Mrs. Paschal pivots on a popular notion – or “folk epistemology,” as termed by Miranda Fricker – of ‘female intuition’ which implies that women are non-logical and have inferior rationality to men (235). In this chapter, I argue that this tradition is neither consistent nor unchallenged. I examine the representation of reason and logic, and related gendered discourses in L. T. Meade’s Florence Cusack stories (1899-1901).

Elizabeth Thomasina Meade (1844-1914) is best-known as an author of children’s and popular fiction. She is credited with the inauguration of the girls’ boarding school novel and the genre of girls’ fiction, more generally, through the creation of the girls’ magazine *Atalanta* in 1887. Meade served as editor from its inception until 1898 (Mitchell 11). Due to Meade’s prolific output in this genre, “Books for Girls” had become a “standard category on the lists of British publishers” by the early-twentieth century (Mitchell 1). In a biographical sketch by Helen Black (*Pen, Pencil, Baton and Mask*, 1896), Meade is reported to have deemed *Atalanta* “the greatest idea and achievement of her life” (226). Like her female detective, Florence, Meade is represented in this sketch as a professional woman; however, unlike Florence, Meade is cast as equally devoted to her domestic responsibilities and to her career. Black reports that “as the pressure of other writing became heavier and the children

grew out of babyhood [Meade] found it impossible to be so much away from home, and was unwillingly compelled to give up [editing *Atalanta*]” (226).

Meade pursued both a career as a professional writer and the duties of wife and mother. In Black’s sketch, Meade describes how she moved to London to pursue professional writing in her early twenties, having had her first book published when she was seventeen (*Ashton Moreton*, 1863): “I came up to London ... determined to fight my own battle and to abide by the result. It was at first a great struggle” (Black 225). This struggle resulted in great commercial success as Meade produced at least 250 novels throughout her career (Mitchell 11). As Sally Mitchell describes, Meade was “an extremely prolific plotboiling novelist” whose *oeuvre* encompasses far more than books for girls (11). Mitchell also recognises the significance of Meade’s contribution to the genre of detective fiction, crediting Meade with the creation of the ‘medical mystery’ in her “Stories from the Diary of a Doctor” (11).

The protagonist of this series was both doctor and detective, and solved crimes “through the latest Victorian science” (Chan 64). It was one of six series about scientific detection that Meade wrote for the popular *Strand Magazine* (Chan 61). The success of her stories is illustrated by the fact that Meade’s work held “an almost regular space” in the periodical from 1893 to 1903 and that by the time of their publication, the *Strand* was already selling approximately 300,000 copies per month (Chan 61). The scale of her *oeuvre* in this periodical is only approached by Conan Doyle (Chan 61). Meade also contributed short fiction to journals such as Messrs. Tillotson & Son’s syndicate, the *Sunday Magazine* (Black 227).

Meade’s fiction includes narratives of aristocratic life, “city arab tales” and Sensation Fiction; she wrote of sorcery, the supernatural, and antivivisection (Mitchell 11). Despite the variety within her *oeuvre*, Meade is principally known as a children’s author and current criticism focuses on this genre; however, both Janis Dawson (2009) and Winnie Chan (2008)

have recognised the need to analyse Meade's diverse output. Dawson and Chan emphasise Meade's unconventional and ground-breaking heroines: her villainesses of "keen scientific reasoning," as Chan describes Madame Koluchy, of *The Brotherhood of the Seven Kings*, 1899 (70). Meade's Koluchy is said to be the first female gang leader represented in British fiction and Madame Sara (in *The Sorceress of the Strand*, 1903) is the fictionalisation of a real-life female criminal (Dawson 144). The recent re-publication of *The Sorceress of the Strand* by Broadview Press, edited by Dawson (2016), illustrates the current interest in Meade's work.

In addition to female villains, Meade also created the inverse, a detective, in her Florence Cusack series. The following stories were published in the monthly *Harmsworth London Magazine*: "Mr. Bovey's Unexpected Will" (April 1899); "The Arrest of Captain Vandaleur: How Miss Cusack Discovered his Trick" (July 1899); "A Terrible Railway Ride: The Story of the Man with the False Nose" (July 1900); "The Outside Ledge: a Cablegram Mystery" (October 1900); and "Mrs. Reid's Terror" (October 1901). Another, "The Great Pink Pearl: A Complete Story," was published in January 1902; it has the same narrator, themes and structure as the previous stories, but does not feature Florence.¹¹ The stories were published under the names L. T. Meade and Robert Eustace. Critics have speculated about the identity of Robert Eustace and concur that he was most likely Dr. Eustace Robert Barton, and claim that he advised Meade on the finer medical and scientific points of her Florence Cusack stories and, later, *The Sorceress of the Strand* (Chan 61-2). Eustace would later collaborate with Dorothy Sayers in a similar manner (Slung, *Crime* 70; Chan 69). In accordance with Mike Ashley, who states that "[Meade] did all the writing" (*Storytellers* 201), I consider Meade to be chiefly responsible for characterisation and narrative construction and cite her as the creator of Florence Cusack.

In this series, Meade addresses preconceived notions of women's mental faculties through her portrayal of the methods and abilities of private detective Miss Florence Cusack. The narrator, Dr. Lonsdale, conveys his admiration of her in the first story: "Miss Cusack's intuitions were wonderful," he states ("Cablegram" 205). This suggests that Florence shares Mrs. Paschal's instinctual approach to detection, but this depiction is challenged throughout the series. Florence also performs deductions, uses logic and bases her hypotheses upon verifiable evidence. The representation of reason and intuition bear out Poovey's claim that ideology is "fissured by competing emphases and interests," despite seeming to be complete and coherent (3). In this chapter, I argue that Florence has a complex relationship to historical notions of women's non-rationality, emotionality and intellectual inferiority. She traverses the semantic space between two dominant modes of cognition: reason and intuition.

Intuition is defined as "the immediate apprehension of an object by the mind without the intervention of any reasoning process" (OED). In Western theory and discourse, the qualifiers 'female' or 'feminine' commonly precede the term to describe a gender-specific ability to form insights in an immediate and unanticipated manner; logic and deduction are circumvented. I use the phrases 'female intuition' and 'feminine intuition' interchangeably throughout this chapter to describe what was, in the nineteenth century and even in some discourses today, perceived as a "*female* thought style" (Fricker 235). Intuition is strongly contrasted with reason in Western philosophical discourse. Reason is "the power of the mind to think and form valid judgements by a process of logic; the mental faculty which is used in adapting thought or action" (OED). Intuition plays a particularly prominent role in a long history of association between femaleness and non-rationality in Western philosophical and popular discourses.

I begin my examination of reason and intuition by providing a brief history of the ideological association between femininity and intuition, masculinity and rationality, and its

relation to female-detective stories of the mid-to-late-nineteenth century. From Hayward's depiction of Mrs. Paschal in 1864, to the female detectives of the British *fin de siècle*, writers engage with the assumption that a female investigator would use specifically feminine attributes and abilities to solve crimes and mysteries.

In *Creating the Fictional Female Detective* (2006), Kungl asks why a writer "would ... create a female detective instead of a male, especially in the 1890s, when Holmes-mania was sweeping across England?" (1-2). Kungl's question is especially pertinent to discussions of female rationality because the popularity of the Holmes stories created a culture in which superior detective methods were attributed to a male protagonist. Scientific methods such as Holmesian "observation and deduction" (Doyle, *Scarlet* 33) were thereby associated with masculinity. Holmes is represented as "highly intelligent, ... all-knowing, [and] disciplinary in knowledge" and, so, he becomes both a "man of science" and a "man of action" (Knight 55; M. Sims, "Introduction" to *Witness* xxx). His scientific deduction is seamlessly incorporated into his identity as the foremost detective of his age. Holmes's brand of detection promulgates the historical associations between maleness and rationality. Given this context, how did authors represent the detective methods of a female figure? In answering this question, I analyse representations of intuition and reasoning through the lens of contemporary socio-scientific and popular discourses.

When Florence Cusack appeared in the *Harmsworth Magazine* in the late 1890s, she provided readers with a very different image of the literary detective to the already-popular Sherlock Holmes. The role of detective and the "logic, action, ratiocination, violence, crime, [and] scientific methods" involved in detective work were attributed to men in the *fin-de-siècle* British imagination (Klein 4). In the literature of the period, too, detective work was a masculine domain. The classic detective story requires its protagonist to assume agency: to follow clues; to find and interpret evidence; and to formulate and test hypotheses. Klein

encapsulates the gendering of literary detection when she observes that its defining trope is that “the detective-hero solves crime” (1). In this statement, Klein implicitly allocates this role to a male protagonist. These patterns of representation were shaped by socio-scientific theories regarding gendered mental faculties.

