



## **Back to bodies: female detectives and bodily tools and tells in Victorian detective fiction**

**Dominique Gracia**

### **Abstract**

The work of the ratiocinative, masculine mind often appears to be the organising principle of detective fiction. However, the notion of detective work as predominantly about minds is a bluff, and we should not take detective stories' word for it. Here, I interrogate this cultural heuristic and feminist critiques of the detective fiction genre that have often wrestled with, but largely embraced, a gendered, dualistic interpretation of detective work as the purview of a masculine mind investigating a feminine body. By setting to one side "iconic" figures like Sherlock Holmes, I look to rebaseline our generalisations about detective fiction using the nineteenth-century professional female detective as my exemplar, including characters such as Loveday Brooke, Dorcas Dene, Mrs. Paschal, G, and Miss Cusack, and historical instances of the female detective figure. By analysing the tools and tells of the incarnated body that is the predicate of the perceiving mind, I illustrate how detectives reason about bodies from and with their own and challenge the exclusion of early professional female detectives from the critical picture that we build of The Detective and their methods.

### **Key words**

detective fiction; female detectives; Loveday Brooke; Dorcas Dene; Mrs Paschal; ratiocination; gender; the body.

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## **Back to Bodies: Female Detectives and Bodily Tools and Tells in Victorian Detective Fiction**

**Dominique Gracia**

Stories about “ratiocinative superm[e]n” like Sherlock Holmes, C. Auguste Dupin, and Monsieur Lecoq are usually understood as the unshakeable foundations of the detective fiction genre (Beegel 1982: 4). Despite efforts by Ronald R. Thomas and others to highlight the importance of physical bodies in the genre, the work of such ratiocinative, masculine minds continues to assert itself as an organising principle of detective fiction. In this article I challenge the bluff of detective fiction as propelled by a “masculinist drive to know” and set aside Holmes and his nineteenth-century brothers (cf. Palmer 2001: 56). Instead, I propose to rebaseline the detective fiction genre by turning to the oft-overlooked female detectives of nineteenth-century popular fiction in order to establish a different, more feminist narrative about the interactions between bodies, both detective and criminal and to focus on the fact that any “perceiving mind” must be predicated on “an incarnated body” (Grosz 1994: 87). This stands alongside the growing trend of historical research highlighting the role of real bodies in the criminal justice system, as in Katie Barclay’s recent work on the nineteenth century (2017a, 2017b).

This approach might initially appear naïve – can we ever *really* escape Holmes as a foundational figure? doesn’t his continued popularity speak for itself? – but this change of perspective allows us both to reframe how all detectives work body-to-body and to reclaim female detectives as key to the early development of the genre. I share the frustration expressed by critics such as Deborah Parsons (2000) and Elizabeth Miller with how many feminist examinations of early female detectives have “undermine[d]” the “feminist potential” of their stories in exchange for “further[ing] feminist re-conceptions of literary histories” (Miller 2005: 49, 52), an approach which seems to me the result of an unchallenged assumption that the “ratiocinative superman” must, necessarily, define the genre. For example, Birgitta Berglund asserts that the “real difficulty” that authors have faced, from the nineteenth century onwards, “in creating a woman detective” relates to “the fact that the detective in the classic detective story is the typical hero: strong, intelligent, resourceful, a latter-day knight who fights and defeats evil,” “an almost superhuman mastermind” “according to the pattern established by Conan Doyle with Sherlock Holmes” (2000: 139).

Palmer suggests that the detective process is one “of ‘feminization’ whereby [the] body [of the victim] is rendered an object of the scientific [male] ‘gaze,’” gendering crime and criminal detection definitively, irrespective of the actual bodies and actors involved (2001: 56). Klein offers the starkest description of this, arguing that, in the Cartesian binaries established in detective fiction (detective/criminal and criminal/victim), the detective is “always male” because they are “always in the dominant position in the [detective/criminal] pairing” (1995: 173; see also Caputi 1993: 101-2). To Klein, female detectives thus “emphasize their deviancy, their distance from the proper role of

Woman” (1995: 177) and act as “honorary males” (1998: 18-30). Joan Warthling Roberts concurs, suggesting that nineteenth-century female detectives “were classifiable and thus easily dismissable as fantasies or freaks, as competent human beings (that is, as honorary males), as domestic but desperate, as lower-class contemptibles” (1995: 4). The value of female detective characters for these critics thus seems, ironically, to be how they illustrate the ‘facts’ of the masculine genre.