In *The Descent of Man* (1871), Charles Darwin claimed that men are “on average ... considerably taller, heavier, and stronger than woman, with squarer shoulders and more plainly pronounced muscles” (867). In Darwin’s theory, physiological differences are translated into differences in mental abilities. He reasoned that men’s “higher mental faculties” of “observation, reason, invention, [and] imagination” are more fully developed (453, 874). Darwin’s claims fed into the pre-existing belief that men held superior reasoning abilities. This notion is traceable to Aristotle’s *On the Generation of Animals* (350 BCE) in which he states that “woman is as it were an impotent male, for it is through a certain incapacity that the female is female” (Book I, chapter 20). Aristotle suggests that women are deficient in “the principle of soul” and, therefore, possess an inferior form of rationality (Lloyd 112). Aristotle’s claim endured into the seventeenth century when rationalist philosophers debated whether women were rational beings and, consequently, whether the category of “mankind” included them (Lloyd 113). Through this discourse, male judgment became aligned with “objective and universal” reasoning; femininity was dissociated from ratiocinative processes (Jagger 130). Beliefs in women’s inferior rationality were solidified when the Cartesian Man of Reason was accepted as a masculine “character ideal” and the embodiment of “reflective consciousness” during the Renaissance (Lloyd 111). The resultant equation of masculinity and rationality extended to the mid-to-late-nineteenth century where it manifested in socio-scientific, philosophical and medical discourses, as well as in fiction.

The gendering of intuition, emotion and reason were vital points in a complex constellation of ideologies, social structures and political institutions which maintained

patriarchal power throughout the nineteenth century. In 1871, Darwin wrote that “of all the faculties of the human mind ... Reason stands at the summit” (453). He claims that men were naturally endowed with greater powers of reasoning and he implicitly positioned men as natural leaders. Darwin’s socio-scientific argument gave authority to the already perceived superiority of male rationality, legitimising patriarchal rule and its resultant social inequities (A. Richardson xxxviii, xlv). In socio-scientific debates about gendered mental faculties, female intuition was cited as evidence of women’s inferior rationality. This was evident in 1865 when the Female Medical Society proposed to the Council of the College of Surgeons that women should be trained as midwives and doctors to women and children. A writer for *The Lancet* responded, stating that “it may be worth the while of those who take a sincere and sound interest in opening up new fields of female occupation to consider whether they are likely to advance or injure their cause by so absurd a scheme” (“Annotations” 628). The author rejected the Society’s proposition and cited “wonderfully acute intuition” as an admirable quality of “the female mind,” but one that was insufficient for medical practice (628). Two decades later, in 1887, evolutionary biologist and physiologist George Romanes wrote on the “Mental Differences Between Men and Women” in the periodical *The Nineteenth Century*. The title encodes an assumption that biological differences between the sexes translate into intellectual difference. Romanes argues that “on anatomical grounds we should be prepared to expect a marked inferiority of intellectual power” in women because the female brain is, on average, approximately five ounces lighter than the male brain (654-5). Consequently, Romanes continues, “with regard to judgment, I think there can be no real question that the female mind stands considerably below the male” (656). The perceived intellectual inferiority of women was attributed to her physiognomy and emotionality.

Opponents of the late-nineteenth-century woman’s movement used this as evidence against the legitimacy of socio-political equality. In his treatise *Revolted Woman: Past,*

Present, and To Come (1894), author and illustrator Charles G. Harper defines Woman as “the irresponsible creature who cannot reason nor follow an argument to its just conclusion – who cannot control her own emotions” (ix). Fearing that “Emancipated Woman” is “preparing to leap the few remaining barriers of convention,” Harper draws on the history of association between women and non-rationality to strengthen his argument against gender equality (1). Since Woman is emotional, “has no efficient control over her own hysterical being,” and cannot use logic, she merits neither social, nor political, nor professional parity with men (ix). Harper expresses anxieties concerning women’s rights and seeks to delegitimise woman’s claim for equality by arguing that “mentally, [woman] is not so well equipped as man” (24).

Meade subtly comments on such popular assumptions about women’s mental ability through the characterisation of Florence Cusack and Letitia Ransom in “Mr. Bovey’s Unexpected Will.” At the beginning of this story, Mr. Bovey has recently died and left an “extraordinary” will which states that “there are three claimants to [his] property, and that the one whose net body weight is nearest to the weight of these sovereigns is to become the legatee” (260). The fortune is stolen immediately after the successful claimant, Edgar Wimburne, takes possession. Florence learns of the case and resolves to “follow up this business” through her friend Letitia, Wimburne’s *fiancée* (264). Letitia functions as the connection between Florence and the case, their friendship providing additional justification for Florence’s involvement in the investigation. More importantly, Meade uses Letitia to critique contemporary debates about femininity. Letty, as Florence calls her, is “a slender fair-haired girl, looking very little more than a child” and provides a foil for Florence’s “eyes of the darkest blue [and] ... raven-black hair” (260, 259). Aesthetic differences symbolise the differences between their mentalities. When Florence attends the crime scene, she tells Lonsdale that “I have left Letty at home. She is too excited to be of the slightest use” (264).

Letty manifests the hysteria that Harper denigrates as an innately feminine weakness. By distancing her from the investigation and preventing her from assuming detective agency, Meade registers the idea that women are naturally emotional, and consequently less capable of reasoning. Letty signifies feminine emotionality and lack of reasoning. Furthermore, Letty's social and financial statuses are dependent upon those of her *fiancé* and on the outcome of the detective plot. Meade gives Florence the authority to exclude Letty from the investigation, suggesting that conventional femininity would impede the investigation. Florence is the sole female depicted as suited to this task.

Whereas Harper generalises that all women lack rationality, Meade counters this generalisation by depicting Florence as calm and her approach to the case as systematic. Florence's agency is manifested through her professional detective work, whereas Letty is neither professional nor independent. Florence is also responsible for the resolution of the narrative. In "Bovey's Will," Florence "watch[es] and await[s] events" without alerting the perpetrators to her suspicions, and conducts professional transactions with Scotland Yard detectives (265). She pursues the case, and thereby the detective plot, by drawing on her knowledge of human nature and science. Florence also performs scrutiny and analysis of material evidence, and deciphers coded messages.

From the beginning of Meade's series, Florence is depicted as unconventional. Each story is narrated by Dr. Lonsdale in a style similar to Sims's Mr. Saxon and the better-known Watson and Holmes partnership. Lonsdale is Florence's doctor and occasionally assists her investigations; this role gives him the proximity required to relate the events as they occur. Meade uses Lonsdale to deliver the narrative and establish that Florence has credentials as a professional detective. In "Bovey's Will," Lonsdale introduces Florence thus: "Amongst all my patients there were none who excited my sense of curiosity like Miss Florence Cusack" (259). He continues, remarking that:

As one glanced at this handsome girl with her slender figure, her eyes of the darkest blue, her raven-black hair and clear complexion, it was almost impossible to believe that she was a power in the police courts, and highly respected by every detective in Scotland Yard. (259)

In this description, Lonsdale sets up professional detection and feminine signifiers, such as aesthetic beauty, as oppositional. Hence, Meade leaves a subtle clue to the reader that Lonsdale holds the dominant view that detective work is antithetical to ideal femininity. His incredulity also reflects the understanding that detection is a masculine profession. By ascribing this opinion to the narrator, Meade indicates the dominance of this belief in the period and suggests that it shapes perceptions of female sleuths. She also registers the ambivalence of the dominant ideology through Florence's attitude towards detective work. Florence, herself, suggests that detective work challenges contemporary ideals of femininity by requiring physical strength and exposing her to the harsh realities of crime. Detective work involves "the performance of duties at once Herculean and ghastly," she tells Lonsdale (259). When prompted by Lonsdale's inquiry into why she leads this "extraordinary life," though, Florence explains that "to me the life is fraught with the very deepest interest" ("Bovey's" 259). Detective work is rewarding because it provides intellectual stimulation. Furthermore, it provides an important social function as illustrated in "Mrs. Reid's Terror." Florence tells Lonsdale that "it is not a pleasant business, and were Richley not a blackmailer, the vilest of all vile people, nothing would induce me to have anything to do with it" (126). Detective work enables her to prevent the violation of the law and of moral codes. The ambivalence in Florence's attitude manifests the complexity of reconciling nineteenth-century expectations of femininity with perceptions of detective work.

Florence challenges the dominant ideals of nineteenth-century femininity embodied by Letty and the Angel in the House of Victorian culture. As acknowledged earlier, part of this ideology was the gendered distinction between public and private space. This supported

the notion that men and women developed mental faculties appropriate to their social *milieux* (Franklin 212). In an article for philosophical journal *The Monist* (1892), psychologist and logician Christine Ladd Franklin wrote: “it is true that society, as at present constituted, offers two somewhat separate *fields of interest* for men and for women, and that the nature of their conduct is of necessity different by the character of action demanded of them” (212). A writer for *The London Harmsworth Magazine* echoes this view in an article about “Clever Families,” published in March 1899. The anonymous author provides descriptions and photographs of “men who inherit brains” and outlines their achievements (153), suggesting throughout that intellect is a hereditary quality passed through the male line and developed in professional *milieux*. Appearing in the same volume, however, was Florence Cusack.

Through characterisation and narrative structure, Meade’s stories reject the ideal femininity of the Angel in the House and her associated emotionality and domestic responsibilities. Meade replaces these with logic, detective work, and investigation in private and public areas. As essayed in Chapters One and Two in reference to Pirkis’s Loveday Brooke and Sims’s Dorcas Dene, the detective plot is predicated on physical and intellectual activity since each is required for successful investigation: the acquisition of evidence generally requires physical relocation to crime scenes for close observation and tactile analysis; the interpretation of evidence demands ratiocination, and the understanding of past occurrences requires the ability to conceptually relate objects, persons and events. Hence, the detective plot places women in circumstances “calling for rationality, enterprise, daring and empowerment” (Kestner 230) and provides a framework that supports a female protagonist who undertakes these activities.

Young theorises that to be classified as the heroine of a nineteenth-century text, a female protagonist, “must also conform to Victorian novelistic conventions of femininity: she must be domestic, subservient, and dependent, both financially and emotionally” (*Culture*

123-4). There is a significant disparity between these qualities and Florence's professional activities. By writing a woman into the dominant position of the detective plot, Meade precludes Florence from the category of 'heroine' and disrupts the dominant patterns of representing female protagonists in the nineteenth-century. I argue that Meade essays a progressive form of femininity through Florence, challenging the notion that women are "less intelligent, less morally reasoning, [and] more emotional" than men (Parsons 44-5). This reflects the broader instability of social scripts and gender ideologies that manifested during the British *fin de siècle*.

Earlier publications presage Meade's articulation of female experience through the detective narrative. Wilkie Collins explores women's ability to undertake detective work in several of his works including *The Diary of Anne Rodway* (1856), *No Name* (1862) and *The Law and The Lady* (1875). His most explicit exploration of the intersection of gender and investigation occurs in *The Woman in White* (1860) in which Marian Halcombe investigates the history of Sir Percival Glyde on behalf of her half-sister Laura Fairlie. Marian performs surveillance, eavesdrops, and, in a sensational episode similar to the detections of Mrs. Paschal,¹² removes several feminine garments to facilitate espionage. "In my ordinary evening costume, I took up the room of three men at least. In my present dress ... no man could have passed through the narrowest spaces more easily than I," Marian relates (Collins 319). Collins ascribes the agency of a detective to a female character, but one who is emphatically masculine. Marian has "a large, firm masculine mouth and jaw" and "the dark down on her upper lip was almost a moustache" (35). Upon first making her acquaintance, Walter Hartright observes that "her expression – bright, frank and intelligent – appeared ... to be altogether wanting in those feminine attractions of gentleness and pliability" (35). Collins, thus, suggests that the independence and autonomy necessary to Marian's investigative role

are masculine qualities. He indicates that ideal Victorian femininity is opposed to detective work.

The image of female detection Collins provides is markedly less progressive than Meade's *fin-de-siècle* detective. Collins "masculinize[s]" his protagonist before staging her "re-feminization"; when exposed to the elements and lacking the layers of conventional feminine clothing, Marian's investigations are curtailed by illness (Watson 43). Her "deviant body" is thereby re-incorporated into the *status quo* of gender roles and a male character, Walter Hartwright, assumes authority over the investigation (Watson 43). Similarly, Collins depicts the female protagonist of *The Law and the Lady* as capable of detective work. Valeria Macallan discovers that her husband has a secret past; he was tried for the murder of his first wife and a "[Scotch] verdict of Not Proven" was given (100). Valeria determines to prove his innocence and clear his name. Valeria describes how "[my] one object in life [is] ... to show the world, and to show the Scotch Jury, that [my] husband is an innocent man" (105). She assumes an active role in the detective plot by making inquiries, interviewing witnesses, and directing the investigation. Valeria also has narrative authority as Collins uses her first-person narration.

Despite these 'clues' to her independence, Collins endorses a conventional narrative of female intuition through Valeria. Valeria progresses from "one line of discovery to another based upon her subjective responses" to the evidence she acquires (Cavallaro 12). She is guided by her feelings toward the witnesses, rather than by reason and material evidence. Valeria circumvents the official legal channels of investigation. This is shown in Collins's description of her methods. Valeria states that:

I shall make out a list of the witnesses who spoke in my husband's defence. I shall go to those witnesses, and tell them who I am, and what I want. I shall ask all sorts of questions which grave lawyers might think it beneath their dignity to put. I shall be guided, in what I do next, by the answers I receive. (121)

Collins suggests that Valeria does not use rational deduction. Valeria's approach is feminine as it opposes the official legal and juridical channels of investigation and prosecution.

In the period between the publication of Collins's *The Law and the Lady* in the 1860s and Meade's Florence Cusack stories in the 1890s, Britain's ideological landscape altered dramatically. The debate regarding the Woman Question had reached its peak by the 1890s through the campaigns for women's rights to the vote, education and property, associated with first wave feminism. Significant changes to women's opportunities and education occurred such as the admission of women to clinical instruction at London's Royal Free Hospital (1877), the appointment of the first female factory inspectors (1893) and the establishment of the National Union of Women Workers (1895). Change manifested ideologically, too, as shown in discussions of women's intellectual inferiority.

Writing in the early 1890s, Franklin proposes that "the belief in the different quality of men's and of women's minds should follow the whole antiquated machinery of '[mental] faculties' into the limbo of old and worn-out fashions of thought and speech" (211). She suggests that 'female intuition' is a socio-culturally constructed concept, rather than a reflection of women's true attributes. Meade takes a similar position in "The Outside Ledge: A Cablegram Mystery" as her depiction of Florence's investigation challenges the prevailing perception of women's abilities.

From the beginning of the story, Meade emphasises Florence's intellect and detective skills. Florence tells Lonsdale that "the cleverest agents in London have been employed to detect [the frauds], but without result," implying that she is engaged because her male counterparts have failed (201). Unlike Collins's "quasi-detecting figures" (Watson 43), Florence is hired by the police for her professionalism and acumen. Her self-styled reputation as "the most acute and ... successful lady detective in the whole of London" rests upon the outcome of the case ("Bovey's" 259). The story opens with Lonsdale's description of a

conversation he holds with Florence in which she tells him about “Oscar Hamilton, the great financier” (201). Hamilton is “a wealthy businessman” who bases his business deals on “private advices” that he receives about gold crushing in South Africa (201). Recently, Hamilton has sustained significant losses: “a series of frauds ... have been going on during the last two months and are still being perpetrated” (201). When the story commences, Florence has already deduced that Hamilton’s communications have been intercepted. She tells Lonsdale that “a dealer in the same market, a Mr. Gildford... obtains the same advice in detail, and of course either forestalls Mr. Hamilton, or ... discounts the profits by selling exactly the same shares” (202). Florence, in collaboration with Scotland Yard, has observed the stock market and learned that Gildford consistently benefits in each deal in which Hamilton loses. This is the result of observation and deduction, not of intuition.

Extant criticism overlooks this aspect of the text. Kestner claims that nineteenth-century female detectives form “imaginative insight[s]” into crimes and mysteries (27). His argument typifies approaches to women detectives in literary and cultural studies. It is generally agreed that these figures and their methods either express or reinscribe the nineteenth-century feminine ideal by using female intuition to solve crime. Such readings emphasise the use of stereotypically ‘feminine’ attributes and investigations within domestic space. I deem this approach problematic because it is based on the assumption that a female detective will use a traditionally ‘feminine’ thought style in her detective work. The primary texts do not consistently support this reading. Meade’s metaphorical language, such as her description of Florence’s “chains of reasoning” (“Cablegram” 206), prompt my deviation from the dominant critical tradition.

In their analysis of “The Outside Ledge,” Craig and Cadogan state that “Florence unravels the problem ... with keen logical deduction,” but they contradict this idea by concluding that Florence has well-developed intuition (31). This is symptomatic of the

ambivalent references to intuition in this story. Like much feminist criticism of female detective stories, Craig and Cadogan propose that female authors of female detectives reinscribe conventionally feminine attributes as empowering tools of investigation.¹³ By rewriting the dominant script, authors portray knowledge of the domestic sphere and human nature as valuable sources of information and the means of penetrating otherwise inscrutable mysteries (Kungl, *Creating* 85). By this reasoning, Craig and Cadogan and Kungl conclude that Meade reinscribes feminine attributes. I offer an alternative interpretation. I argue that Meade raises assumptions of female intuition through Lonsdale's narration and undercuts them through her depiction of Florence's methods.

In "The Outside Ledge," Lonsdale regards Florence's suspicion of Gildford as spontaneous and intuitive. In this portrayal, her methods resemble those of Edgar Allan Poe's Chevalier C. Auguste Dupin, a detective well-known for his astonishing insights. In "The Murders in the Rue Morgue," the narrator describes Dupin as an analyst who "exhibit[s] in his solutions ... a degree of *acumen* which appears to the ordinary apprehension preternatural" (105). Dupin's results have "[an] air of intuition" and are so intricate that they seem to circumvent any inferential pathway, but in reality, they are "brought about by the very soul and essence of method" ("Morgue" 105). His results are based on logic and science as he closely scrutinises crime scenes "with a minuteness of attention" ("Morgue" 119), performs "ratiocination[s]," theorises about mathematical probability and displays scientific knowledge about the decomposition of corpses ("Rogêt" 155). Building on Poe's representation of ratiocination, Conan Doyle endows Holmes with highly-developed skills in "observation and deduction" to the effect that he "can distinguish at a glance the ash of any known brand of either cigar or of tobacco" (*Scarlet* 33). Watson avers that Holmes's deductions are "swift as intuitions," but he swiftly adds that they are "always founded on a logical basis" ("Speckled" 258). Dupin and Holmes have emphatically logical and scientific

methods and, thereby, promulgate existing beliefs about gendered mental faculties. Their rationality is bolstered by overt rejections of intuition which is thereby reduced, in both Poe's and Doyle's writing, to a mere appearance.