The problem with this view and the history based on it, of course, is that Holmes was preceded by many a female detective, and that his dominance has been generated and perpetuated by critical assertions feeding off each other rather than doing historical spadework. In focusing on stories of female detectives, I seek to disrupt such confusion between cause and effect as part of a recuperative project to (re)introduce the early female detective into our ideas about how the genre operates, establishing the bodies of women as a new organising principle. This means eschewing direct comparison with stories featuring Holmes and his brothers to allow the stories of successful professional female detectives to speak for themselves about their narrative priorities and their detectives’ methods. As Jennifer Woolston notes about the specific case of Nancy Drew, perhaps the most enduring female detective of the genre,<sup>1</sup> each of these detectives’ “primary action is utilizing her body as a tool for solving crime,” a “vehicle through which she can carry out her desires to solve crimes” “physically” (2010: 173). Revising our baseline in this way can help us sidestep Berglund’s “difficulty.” These detectives offer “a corrective” to the critical “tendency toward unilateral deployment of the categories of ‘male gaze’ and ‘female spectacle’” (Miller 2005: 52). Thus, while Joy Palmer suggests that “whose body?” is the “pivotal question propelling the narrative of the detective novel,” I argue that this only poses the mystery in way of a solution, with the true engine of the detective novel being “how can bodies reveal – or conceal – that answer?” (2001: 54).

## The Nineteenth-Century Corpus

Feminist criticism of detective fiction and television has in the past concluded that the female detective is a technical impossibility because of women’s supposedly essential bodiliness, which has consequences for their perceived effects in the genre. Female bodies are, Elizabeth Grosz argues, coded as “leaking, uncontrollable,” a “formless flow” of “disorder that threatens all order,” wholly at odds with the generic understanding of the detective figure as bringing order and containment (1994: 203). This vein of criticism interprets female bodies Platonically, as a threat to detective work, “a source of interference in, and a danger to, the operations of reason” (5). However, as Parsons notes, feminist literary criticism’s “support [for] the masculine definition of the urban observer” does not align with known examples of nineteenth-century women occupying “public positions ... that locate them as observers” (2000: 4-5). Furthermore, if it is true that, as Lisa Zunshine argues, “we care about the clues provided by the criminal bodies because other people’s bodies are our pathways to their minds (however misleading and limited these clues may turn out to be)” (2006: 133-4), then detective investigations are only really possible body-to-body, with active female protagonists using their bodies as “a vehicle” for solving crime “physically.” Thus, my focus on women and bodies should not be taken as unquestioningly perpetuating the common pairing of mind-body and male-female Cartesian binaries. Rather, it is simply to say that female bodies in these stories offer us greater insight precisely because of the oft-assumed relation between the female - body poles of the binaries Grosz describes.

Which bodies, and which stories, then? A short introduction to these women might be advantageous. Two of the most studied of the mid-to-late-nineteenth-century British female

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<sup>1</sup> The Drew stories have, since 1930, been written by a host of authors under the collective pseudonym Carolyn Keene and spawned several TV series, including *Nancy Drew* (The CW, 2019–).

detectives are Loveday Brooke, who featured in C.L. Pirakis' stories for the *Ludgate Monthly* in 1893 and 1894, and Dorcas Dene, of George R. Sims' story collections of 1897 and 1898. Their earliest identifiable predecessors appear in 1864: the "Lady Detective," Mrs Paschal, a creation of the pseudonymous W.S. Hayward, and G, the "Female Detective" of James Redding Ware's short stories, published under his pseudonym Andrew Forrester Jr.<sup>2</sup> Often well-to-do but in need of money, these women turn to detection as an alternative to traditional women's work as seamstresses, milliners, or servants. Leonard Merrick's Miriam Lea, the titular *Mr Bazalgette's Agent* (1888), chooses detection in lieu of a career on the stage, a prior history shared with Dene. Grant Allen's Lois Cayley, newly graduated from Oxford, is the most 'amateur' of the female detectives covered here – she is largely employed as a companion to Lady Georgina – but the structure of Allen's novel, with chapters entitled as if a series of "adventure" stories, including the final "Adventure of the Unprofessional Detective," warrant her inclusion. Finally, rounding out our group, L.T. Meade's Miss Cusack, who featured in stories between 1899 and 1901, succeeds Brooke in *fin-de-siècle* magazines.<sup>3</sup>