Meade signals Florence's belonging to a tradition of literary detectives by veiling Florence's logic in the garb of intuition. This appearance is given because her hypotheses are delivered without explicit explanation of inferential pathways. Just as Dupin's conclusions have the appearance of spontaneity and intuitiveness, so do Florence's deductions. Thus, Lonsdale's belief is the result of his ignorance rather than being a reflection of the basis of Florence's thought processes. When Florence first describes the case in "The Outside Ledge," she remarks that Lonsdale will assume that there is no cause for investigation and explain Hamilton's financial losses as the result of imprudent gambling, implying that her suspicions have no factual basis: "you will say, of course, that [Hamilton] gambles, and that such gambling is not very scrupulous," she tells Lonsdale (202). By having Florence convey this belief, Meade endows her with awareness that Lonsdale, the voice of the dominant discourse, presumes that her hypothesis is based on intuition.

Meade counters Lonsdale's assumption through Florence's declaration that "I assure you the matter is not at all looked at in that light on the stock exchange" (202). This remark yields many clues to the discourses shaping representations of the female detective. Lonsdale presumes that a woman will use female intuition to penetrate the mystery, whereas Florence is familiar with dealings on the stock exchange and her observations enable her to develop a hypothesis. Hamilton receives his financial advice by telegram and they are "cabled ... in cipher by his confidential agent in South Africa" (202). Florence eliminates the agent from her list of suspects, explaining that "[his] *bona fides* is unquestionable since it is he who profits by Mr. Hamilton's gains" (202). By the same logic, Hamilton's *bona fides* are also unquestionable; he would not sabotage his own dealings by disclosing the cipher, especially

not to a business rival such as Gildford. Florence's hypothesis of Gildford's guilt underpins her strategy to uncover "[the] means absolutely unknown" whereby the information is leaked (202).

Florence's methods involve empirical observation as she engages the police to watch over Gildford's offices when the next "important cable" is expected (202). Lonsdale describes the "extraordinary precautions" adopted:

Two detectives were placed in the house of Mr. Gildford, of course unknown to him – one actually took up his position on the landing outside his door, so that no one could enter by the door without being seen. Another was at the telephone exchange to watch if any message went through that way. (202)

Florence ensures that each avenue of communication is visible. From this, she deduces that if a person intercepted the message on Gildford's behalf, then "it must have been detected either leaving the former office or arriving at the latter" (202). Her method involves the visual scrutiny and surveillance that Pirkis's Loveday Brooke performs, further illustrating the importance of vision as an investigative tool and structuring device in the detective plots of female-detective stories.

Male assistance, via Scotland Yard, appears to indicate a deficiency in Florence's investigative ability. Their presence raises the idea that "with regard to judgment ... the female mind stands considerably below the male," as Romanes claims (656). Proceeding from the assumption that men and women have distinct mental faculties, Romanes argues that "[the female mind] is much more apt to take superficial views of circumstances calling for decision, and also to be guided by less impartiality" (656). Meade acknowledges that these ideas were circulating in *fin-de-siècle* Britain as the presence of the police seems to indicate Florence's lack of professional competence. However, the police do not appear in this story to compensate for an "inferiority of [female] intellectual power" (Romanes 654-5). In contrast to Florence, the police have neither narrative nor detective agency. She employs

them for their observational skills and uses the information they acquire to aid her deductions. As the police are required to meet professional standards, they also convey Florence's high regard for objectivity.

From observing Hamilton's office, Florence deduces that "no one knows the cipher except Mr. Hamilton and his partner, Mr. Le Marchant" because they are the only people present in the office when the telegram arrives (202). As discussed, Hamilton and his agent have unquestionable *bona fides*, and this leaves Le Marchant as the primary suspect. Florence does not perform deduction in the Holmesian style: "the deduction of staggering conclusions from trifling indications" (Sayers 93). Florence neither impresses the reader with an extensive knowledge of chemistry, nor has she written theoretical works on "the Science of Deduction and Analysis" (Doyle, *Scarlet* 23). Her scientific approach involves observation and the systematic application of logic. Each piece of evidence, such as the agent's *bona fides*, is metaphorised as a link in Florence's chain of deduction.

Florence learns "from a very private source" that Le Marchant is "in very great financial difficulties, and in the hands of some money-lenders" (203). This contributes to her hypothesis of his involvement in the frauds. If in debt, Le Marchant would be likely to accept a bribe from Gildford in exchange for passing the information. Florence pursues this suspicion with the assistance of Le Marchant's *fiancée*, Evelyn Dudley. It transpires that Evelyn is Florence's close friend. Evelyn confides to Lonsdale that "she is my best friend ... I lost my mother two years ago, and at that time I do not know what I should have done but for Florence Cusack. She took me to her house and kept me with her for some time" (204-5).

Meade subtly indicates that Florence's involvement in this case is driven by her fondness and sense of responsibility for Evelyn's welfare; their closeness suggests shared feminine sympathy and confidences. The relationship also implies that Florence may have based her suspicion of Le Marchant on her concern for Evelyn. Indeed, Florence tells

Lonsdale that “Evelyn is a dear friend of mine, and if I can prevent it I don’t want her to marry a scoundrel” (203). However, as I have shown, Florence’s suspicions are based on her knowledge of Hamilton’s and Gildford’s business dealings, rather than on her apprehensions about the moral character of Evelyn’s prospective husband.

The friendship with Evelyn provides a pretext for Florence to observe Le Marchant at first hand. She hosts a dinner party, inviting Evelyn, Le Marchant and Lonsdale, where she observes Le Marchant’s character and conduct, and considers her hypothesis. Here, Lonsdale’s role exceeds mere description of the event. Meade uses him to demonstrate that Florence does not allow her affection for Evelyn to cloud her judgment. Florence says to Lonsdale: “I want you to join the party in order that you may meet them and let me know frankly afterwards what you think of [Le Marchant]” (202). Lonsdale subsequently reports that “[Florence] lowered her voice, and said in an emphatic whisper, ‘I have strong reasons for suspecting Mr. Le Marchant . . . for being in the plot’” (203). Florence’s wording clearly refers to ratiocination, but Lonsdale believes that her methods are based on intuition, and attributes her hypothesis to a dislike of Le Marchant: “After all, Miss Cusack’s intuitions were wonderful, and she did not like Henry Le Marchant – nay, more, she suspected him of underhand dealings,” he states (205). He voices the suspicion that Florence’s fondness for Evelyn has affected her judgment of the case. Thus, Meade implies that Lonsdale shares the experiences of an anonymous writer for *The British Medical Journal*: experiences of “woman shin[ing] in intuition, man in judgment” (416). This dualism underpins Lonsdale’s interpretation of Florence’s methods and he presumes that, being female, she would use neither reason nor logic to solve the case. The connotations of Meade’s language invite an alternate interpretation. Florence overtly references her “strong reasons for suspecting Mr. Le Marchant” (203). Here, reason is a term for her justification of her suspicion and a signifier of

ratiocination. Her reasons are the deductions she has performed concerning Le Marchant's motives and opportunity.

In an overt challenge to popular belief, Meade depicts Lonsdale as governed by his emotions. He describes Evelyn's "attractive, bright face" and "tall, dark-eyed" beauty and confesses that "I felt a certain pity for [Evelyn] ... Surely [Florence] must be wrong. I hoped when I saw the young man that I should be able to divert my friend's suspicions into another channel" (203, 205). Lonsdale's sympathy for Evelyn affects his reading of the situation to the extent that he attends the dinner predisposed to find Le Marchant innocent. In contrast, Florence uses the party as an opportunity to assess Le Marchant's character and test her hypothesis in an objective and strategic manner. She gathers evidence which she later describes as links in her "chain of reasoning" (206).

Florence detects "a slight whiff of some peculiar odour" at the dinner table and Lonsdale describes how "at the same moment Le Marchant, who had taken his handkerchief from his pocket, quickly replaced it, and a wave of blood suffused his swarthy cheeks ... His embarrassment was so obvious that none of us could help noticing it" (204). Being a medical doctor, Lonsdale recognises the scent of valerian and doubts Le Marchant's explanation that it was prescribed for a nervous condition: "Valerian is not often ordered for a man of his evidently robust health, and I wondered if he was speaking the truth" (204). Nevertheless, Lonsdale dismisses this as an anomaly. Florence's olfactory and visual acuities are equal to Lonsdale's and, as shown here where she identifies valerian as vital evidence, her interpretive skills are superior. Florence researches the drug in order to gauge its significance and later tells Lonsdale that "I went through every conceivable hypothesis with regard to valerian, but it was not till I looked up its properties in a medical book that the first clue came to me" (206). This episode is a textual clue to the reader that Florence has made a key discovery.

Meade depicts Florence using her visual, aural and olfactory senses throughout the case in a portrayal which challenges Darwin's claim that Man surpasses Woman in "whatever he takes up ... whether requiring deep thought, reason, or imagination, or merely the uses of the senses and hands" (873). Florence resembles another detective in this systematic approach to research. In "The Adventure of the Lion's Mane," Sherlock Holmes investigates a death in which the victim's body is covered with mysterious markings and his dying words are 'the lion's mane.' Holmes has "vague and nebulous" suspicions from the outset that are informed by his "strangely retentive memory for trifles" (1087, 1094). Reading *Out of Doors*, by J. G. Wood, he then learns that the man was the victim of a marine animal with the appearance of a lion's mane. Holmes solves the mystery through memory, and empirical and secondary research. In "The Outside Ledge," Florence's research similarly equips her with the information necessary to intercept the next fraud and solve the case, thereby concluding the narrative. In doing so, she also shares the methods of Loveday Brooke, who uses logic to connect seemingly unrelated events and solve crimes. Loveday speaks of "link[s] in my chain of evidence" (Pirkis, "Black" 13), showing that systematic research and deduction are not merely the preserves of male detectives in this period.

In Chapter One, I discuss the representation of vision and insight in Pirkis's *Loveday Brooke* and I argue that Loveday's knowledge is produced through the systematic observation and examination of evidence. Her method follows a process akin to Schelling's description of knowledge as "piecework": "it must be produced piece by piece in a fragmentary way" (88). Pirkis's narrator metaphorises Loveday's understanding as "thread[s] of connection" and her deductions as "chain[s] of evidence" (Pirkis 13, "Ghost" 80). Meade uses similar metaphors to describe how the links in such a chain comprise the tangible and intangible evidence that Florence, like Loveday, figuratively pieces together as she identifies the connections between events, objects, and persons. The associated vocabulary of piecework, construction, links, and

‘chains of reasoning’ all reference or mimic stereotypically feminine activities such as needlework. I do not suggest that these detectives’ methods are merely expressions of ‘feminine’ occupations. When read in the context of Loveday’s and Florence’s investigations outside of the domestic sphere, the terms implicitly show that female detectives are actively engaged in a process of construction. They piece together information and material evidence in a way that can be followed, or mapped, just as one could observe and follow the construction of a woven fabric or chain. The process is incremental and systematic: each link is dependent upon the previous one and provides a supporting structure for the next. This forms the narrative structure of the detective plot.

Florence gradually acquires knowledge of Le Marchant’s guilt through empirical observation and secondary research. Her success is evidenced when she tells Lonsdale that she found “the first clue” in the medical book (206). Florence discovers that valerian has “a sort of intoxicating, almost maddening effect on cats, so much so that they will search out and follow the smell to the exclusion of any other desire” (206-7). She uses first-hand observation to test her hypothesis that a cat is the missing link in the chain of evidence between the frauds, Le Marchant, and valerian. On the pretence of sending a message from Evelyn, Florence determines that he owns a cat: “I thought all this out, and, being pretty sure that my surmises were correct, I called yesterday on Henry Le Marchant at the office with the express purpose of seeing if there was a cat there” (207). She deduces that Le Marchant has left a trail of valerian between Hamilton’s and Gildford’s offices which his cat will follow, carrying the messages Le Marchant writes to Gildford. The trail literalises the “chain of reasoning” that Florence constructs (206); however, she withholds her explanation of the case until the *dénouement*.

Since Meade keeps Lonsdale in ignorance of Florence’s deductions, for the majority of the story her conclusions have the appearance of intuitions. Lonsdale accompanies

Florence to an office located between those of Hamilton and Gildford “with the greatest curiosity, wondering what could be her plans” (205). Meade, thus, ensures that despite Lonsdale’s narrative authority, Florence retains authority over detection and analogically directs the trajectory of the investigation. Florence’s strategy is revealed through Lonsdale’s description of her actions: ““But what are you going to do?’ I queried, as she proceeded to open the window and peep cautiously out. ‘You will see directly,’ she answered. ‘Keep back and don’t make a noise’” (205). Lonsdale recalls that:

I saw her bend forward, her hand shot out of the window, and with an inconceivably rapid thrust she drew it back. She was now grasping ... a large tabby cat ... Miss Cusack deftly stripped of a leather collar round its neck. A cry of delight broke from her lips as, unfastening a clasp that held an inner flap to the outer leather covering, she drew out a slip of paper. (206)

The note is evidence that Le Marchant has leaked the information to Gildford. It proves that Florence’s hypothesis is correct and is evidence of Florence’s intellectual superiority over her male counterparts. As Florence does not divulge her plans until the end of the story, her capture of the cat is unanticipated by Lonsdale and the readers. Meade conceals the inferential pathway which leads to this point. Florence then explains that “the method employed by Mr. Le Marchant to communicate with Mr. Gildford, which has nonplussed every detective in London, was the very simple one of employing a cat” (207). Florence’s retrospective description of her methods undercuts the prevailing appearance of her intuitiveness. She literally traces the mystery to its source, using a fur boa scented with valerian to lure the cat from the intended path, and intercepts the message.

Meade depicts Florence’s gradual accumulation and analysis of evidence according to contemporary scientific discourse as it was essayed in Herbert Spencer’s *Education: Moral, Physical and Intellectual*. Although it was published in 1861, this text was sufficiently popular to be reprinted numerous times as cheap editions in 1879 and 1880 and remained in

print into the twentieth century (A. Richardson xl-i). Therein, Spencer criticised the present system of “over-education” and offered an alternative rationale for both boys and girls (168). His comments on observation and science express the visual nature of Victorian culture as he argues for the importance of visual and intellectual acuity in the nineteenth-century British imagination. Echoing Schelling’s remark that I discussed in Chapter One, Spencer claimed that “exhaustive observation” is involved in every “great success” (56). He continued thus:

It is not to artists, naturalists, and men of science only, that it is needful; it is not only that the physician depends upon it for the correctness of his diagnosis . . . we may see that the philosopher, also, is fundamentally one who *sees* the fine facts in nature which all recognise when pointed out, but did not before remark. Nothing requires more to be insisted upon than that vivid and complete impressions are all-essential. (56)

I argue that Florence’s investigation, and thus her professional success, is contingent upon performances of acute observation, sensation, and interpretation. Through Spencerian methods of observation, she forms chains of evidence, comprising both tangible and intangible links, and connects them through deduction. Like Pirkis’s Loveday, Florence is endowed with the ability to identify and interpret crucial details which others observe, but do not comprehend. Meade further essays Spencerian theories of observation in “The Arrest of Captain Vandaleur: How Miss Cusack Discovered His Trick.”

In this story, Florence is engaged to investigate a series of frauds committed against a bookmaker. She holds several clues from the very beginning of the narrative. The clues include a cryptic message in the newspapers which reads “No mistake. Sea Foam. Jockey Club” (550). Lonsdale regards this information as useless and states that “one would want second sight to put meaning into words like those” (550). Lonsdale’s comment suggests that female intuition would be a fitting, and perhaps the only, means of decoding this message. Florence’s means of interpretation, however, rely on empiricism and deduction. She connects

the message to other data and forms a chain of deductions leading to the culprit, Captain Vandaleur.

Florence attends the bookmaker's during a horse race attended by Captain Vandaleur, whom she "know[s] ... well in connection with more than one shady affair" (547). While there, Florence gains the information necessary to decipher the message. She overhears that 'Sea Foam' is the name of a horse and smells "a certain scent" which she recognises is a perfume called 'Jockey Club' (554). Hence, she deduces that Vandaleur and his associates use a complex system of communication to swindle the bookmaker. Florence describes how "a certain scent corresponding to a certain horse was sent down through the gas-pipe" to communicate the winning horse to Vandaleur before the race was transmitted to the attendants of the bookmaker's (554). Informed of the winning horse before the race was aired, Vandaleur defrauds the bookmaker and consistently wins large sums of money.

Meade's depiction of this case conveys the superiority of logic and rationality over intuition in the resolution of crime. She equips Florence with objective, scientific practices as further developed in Spencer's *Education*. Spencer argues that "Science makes a constant appeal to individual reason. Its truths are not accepted on authority alone, but all are at liberty to test them" (44). Like Spencer's pupil of science, the detective is required to develop and test hypotheses in his or her pursuit of the truth. Florence's methods are scientific in Spencerian terms, as she does not accept the absolute truth of her deductions until they are tested through visual and other sensory forms of scrutiny. In "The Outside Ledge," for instance, Florence only intercepts the communications and confirms Le Marchant's guilt after observing him at first hand. This narrative structure reflects Spencer's argument that "every step in scientific investigation" should be submitted to and verified by the scientist's judgment before it is accepted as truth (44).