The 24-year gap in the extant literature between Paschal and G (1864) and Lea (1888) means that early female detective figures can appear as outliers in a genre circumscribed by Holmes and his male fellows, statistical anomalies that must be excluded from generalisations about the genre and its development. But we must acknowledge that the appearance of early female detectives as anomalies is exacerbated by the fact that many of the known stories featuring female detectives, once published in magazines or as yellowbacks, are now difficult to come by, and many others may well have been lost to us.<sup>4</sup> The dismissal of female detectives on the grounds of unavailability ignores the fact that plenty of real female detectives occupy the apparent gap, predating even the penny dreadful that seems to feature the first fictional female sleuth working with the professional police, *Ruth the Betrayer; or, The Female Spy* (Ellis [1862-3] 2018). In 1855, former Chief Inspector Charles Frederick Field, the inspiration for Charles Dickens' Inspector Bucket, was employed by a Mr Evans to collect evidence of his wife's adultery: Field employed and trained several women to spy on Mrs Evans and her lover. These women were referred to as "female detectives" in the press, and their testimony was heard and relied upon in court (Untitled. *London Daily News* 1857: 4). This example already begins to contradict the theoretically persuasive but historically simplistic analyses on which some feminist criticism of detective fiction is based, such as Kathleen Gregory Klein's argument that in the seventeenth, eighteenth and nineteenth centuries women "could not be detectives or judges or juries or witnesses": "Women, you remember, were

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<sup>2</sup> Dagni Bredesen has done much to make Paschal and G available for future generations of scholars through her 2010 facsimile edition of Hayward's and Forrester's stories, and through her research, such as her "Conformist Subversion" (2006).

<sup>3</sup> Some other names could be mentioned, including Anna Katherine Green's Amelia Butterworth, who appeared in 1897, and Clarice Dyke, created by Harry Rockwood (1883), both of whom I omit from this survey because they are distinctly American and my focus here is on the British context. I also exclude Dora Myrl, M. McDonnell Bodkin's 1900 character, who competed with male detective Paul Beck, as her career continued throughout the first decade of the twentieth century, and my focus is on the mid-to-late-nineteenth century development of the detective figure. Other female characters participate in detection more tangentially, and so do not help us draw a clear picture of female detective work in this era, such as the gypsy shop-owner Hagar Stanley, the protagonist of a series of stories by Fergus Hume (1899), and Anne Cory, who features in Elizabeth Burgoyne (Mrs George) Corbett's 1894 *When the Sea Gives Up Its Dead*.

<sup>4</sup> In such cases, I rely on e-books, often from The British Library, which has done invaluable work in bringing these texts back into circulation. Where this is the case – with Hayward's *Revelations*, Forrester's *Female Detective*, Merrick's *Agent*, and Sims' *Dorcas Dene* – I provide references according to e-book locations, which are invariable across e-readers, to aid the reader, unless page numbers are provided within the text (as in *Agent*).

classified with idiots and children, not capable of swearing, giving evidence, or being trusted” (1995: 172). As well as Field’s assistant detectives, and again in 1855, the Eastern Counties Railway hired a woman to detect and halt luggage theft from the first-class waiting room (“Police Intelligence” 1855: 7), while having female detectives was an explicit selling point in advertisements for private detective agencies throughout the mid-to-late-nineteenth century.<sup>5</sup> Although the first women did not enter the Metropolitan Police force until 1883, the press covered Kate Warne’s career in the US after her death,<sup>6</sup> and the work of female detectives in local communities in the UK, with headlines such as “Clever Arrest by a Female Detective” (1869: 2) or merely “A Female Detective” (1877: 6).<sup>7</sup> By the *fin de siècle*, detective work was even the subject of queries to employment advice columns for women, although it did not find much favour with “Pandora”, the pseudonymous advice columnist in *Hearth and Home*, who wrote that she “never regarded [detective work] seriously as desirable, or even possible, work for a woman who could get anything else to do” (1900: 414). The female detective was thus an active and even exciting figure in the nineteenth-century popular imagination. She was, perhaps, exceptional and so worth remarking on – why mention specifically the availability of female private detectives if they were commonplace? – but the introduction of professional female police officers in the 1880s, after several decades of fictional female police officers and real female detectives in the press, suggests that she was becoming less of an oddity. So, what exactly did the female detective demonstrate about how detecting works?