Florence's investigation in "Bovey's Will" illustrates the various sensory forms that this scrutiny takes. Investigating the theft of Wimburne's fortune, Florence initially seems to be driven by instinct, as she informs Lonsdale that "from the very first I feared some such catastrophe as has really taken place" (264). She suspects Wimburne's fellow claimant, Graham: "I have known Mr. Graham for a long time, and – distrusted him. He has passed for a man of position and means, but I believe him to be a mere adventurer" (264). As in "The Outside Ledge," Meade suggests that a personal acquaintance inspires her doubts through Lonsdale's belief that her suspicions stem from an inherent dislike. Meade raises this notion only to dispel it through Florence's subsequent description of her investigations. No longer concealing her evidentiary chain, Florence tells Lonsdale that "three weeks ago a certain investigation took me to Hammersmith in order to trace a stolen necklace. It was necessary that I should go to a small pawnbroker's shop" (264). Using methods akin to those of Sims's Dorcas Dene, Florence disguises herself as "a domestic servant on her evening out" and enters the pawnbroker's where she overhears the proprietor "discussing a matter of the utmost importance" with Graham (265), who states:

In all probability Bovey will die tonight. I may or may not be successful, but in order to insure against loss we must be prepared. It is not safe for me to come here often – look out for advertisement – it will be in the agony columns. (265)

Aural and visual data inform Florence's hypothesis that Graham plans to steal the fortune. This information also dictates her next move and, thereby, directs the detective plot. When eavesdropping on the conversation, Florence learns that Graham will place messages to the pawnbroker in the advertisement pages of the newspaper under the alias Joshua Linklater. This information enables her to monitor their communications. Florence performs textual analysis, closely reading newspapers to obtain further information about Graham's plans. Florence systematically reads the newspapers for messages: "I have been watching for a

similar advertisement in all the dailies,” she informs Lonsdale (260). Florence finds several messages such as a request for “more sand and charcoal dust. Core and mould ready for casting” (259). Lonsdale regards these as “curious words” (260), whereas Florence pieces this data with extant evidence to form a coherent explanation of the crime. Florence tells Lonsdale that “when I heard of Mr. Bovey’s death and read an account of the queer will, it seemed to me that I began to see daylight” (265). This metaphor recalls Loveday Brooke’s formation of insight through visual scrutiny. Meade constructs these circumstances in a way which also mirrors Sherlock Holmes’s research; he reads the agony columns for unusual events and potential cases.¹⁴

As in “The Outside Ledge,” Florence enlists police officers to watch the pawnbroker’s residence, where they observe the cart containing Wimburne’s stolen fortune arrive (266). She tells an inspector that “in order to confirm certain suspicions I wish to search the [pawnbroker’s] house” (266). He demurs on the grounds that the police have already searched the premises, implying that the male police have superior skills: “it’s almost impossible that a mass of gold should be there and be overlooked: every square inch of space has been accounted for” (266). Meade, thus, questions Florence’s deduction and ability to see what Spencer calls the “facts in nature which all recognise when pointed out, but did not before remark” (56). Florence reiterates her determination to conduct the search and emphasises the rational basis of her methods: “I have a reason for what I do, and must visit the pawnbroker’s immediately” (267). Meade references the logical basis of Florence’s detective strategy. The word ‘reason’ provides a subtle clue to Florence’s investigative methods due to its dual meaning. Florence’s reason (that is, her motive) is her hypothesis of Graham’s guilt; it is also the reasoning (the deductive process) by which she reached this theory. It is her justification and her logic; it describes her capacity for ratiocination and the motive underlying her actions. Meade’s dual use of reason shows that she, like Pirkis and

Sims, uses semantic subtleties to construct a detective narrative for the female protagonist, challenging nineteenth-century beliefs about femininity, intuition and ratiocination.

Like Pirkis's Loveday, Florence uses visual scrutiny to acquire evidence and test her hypothesis. Meade demonstrates that Florence, like Loveday, sees beyond superficial appearances, identifying the crucial "facts in nature" which others overlook (Spencer 56). The search does not require the knowledge of domestic life that critics often ascribe to female detectives. For example, Kungl claims that nineteenth-century female sleuths "solved crimes based on their knowledge of the household and through using 'natural' feminine intuition" (diss. 19). She suggests that nineteenth-century British culture perceived women as naturally intuitive, and that this could be cast as an effective investigative method. Kungl owes much to Slung's earlier work in which she foregrounds female detectives' "practical application of their never-to-be-doubted 'women's intuition'" (*Crime* xix). While I value these insights, as they comprise the little work on intuition and deduction in female detective stories, I offer a different reading.

In an endorsement of Spencerian theories of science, Meade depicts Florence making and verifying her observations before acting on her hypothesis. Florence uses her existing chain of evidence to identify crucial areas of interest at the pawnbroker's. Tracing Graham's request for coal dust to the furnace, Florence finds grains of sand and fragments of a wooden mould: "she slowly commenced raking out the ashes with an iron rod, examining them closely and turning them over and over. Two or three white fragments she examined with peculiar care" (267). Florence finds that "considerable heat still radiated from [the furnace]" and deduces that "gold has been melted here, and within a very short time" (267). This indicates to Florence that Graham and the pawnbroker had no time to remove the gold from the premises. Throughout this search, the police inspector and Lonsdale witness Florence's findings and act as foils for her visual and mental acuity. Meade establishes Florence's

superiority in both fields by depicting Florence withholding her deductions from the men: “[Florence] said nothing further, but went back to the ground floor and now commenced a systematic search on her own account” (267). From the inspection of the furnace onward, Lonsdale, and therefore the readers, are ignorant of her deductions. Florence’s explanation of the case is delayed until the *dénouement* and this gives the appearance that she has intuition into the mystery.

Lonsdale provides a potent suggestion of Florence’s intuition when he describes how “Miss Cusack walked at once to the window and flung it open” and relates her remark that “things are exactly as I expected to find them; we can take the gold away with us” (267). It seems that Florence has circumvented the deductive process and displayed an “air of intuition” which Poe terms “a degree of acumen which appears to the ordinary apprehensions preternatural” (“Morgue” 105). Reactions to Florence’s statement confirm this appearance as Lonsdale recalls that “both the inspector and I stared at her in utter amazement” when she informs them that “you are both gazing at it [the gold]” (267, 268). Florence’s intuitiveness is only an appearance, however. She uses scientific knowledge and logic to locate the stolen gold. From her visual examination of the furnace and tactile examination of the golden spheres hanging over the pawnbroker’s shop as symbols of his trade, Florence deduces that the gold has been melted and cast around a plaster mould. The “white fragments” found in the furnace are remnants of the mould (267). She informs Lonsdale that “the lost fortune is hanging outside the house. The gold was melted in the crucible downstairs, and cast as this ball” (268). She deduces that the ball is not solid, exhibiting an ability to translate weight into mass: “if it were [solid], it would not be the size of the other two balls. It has probably been cast around a centre of plaster of Paris to give it the same size as the others” (268). When the inspector “lean[s] out and feel[s] that lower ball,” he exclaims that “it is hot” (268); thus, he confirms Florence’s theory that the gold was recently melted. Through Florence’s discovery

of the gold, and the contrast between her insights and the men's ignorance, Meade counters the idea that "mentally, [woman] is not so well equipped as man" (Harper 24). She exhibits the same level of skill as her male predecessor, Dupin, who uncovers the conspicuous concealment of evidence in "The Purloined Letter." Like Poe's letter, the gold "escape[s] observation by dint of being excessively obvious" (Poe, "Letter" 213).

The story concludes with Florence's explanation of her methods. Thus, the narrative structure displays the deductive basis of her methods, undercutting Lonsdale's belief in her intuitiveness. Meade depicts Florence linking an unusual will, encoded messages, a hot furnace, ash and wooden fragments, in a chain of evidence and using this as the basis for her deduction that the stolen fortune has been melted and cast into the golden ball. This representation directly challenges Harper's observation that women are not capable of ratiocination (ix). Florence's methodology illustrates Franklin's notion that, despite contemporary beliefs in female intuition, women can exercise logic. She wrote that "[a woman] does not fix the price of her straw hats every morning in accordance with the feelings which the hats awaken in her when she first looks at them, but in accordance with the fluctuations on the market" (Franklin 214). Florence is neither governed by her feelings nor her relationships with other characters, as Meade shows her following tangible and intangible evidence. These clues provide a structure for the detective plot; thus, Florence's narrative trajectory is created from a vocabulary of detection.