## Bodies Detecting (and Detected)

This section discusses two of the most important bodily tools that define the female detective’s functions: physical proximity, often gained through disguise; and the relation between active, direct observation and intuition (often encapsulated in the term “sympathy”).

### *Proximity and disguise*

While female detectives meet with scepticism or wonderment regarding their profession, their exceptional nature and the assumption that they are body rather than mind offer an advantage: the “petticoated police” (Hayward [1864b] 2013b: loc.131) can “more fully penetrat[e] the feminine, domestic world without arousing suspicion” (Miller 2005: 53). This is articulated very clearly by Ebenezer Dyer, Loveday Brooke’s boss: “In cases of mere suspicion, women detectives are more satisfactory than men, for they are less likely to attract attention” (Pirkis 1893c: 581). While Miller codes the female detective’s sphere of work as “domestic” and thus “feminine,” and Dyer hedges the efficacy of female detectives by restricting it to “cases of mere suspicion,” it is hard to imagine a detective story that does not begin with “mere suspicion” and require engagement with the “domestic world” of suspects, victims, or witnesses. Despite our inclination to deny it, female detectives, we might already begin to suspect, are detectives *par excellence*.

Why is this so? By and large, the female body is left unseen, passed over owing to a sense of propriety or indifference: what threat can these bodies pose? These biases generate a feminine invisibility, which seems to be an apparent fact of the sex as a whole (Miller 2008: 41). This increases female detectives’ opportunities for surveillance, particularly when another female body must be surveilled. In “Murder on Troyte’s Hill,” Miss Craven attempts to deceive the police by

<sup>5</sup> See, for example, adverts such as “Arthur Cleveland Montagu” (1875: 1) and “Detective Offices—Slater’s” (1896: 1).

<sup>6</sup> See, for example, “A Female Detective” (1868: 3).

<sup>7</sup> Admiring references to “lady detectives” were equally frequent.

appearing before detectives who wish to question her brother “looking very white and scared, in a long, flowing robe-du-chambre.” The male Detective Griffiths, who has blundered into this “domestic world,” “depart[s] in haste and confusion” (Pirkis 1893b: 538). Miss Craven’s self-presentation confuses him, as intended. Loveday Brooke, however, is not fooled: she deduces that Miss Craven has been disguising herself as her brother who has left the country, and so solves the case. As this example illustrates, and Paschal notes, “men are thrown off their guard when they see a petticoat” (Hayward [1864c] 2013c: loc.714) and “are less apt to suspect a woman [detective] if she play her cards cleverly” (loc.562). Female-bodied detectives – and, we should note, female criminals – immediately have the upper hand.

Female detectives find various ways to use their bodies as a passport into enclosed spaces. They play to female stereotypes to conceal themselves, as when Loveday Brooke feigns being a shopper seeking fashionable clothes to question the targets of her investigation, or otherwise further her detection (see Pirkis 1893d and 1893f). Female detectives can insinuate themselves into explicitly women-only spaces where they can act “in sheep’s clothing” without notice while a man’s presence would visibly “be like that of a wolf amongst a flock of sheep” – as when Paschal enters a nunnery (Hayward ([1864f] 2013f: loc.1815, loc.1775)). And they regularly disguise themselves as servants, exploiting the particularly acute invisibility of working-class women in nineteenth-century society (as in Hayward’s “The Mysterious Countess”), either merely claiming to have a particular occupation or actually labouring as a servant. Other disguises include Brooke’s claims to be a home decorator (Pirkis 1893e), a school-teacher (Pirkis 1893f), and an amanuensis (Pirkis 1893b). Dorcas Dene successfully impersonates a flower girl (Sims [1898] 2014c). Dene, in particular, is highly effective at disguise, often evading recognition even by her assistant, Mr Saxon. She attributes this to her professional experience on the stage, which she shares with other female detectives, such as Miriam Lea, and some female criminals, such as Fanny Williams (Hayward [1864h] 2013h).

Setting aside Paschal’s short stint as a letter-sorter in a male working environment, during which, “for the sake of appearances,” “two other women” were also employed at the same time, female detectives’ disguises as working women seem easy to maintain as they go about their detective work (Hayward [1864e] 2013e: loc.1372). Miller notes society’s “blind-spot with regard to women’s domestic labor” (2005: 59). But although Paschal tells us how the Countess of Vervaine treats her servants carelessly as “attendant satellites,” regarding them “as something for which she paid,” it is not so much the fact that servants *work* that is missed as the fact that they remain perceiving minds in their incarnated bodies, people capable of seeing, hearing, thinking and remembering while working (Hayward [1864b] 2013b: loc.240). As Grosz notes, “seeing entails having a body that is itself capable of being seen, that is visible” (1994: 101), and the “represent[ation]” of “ideal domestic labor” “as agentless in late-Victorian mass culture” did not make it so (Miller 2005: 59). Accordingly, Fanny Williams must make explicit the expectation on servants when hiring Paschal as a maid: “You should have eyes and not use them; ears, and keep them shut” (Hayward [1864h] 2013h: loc.3172). Needless to say, Williams’ warning goes unheeded. Female detectives concealed as servants “subvert the patriarchal paradigm by fusing the theoretical active and passive gender roles together in one significant and complex act” (Woolston 2010: 179).

There are other ways a female body can increase the detective’s opportunities for observation. In Forrester’s 1864 “The Unknown Weapon,” the main action of the story takes place in and around a house seemingly named for the women who are often referred to metonymically as “petticoats”: Petleighcote. We should not be surprised, then, that the final clue is revealed by the petticoats of the policewoman whom G has disguised in the household as a maid: “Martha, in passing between me and the box, swept the drapery away with her petticoats, and showed a black corner” (Forrester [1864c] 2016c: loc.4068). A male body, in male attire, would not have had the

same effect, would not have detected the box, and would not have revealed the truth of the crime. Female detectives disguised as servants lift veils, then, literally and metaphorically, because they have specific affordances unavailable to men (honorary or otherwise) and can so readily “fuse” the analytical and the bodily, the ratiocinative and the somatic.

### *Observation and intuition*

Bodily proximity is essential for observation and intuition. Etymologically, little distinguishes the two: “intuit” derives from the verb “intueor,” “to look upon” or “to regard”. However, the two words’ meanings diverged in the mid-seventeenth century as “intuition” came to relate more specifically to mental looking-upon, rather than physical. Intuition is perhaps now a *de facto* antonym of ratiocination, denoting immediate apprehension of a fact or idea through the bodily interpretation of sensory data without the use of conscious reasoning. Accordingly, it is often identified as a feminine alternate to masculine reason. Lucy Kay suggests that many fictional female detectives of the nineteenth and early-twentieth centuries “operated on an amateur basis and used ‘female intuition’ rather than ratiocinative methods of detection” (2002: 160). Yet, our female detectives here – with the partial exception of Cayley – *are* professionals, earning their livings as detectives. Kay’s association of “amateur[s]” and “‘female intuition’” highlights one way that female detectives’ work is devalued because it is more evidently founded on bodily action, a deviation from generic expectations that presuppose the action of a male ratiocinative mind.

The stories in my corpus in some ways encourage this gendered dichotomy. For example, Cayley criticises her friend for having “misse[d] the drift” of a conversation because she is “lacking in feminine intuition” owing to her study of “higher mathematics,” which has “kill[ed] out” “th[is] most distinctively womanly faculty,” relying both on the association of women and bodies, and of women and intuition (Allen 1899: 208). Meanwhile, Miriam Lea gains her first assignment by demonstrating intuition that she herself codes as feminine. Upon first meeting Bazalgette, the man who will become her employer, she “intuitively guessed” his identity, and describes her conclusion as the interpretation of “rapid signals in woman’s own deaf and dumb language” (Merrick (1888) 2013: 29).