That each story concludes with the apprehension of the culprit illustrates that Florence is capable and active, as well as ratiocinative. The intuitions and "imaginative insights" that critics identify as archetypal investigative methods of female sleuths (Kestner 27) are not part of her methodology. In Meade's stories, detective work is reliant upon logic and ratiocination. The female detective functions as a vehicle to establish women's rationality in a period when debates were waged over the gendering of mental attributes. Romanes terms

these the “grave questionings” of gender ideology and by the conclusion of his article, he concedes that:

Women are everywhere justifying the hopes of their champions, and disappointing the gloomy vaticinations of their opponents. Their university successes have exceeded the most sanguine anticipations, and such successes as that of Miss Ramsey, at Cambridge this year, is enough to cause grave questionings to believers in the natural and inherent intellectual inferiority of women. (416)

Romanes’s concession bears out Poovey’s claim that although ideology seems to be complete and coherent, it is “fissured by competing emphases and interests” (3). The history of association between women and intuition is seemingly linear and consistent. From Aristotle’s comments to the emergence of the Cartesian Man of Reason, through to nineteenth-century socio-scientific debates, women are discursively attributed innate intuitiveness *in lieu* of ratiocinative abilities. However, such beliefs were reconsidered in the “heightened self-consciousness . . . confusion, uncertainty and [ideological] questioning” of *fin-de-siècle* Britain (A. Richardson xxxi). Gender ideologies and attributes were debated while tertiary education expanded to include women, and women sought work in the public sphere. As Franklin avers in her 1892 article, the belief that men are naturally rational and women are innately intuitive was coming to be seen as “wholly unfounded, and could only have had its origin at a time when the psychology of the working of the human mind was thoroughly misunderstood” (211). Meade participates in the interrogation of this assumption.

Pre-existing beliefs in ‘female intuition,’ women’s emotionality and non-logical thought styles pervade the text through Lonsdale’s narrative voice. In “A Terrible Railway Ride: The Story of the Man with the False Nose,” Lonsdale describes how “with her usual intuition [Florence] observed my glance” (564). As Florence’s chains of inference are withheld until the very end of each story, it initially appears as though Meade endorses the dominant perception of women as intuitive and instinctive. References to Florence’s

intuitiveness, however, remain contained within Lonsdale's opinion. The conclusions of the stories show that Florence is capable of performing deduction. She has "no deficiency in the power of putting this and that together, when this and that are pieces of knowledge which are in [her] possession," as Franklin describes women's intellectual powers (217). Theories are formed in conjunction with visual scrutiny, surveillance, interviewing suspects and textual analysis. These activities are performed in a variety of professional and public *milieux*: business on the stock exchange ("Cablegram"), inheritance ("Bovey's"), horse-racing ("Vandaleur"), and gold smelting ("Bovey's").

Meade's Florence Cusack stories register the dynamic socio-cultural climate of *fin-de-siècle* Britain and its inquiries into gender ideology. Thus, Meade simultaneously acknowledges and counters perceived female intuitiveness. Florence Cusack is highly observant (like Loveday Brooke as established in Chapter One) and alert to the possible disjunction between appearances and reality (as Dorcas Dene is shown to be in Chapter Two). In this text, rationality is represented as a detective skill, rather than a gendered attribute. The rationality of this detective is the 'reason' behind her success: deduction – the formation of her 'chains of reasoning' – makes Florence Cusack potentially, "the most acute and ... successful lady detective in the whole of London" ("Bovey's" 259). She fulfils "the fallacy", so feared by Harper: "what man may do, woman may also do – and more!" (13).

Conclusion

“A Golden Age” for Female Detectives?

In 1900, Bernard Owens wrote that “it is not unlikely that the twentieth century will develop into a kind of Golden Age for women” (79). The article, entitled “Women Who Work,” was published in the *Harmsworth London Magazine*, two months before L. T. Meade’s “The Outside Ledge: A Cablegram Mystery” appeared in this periodical. Florence her fellow *fin-de-siècle* female detectives embodied the professionalism and agency that Owens optimistically anticipates. In “The Outside Ledge,” private detective Florence Cusack unravels a mystery concerning frauds committed on the stock exchange. She uses logical deduction, despite narrator Dr. Lonsdale’s assumptions that, being female, she would use intuition. The representation of Florence’s experiences as a professional woman, like those of C. L. Pirkis’s Loveday Brooke and George Sims’s Dorcas Dene, are articulated through the detective plot. Hence, these characters personify Owens’s contention that twentieth-century women would not depend solely upon marriage for financial stability. The time when “single women had no prospect but domestic service, needle-work or teaching as a means of keeping body and soul together” has also departed and would not return, Owens claims (79). Pirkis, Sims and Meade likewise suggest that this time has passed. They demonstrate this by writing women into the detective plot: an alternative narrative to the romance or marriage plots of Victorian realism.

Loveday, Dorcas, and Florence are evidence that female characters have been given “the most important part to play” in detective fiction, despite Birgitta Berglund’s claim to the

contrary (138). As early as 1864, with the publication of William Hayward's *Revelations of a Lady Detective* and Andrew Forrester's *The Female Detective*, female characters are given prominence and independence through the detective plot. These authors developed the female 'detective agency' essayed by Wilkie Collins in *The Diary of Anne Rodway*, *The Law and the Lady*, and *The Woman in White*, and transformed his amateur sleuths into professionals. Collins's heroines undertake investigation to exonerate a husband or relative, to seek revenge, or because they are "wrongfully suspected or accused of the crime in question" (Slung, *Crime* xx; Berglund 143). In contrast, Hayward's Mrs. Paschal and Forrester's 'G' are given a professional status. Through first-person narration, they describe themselves as "much-dreaded, but little-known people called Female Detectives" and "female detective police spies" (Hayward, "Countess" 18; Forrester, "Introduction" 3).

Like their predecessors of the 1860s, *fin-de-siècle* female detectives symbolically "throw off the mantle of domesticity" (L. Richardson 14) by undertaking professional detective work. Even Dorcas, although she is married, independently conducts investigations in public as well as domestic settings. Pirkis, Sims, and Meade take the key tropes established in the 1860s, and inflect these with the "heightened self-consciousness, ... confusion, uncertainty and [ideological] questioning" of British *fin-de-siècle* culture (A. Richardson xxxi). Loveday, Dorcas and Florence investigate crimes and mysteries, including murder (or otherwise suspicious deaths), theft, fraud and forgery, blackmail, abduction, and false imprisonment. These plots of detection provide narrative frameworks and vocabularies which contrast with the romance and marriage plots of Victorian realism, enabling authors to essay alternative experiences of female protagonists. These narratives endorse the independent action undertaken by the female sleuth.

In Chapter One, I argued that Pirkis uses a vocabulary informed by vision to depict Loveday's investigative methods. Pirkis uses metaphorical and literal descriptions of

Loveday's vision to depict the identification and examination of evidence. These descriptions have a dual purpose as they also function as clues to crucial stages in Loveday's cases, assisting the reader to follow the detective plot. Representations of vision also communicate the nineteenth-century belief that observation is an embodied capacity, unlike earlier *camera-obscura* notions of detached vision (Spengler 159). According to the conception of embodied vision, Loveday analogically confronts "the Victorian precept [for the woman] not to make herself visually conspicuous" (Spengler 217). The vocabulary of vision interacts closely with that of disguise, as Chapter Two demonstrated.

In Sims's collection, Dorcas's investigations are both enabled and disrupted by her status as an embodied female observer. This status allows for her presence on London's streets to observe suspects such as Flash George in "The Haverstock Hill Murder." However, Dorcas must avoid being visible to suspects who would be alerted to her suspicion. Sims uses these visual obstacles to Dorcas's investigations to analogise Victorian mores and standards of femininity which would relegate Dorcas to domestic spaces and responsibilities. As a woman on London's streets in the nineteenth century, she would attract the "contaminating sexual meanings" ascribed to women seen alone in public space (Rosenman 36-7). Disguise is depicted as the solution to these obstacles. Due to the multiplicity of its connotations, disguise also metaphorises Dorcas's means of simultaneously resolving intra-familial conflict and concealing it from the public gaze. The final, and perhaps the most significant, form of disguise in Sims's collection is as a literary technique. Sims registers the complex nature of depicting a female detective in the British *fin de siècle* because Saxon's narrative voice 'disguises' Dorcas's professionalism and independence. This metafictional device tempers the independence Dorcas embodies, assuaging anxieties that this form of femininity may provoke.

Like Dorcas, Meade's Florence Cusack "lead[s] ... an extraordinary life" ("Bovey's" 259). Lonsdale attributes her unconventional nature to her "mannish" profession (Slung, *Crime* xix). He voices the beliefs in women's emotionality and intuitiveness that were promoted in socio-scientific discourses, typified by Darwin's *The Descent of Man*, and political debates, such as Charles Harper's *Revolted Woman*. Meade's depiction of Florence's deductions counter the dominant gender ideology that Lonsdale voices. Meade uses a vocabulary informed by the semantically nuanced word 'reason' to challenge beliefs in women's inferior rationality and innate emotionality. The word reason connotes logic and rationality; it is opposed to female intuition as understood in Western "folk epistemology" (Fricker 235). At the same time, reason is also synonymous with the justification or underlying motive of an action. Meade refers to Florence's "reason[s]" ("Bovey's" 267) for searching crime scenes, subtly suggesting that her methods are based on logic. These clues to Florence's rationality accumulate throughout the series, undercutting Lonsdale's references to her "wonderful" intuitions ("Cablegram" 205). The reason behind Florence's successful resolution of crimes and mysteries is her own 'reason': her capacity to use logic and construct "chain[s] of evidence" ("Cablegram" 206), similar to Pirkis's Loveday.