The sort of intuition that Lea displays – often described with the synonym of “sympathy” (see, for example, Forrester [1864b] 2016b: loc.308) – is further feminised because it is linked to a nuanced understanding of affect and its power. Loveday Brooke demonstrates her superior intuition by gaining information from a distressed female witness who had previously been “most injudiciously handled” by male police officers (Pirkis 1894: 368). Such intuitions relate to a comprehension of the bodily needs of others but they can also be manipulated. Thus, Paschal simulates “fatigue” and “attention” to insinuate herself into the home of a lonely female caretaker by understanding and attending to the needs of the woman who describes herself as “a body who’s lonesome” and finds relief, very briefly, in having an engaged interlocutor in her home (Hayward [1864c] 2013c: loc.781, loc.787, loc.824). G similarly attends to others’ needs for social interaction, describing herself as a “talking companion.” Revealingly, she notes that “It is the first lesson of a detective to oblige a victim; his second is to accept that victim’s hospitality if he offers it. Nothing opens a man’s or a woman’s mouth so readily as allowing him or her to fill yours” (Forrester [1864b] 2016b: loc.273, loc.832).<sup>8</sup> G’s use of masculine pronouns for work that she herself conducts illustrates that such behaviours are neither uniquely feminine nor uniquely masculine, but they *are* more readily noticed and remarked upon when carried out by female detectives. G thus makes her declaration for her own actions being gender-neutral, characteristic simply of good

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<sup>8</sup> Here, in referring to a “victim,” G appears to mean a victim of her deception, as she is not engaging at this point in the story with a victim of a crime.

detectives. Without intuitive, sympathetic bodily reaction or conscious manipulation, it would be impossible for any detective fiction narrative to proceed at all, irrespective of whether the detective is male or female.

We see a gendered example of the failure to use intuition correctly when a male detective allows Cayley and her wanted (but falsely accused) fiancé, Harold, to escape detection on a train to Edinburgh. The male detective, despite his “plain clothes,” demonstrates the “obtrusively unobtrusive air of a detective,” a “mood of careless observation” “overd[one]” (Allen 1899: 291). Unlike the female detective, who can disguise herself as an “attendant satellite” and readily escape detection, the male detective cannot disguise his observations, from which Cayley can intuit the extent of his knowledge: since he gazes at the Maharajah with “a frank, long gaze” and glances at the attending servants with a mere “hasty eye,” she realises that the police are unaware of Harold’s disguise as a servant (male serving bodies, too, are beneath the male detective’s notice). The male detective “trust[s]” to his “vague expectations” about how criminals will behave but lacks both direct observational skills and indirect intuitive “sympathy,” and so fails to attend to actual bodies as he ought (292–3). Applying his mind only, he neither sees nor understands the (supposed) criminals before him.

Far from being a poor imitation of ratiocination, intuition is a powerful form of reasoning, involving recognising, and drawing conclusions from, patterns about bodies. It manifests as hunches or gut feelings, somatic metaphors for sensory data being processed in the dark, as it were, before the rational mind becomes aware of it. Cayley attributes various insights to her “intuition” (Allen 1899: 36, 154), while Paschal relies on a “shrewd guess” to guide her investigations, defending such guesses as “not random thoughts” but based on “minute observations” (Hayward [1864d] 2013d: loc.1160, loc.1177). G similarly describes how the police, amongst whose numbers she ranks herself, operate “by a wonderful series of fortunate guesses and industrious inquiries,” distinguishing intuition or gut instinct (“fortunate guesses”) from conscious observation and active labour (“industrious inquiries”) in a way that highlights their sequential order and reflects their intimate connection (Forrester [1864b] 2016b: loc.256). Intuition, then, is a function of the “incarnated body” that precedes and dictates any action of the “perceiving mind.” The capacity to make and interpret observations without conscious intellectual processing is an essential qualification for detectival success.

Female detectives leverage their intuition as a tool to guide them towards an evidence-based explanation that can be communicated persuasively to others, “full and adequate proof” without which the “important accusation” that the detective might make “will recoil against [her]” (Hayward [1864d] 2013d: loc.1162). Such *ex post facto* constructions of a chain of reasoning are what Martin Kayman refers to when he says that Paschal possesses the “irritating ability for making the simple appear difficult,” which Holmes later apes (1992: 127). As well as seeking to impress the reader, such descriptions form part of the genre’s efforts to conceal the intuitive, bodily processes involved in detective work in favour of presenting a male-coded, cerebral, ratiocinative model. In such chains of reasoning, the rationally perceiving mind is thrust into the limelight, not as the ultimate arbiter of the incarnated body’s intuitions, but as their replacement. We must not be fooled by this ploy.

## The Bodily Work of Detection

The criminal body’s tells often contribute to the detective’s solution to a crime, but even though they appear as abstract units in an articulated chain of ratiocination, they are available only body-to-body, through the “perceiving mind” in “an incarnated body” and relying on the detective’s sympathetic responses. We can thus attend to how the female body works in the process of detection. In the throes of her investigations, L.T. Meade’s Miss Cusack undergoes physical



changes that facilitate the observational nature of her work: “the pupils of her eyes were largely dilated, and glowed as if some light were behind them” (Meade and Eustace [1899] 1998b: 38). It is as though her somatic capacity for observation increases when the thrill of detective work is upon her. Similarly, a detective needs her other senses to be well honed. Aural detection is an oft-used bodily tool in the female detective’s arsenal, with G describing how she has deliberately “sharpened up” her senses and can “hear with more than ordinary acuteness” (Forrester [1864b] 2016b: loc.810). In “Tenant for Life,” a speech impediment allows her to identify a woman from a sparse description: to G’s attentive ear, the voice is one of the few bodily characteristics that are beyond disguise: “no cunning, no dexterity” would allow a criminal to conceal his “mode of speaking” or “pronunciation,” although “he may change dress, voice, look, appearance” (Forrester [1864b] 2016b: loc.483). Likewise, in two of Miss Cusack’s cases (Meade and Eustace [1899] 1998b and Meade and Eustace [1901] 1998c), an acute sense of smell is critical to identifying the truth of the case. With these acutely trained senses, the detective both consciously and unconsciously applies herself to the bodily tells of the criminal, including their mannerisms, accent, and general appearance.

Perhaps the best illustration of the detective’s observation and interpretation of bodily tells is in C.L. Pirkis’s “Drawn Daggers,” in which Mary O’Grady’s accent and mannerisms betray her as a maid posing as a lady. Brooke notes the “extreme neatness” of her room, an indication of the movements of a young woman’s body as she goes about her toilette. It is an arrangement that Brooke believes would not “occur [to a lady],” as “this would be what a maid, accustomed to arrange a room for her mistress’s use, would do mechanically” (Pirkis 1893e: 137-8, 141). However, other “mechanical” bodily actions, such as O’Grady’s pronunciation of the letter “h,” which Brooke claims is “a mark of ... nationality which [the Irish] never lose” (141), and the young woman’s notable punctuality at meals, are also telling: as one of those servants beneath observation, O’Grady would be expected to appear punctually, and so not draw attention to herself, while a young lady might follow a looser timetable (138). Such mannerisms are printed on the body, unavoidably making themselves known to those willing and able to attend to them, just as intuition comprises the processing of bodily data.

Such unavoidability, on both sides, does not mean that detectival body-work can be carried out effortlessly. We have seen how Cayley’s disguise escapes a careless male detective, but perhaps one of the best examples of how the inescapability of interpretation still requires (body-)work is an example of where the body is turned against the detective and her disguise proves inadequate. In “The Secret Band,” Mrs Paschal is interrogated by criminal ring-leader Zini who seeks to expose her as a snooping detective by examining what the psychologist Paul Ekman (1985/ 2009) has called “micro-expressions”. Just like O’Grady’s accent and “mechanical” actions, micro-expressions are habitual body behaviours (for Ekman, mainly facial expressions) that are impossible to disguise entirely. Paschal’s body is expected to reveal the truth: she is told to “take up a certain position ... where the light of the lamps would fall upon [her] features and reveal the play of [her] countenance.” When Zini quizzes her, he declares that she has given him a “bad answer” because “it carries the impress of falsity on the face of it” (Hayward [1864c] 2013c: loc.924, loc.953).

Zini’s literal interpretation of the notion of *prima facie* seeks to disentangle bodily truth and oral dissimulation at the very limits of disguise. While his conclusion about Paschal’s deception is correct – she is, after all, a detective who has come to spy on his criminal enterprise – the stories of female detectives largely trouble the notion of *prima facie* when it is applied without adequate “sympathy” for the people whose bodies are being observed and judged. Like the female detective, the female criminal has traditionally been pathologised as an “honorary male,” and – despite Lady Audley and her many successors – the crudest expression of *prima facie* guilt was thought to be women’s physical unattractiveness. The categorisation and criminalisation of bodily types comprised a considerable line of inquiry throughout the late nineteenth century, as in Havelock