Requiring physical strength, endurance, and logic, detective work was seen as a "mannish profession" (Slung, *Crime* xix) in the nineteenth century. Nineteenth-century audiences expected to find conventionally masculine tropes of "logic, action, ratiocination, violence, crime, [and] scientific methods" in detective fiction (Klein 4), and they did not expect these to be part of a woman's story. In contrast, the experiences of female protagonists in nineteenth-century realism were circumscribed by the genre's attempt to represent socio-cultural actualities of lived experience: "the options for its female protagonists [were reduced to] to either marriage or death" (Boumelha, "Realism" 84). Loveday, Dorcas, and Florence, however, unite detection with female agency. By creating a female sleuth, writers engaged

with contemporary gender ideologies, socio-cultural values and anxieties, and realities of lived experience in *fin-de-siècle* Britain. As the preceding Chapters show, gendered attributes were shown to be products of discourse.

Pirkis, Sims and Meade circumvent the conventional trajectories of Victorian literature because their detectives' experiences take the form of short stories; there is no space allotted to romance as the focus remains on detection. As professional women who traverse private and public spaces, they pursue suspects, mysteries, and the truth. The detective plot provides these writers with a structure on which to map women's experiences without recourse to the conventional romance or marriage plots. In this, female-detective stories share the rejection of the marriage and romance plots with other *fin-de-siècle* genres such as New Woman fiction. There are distinct similarities between the protagonists of these genres because both the New Woman and the female detective enter public and professional realms, acting independently and essaying a mode of femininity that is not dependent upon marriageability. Pirkis takes this to an extreme in her characterisation of Loveday Brooke as "altogether nondescript" and description "in a series of negations" ("Black" 2). Signifiers of New Womanhood, such as smoking and overtly progressive politics (A. Richardson xxxi), however, are absent. The focus remains on professional detection, showing that creators of female detectives forge a distinct narrative for their protagonists and do not fully subscribe to the tropes of New Woman fiction.

Vision, disguise, and reason are central terms in female detective stories. Their semantic nuances and gendered connotations enable authors to depict investigation, whilst subtly interrogating broader gender ideologies, roles and perceived differences. Throughout my analysis, I have identified when and how these terms are used in their various forms. Like the detective, I have drawn deductions based on corroborative evidence in the form of cultural, socio-scientific and socio-political histories and discourses. Also like the fictional

detective, I do not act alone. Just as Meade's Florence employs the police to perform surveillance in "The Outside Ledge," I draw on extant critical literature in this study.

By the Conclusion of this thesis, the female detective of *fin-de-siècle* British literature is far less mysterious than she was in the Introduction, where I posited that she is currently "little-known" (Hayward 18) in scholarship. This thesis has contributed to studies of detective and *fin-de-siècle* literature through the analysis of protagonists and authors that have, hitherto, received insufficient attention. As the first female detective in British literature known to be created by a woman (Ashley, *Storytellers* 119), Loveday Brooke has received the most critical attention of the detectives examined in this thesis. My analysis substantially adds to the small body of work devoted to Dorcas Dene and, especially, Florence Cusack. This thesis has also expanded the scope of studies of female detectives by using a vocabulary of detection to interrogate the representation of this protagonist. It provides a broader perspective of this protagonist than studies which only compare her to existing character types, such as the New Woman, social investigator or male detective. I recognise that she is a significant character in her own right, and an expression of *fin-de-siècle* socio-cultural, scientific and political discourses. The female detective is not merely "a Female Sherlock Holmes" or "a Sherlock Holmes in petticoats" ("Female" 12; "Sherlock" 347). Loveday Brooke, Dorcas Dene, and Florence Cusack pursue professional careers as detectives in *fin-de-siècle* British literature. Detective work and its related vocabularies regarding vision, disguise and reason, enable this depiction, simultaneously challenging beliefs in women's abilities, and narrative patterns of femininity.

This thesis opens up the possibility of applying the methodology of literary investigation to female-detective fictions of other periods. For instance, the scholarly field would benefit from work on little-known collections of the early twentieth-century, such as Marie Connor Leighton's *Joan Mar, Detective* (1910) and Baroness Orczy's *Lady Molly of*

Scotland Yard (1910). Looking further ahead, it would be valuable to read more familiar texts of the 'Golden Age', such as Agatha Christie's Miss Marple stories and Dorothy L. Sayers's *Gaudy Night* (1935), through the lens of investigation in order to gauge the utility of vision, disguise and reason in representations of the female detective over a broader historical period. This would go some way to answer questions prompted by Bernard Owens's prediction of "a Golden Age for women" in the twentieth century (79). Does this age have correspondence with the so-called Golden Age of detective fiction? How does the representation of the female detective shift as women's professional opportunities gradually expanded? In particular, how did the inclusion of women in the British police force in 1915 affect her representation? I posit the further application of the methodology used in this thesis: an approach which reads the vocabulary of detection as a means of articulating women's experience and critiquing contemporary discourses.

The geographic boundaries of this work could, likewise, be expanded to include American fiction. While they were few in number, some female investigators did appear in American dime novels during the 1880s and 1890s, such as a two-part serial, *Lady Kate, the Dashing Female Detective* (1886) by Harlan P. Halsey. This would serve as a useful comparison to the British female detective.

This thesis does not conclude with the irrefutable pronouncement of the fictional detective – the articulation of the culprit's name and their arrest. It opens up the representation of the female detective to greater scrutiny by resisting the linear sequencing of detective fiction itself (Sweeney 4). By focussing on the semantic nuances and historically-specific understandings of key terms, I have shown the benefit of analysing female-detective stories in terms of vision, disguise, and reason. Each term is multifaceted and this allows for a wide-ranging, yet also detailed, literary analysis. Moreover, this approach has shown the aptness of the analogy between the literary detective and the literary critic. Like Loveday,

Dorcas, and Florence, I have identified and followed subtle semantic nuances to uncover patterns of articulating female identity and experience in the *fin de siècle*. With critical attention to the nuanced vocabulary of a text, it is possible to untangle the complex interrelation of social, cultural and literary forces which shape representations of fictional female detectives.

Notes

¹ For more detail see Knight's *Crime Fiction Since 1800: Death, Detection, Diversity* (2010) and Ashley's introduction to *The Female Detective* (2013).

² It is not my intention in this thesis to construct a history of female-detective stories; neither do I seek an exhaustive genealogy of its protagonists. Therefore, I accept the most widely-held position that Hayward's *Revelations* and Forrester's *Female Detective* are both 1864 texts by male authors.

³ There are many more female detectives in literature of the period, many of whom appeared in novels, and for a comprehensive survey of these characters I recommend reading Colleen Barnett's *Mystery Women: An Encyclopedia of Leading Women Characters in Mystery Fiction Vol. 1 1860-1979* (2006).

⁴ Emile Gaboriau's Monsieur Lecoq stories were based on the exploits of "real-life criminal-turned-detective Eugène François Vidocq." Written in French during the 1860s, the stories were translated for British readers in the 1880s (Clarke 2).

⁵ See John Sutherland's brief history of detective fiction in the introduction to *The Longman Companion to Victorian Fiction*.

⁶ Sherlock Holmes first appeared in *A Study in Scarlet*, published in *Beeton's Christmas Annual* for 1887 (Ashley, *Storytellers* 6). Further Holmes stories appeared in the *Strand Magazine* until the final "The Adventure of Shoscombe Old Place" in April 1927 (Ashley 205).

⁷ The afterimage is an optical phenomenon discussed by Goethe in *Theory of Colours* (1810). It describes the visual perception of an image in the absence of the stimulus: "an optical experience that was produced by and within a subject." See Crary's *Techniques of the Observer* (98).

⁸ There are five short stories in *Dorcas Dene: Her Life and Adventures* which span eleven chapters. Each story centres on one case investigated by the protagonist. I refer to each story by the title of its first chapter.

⁹ They were, however, required to carry a warrant card as proof of identity and rank. See Heather Worthington's *The Rise of the Detective in Early Nineteenth-Century Popular Fiction* for a discussion of this.

¹⁰ Throughout this thesis, the term 'gypsy' refers to the disguise Dorcas dons. For clarity, I retain the original spelling in Sims's text. I use the term 'Romani' to describe the cultural and racial group. See the introduction to Deborah Epstein Nord's *Gypsies and the British Imagination, 1807-1930* (2006) for further discussions of nomenclature regarding the Romani and literary representation.

¹¹ Critics have speculated that the series is incomplete. In the first story, Florence describes her reasons for undertaking detection: "I have no choice; I am under a promise, which I must fulfil" (Meade, "Bovey" 259). No further information is ever provided, suggesting that this narrative was abandoned part-way through. See Adrienne E. Gavin's "Feminist Crime Fiction and Female Sleuths" in *A Companion to Crime Fiction* (2010).

¹² In "The Mysterious Countess," Mrs. Paschal removes her crinoline to facilitate her pursuit of the Countess of Vervaine through a subterranean passage.

¹³ For more on female authors of women detectives see Kungl's *Creating the Woman Detective*.

¹⁴ See "The Adventure of Wisteria Lodge." Holmes states that "life is commonplace; the papers are sterile; audacity and romance seem to have passed forever from the criminal world" (870).

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