Ellis' *The Criminal* (1890) and Cesare Lombroso's *The Female Offender* (1895), who both associated masculine physical traits, such as bulk, aggression, or stronger features, with female criminality. Ellis, for example, asserts that the female criminal "is found to approach more closely to the normal man than the [normal woman] does" (1890: 53). In "Redhill," Sister Monica is assumed by male detectives to be guilty on the basis of her ugly appearance, but Loveday Brooke's suspicions are turned away from her and from her Sisterhood because of "the way in which [she] handled the children," which Brooke contrasts with her observations of female criminals, who may treat children "occasionally ... with a certain rough sort of kindness," but who are "utterly incapable" of "tenderness" (Pirkis 1893c: 595). Brooke highlights that conclusions based on *prima facie* assumptions are unsafe, while defending her own deductions based on body behaviours. We may question this distinction, but Pirkis' stories clearly seek to tell us something about careless and careful, or unsympathetic and sympathetic, body-work.

The stories featuring Paschal also present a mixed picture about how to judge bodies according to other *prima facie* tells: physiognomic assumptions. In "Fifty Pounds Reward," Paschal dwells in great detail on the apparently unfeminine body of the female criminal, Mrs Wilkinson, which helps mark her out as a degenerate with a "vitiating" mind and a "swaggering manner" that combines "the bully and the cut-throat" (Hayward [1864g] 2013g: loc.2418, loc.2512, loc.2705). When Wilkinson's guilt is revealed, Paschal describes her bodily responses in detail:

[Her] puffed and bloated cheeks turned the colour of fine lard. She grasped the back of the chair for support; but the frail structure gave way beneath the mighty load imposed upon it and collapsed with a sudden crash, the result of which was that she came to the ground heavily.

(Hayward [1864g] 2013g: loc.2708).

Wilkinson and her husband are subsequently driven from the neighbourhood and end in a "state of abject poverty" brought on by alcoholism, a bodily vice heavily intertwined with ideas of criminality and degeneracy (loc.2726, loc.2730). Wilkinson seems to invite bodily punishment, which Paschal relishes seeing meted out (loc.2708).

The same viciousness occurs in "The Mysterious Countess," which features the Countess of Vervaine. Paschal is sent to investigate the Countess, who has provoked suspicion by "dazzling all London" with "the splendour of her equipage and her diamonds" (Hayward [1864b] 2013b: loc.155). This aberrant beauty correlates with Wilkinson's ugliness only in its excess, but just as Wilkinson is forced into "disgusting" and "abject" penance, so Paschal wishes to punish the Countess bodily by putting her "in the hands of the police," "a terrible phrase" that Paschal reflects is "replete with visions of hard-labour and a long and weary imprisonment – expressive of a life of labour, disgrace, and pain – perhaps indicative of summary annihilation" (loc.210, loc.458). The bodily awfulness of corporal punishment is enacted on the Countess when a superintendent lays a "strong hand" "upon her white throat," throttling her as he "drag[s] her remorselessly into the moonlight" while Paschal looks on gleefully. The Countess escapes the punishment intended for her only by suicide (loc.512).

## Conclusion

I began by suggesting that we should resist, if only momentarily, letting the work of ratiocinative, masculine minds assert itself as the unshakeable organising principle of detective fiction. Here, I want to illustrate how rebaselining this recuperative project can support us in challenging this assertion where it might appear in a recent detective television series and in one account of female detectives.

Let us take, first, the case of *House* (Fox, 2004-2012). House, his name echoing Holmes ("homes"), is an anti-social genius doctor who solves medical "cases" or "puzzles," lives at 221B Baker Street (see "Hunting"), and is at one point shot by a character named Moriarty ("No

Reason”). Much could thus be said about Holmes and House through the lens of adaptation studies, but I am interested here in how the series illustrates the contradiction inherent in asserting ratiocinative, masculine minds as the core of detective work. House prides himself on remaining above the fray, actively uninterested in patients’ lives and experiences except where they might be medically relevant, and the series makes much of his ability to read bodies at a glance, presumably so that he can sift medically relevant from irrelevant body behaviours. The series links House’s supposed brilliance with his disability (he has chronic leg pain and uses a cane), and House’s Watson (Dr James Wilson) goes so far as to tell him that, since his injury, he “ha[s] dismissed anything physical, anything not coldly, calculatingly intellectual,” a characteristic repeated in subsequent *House* episodes, such as “The Softer Side” and confirmed by House’s own rant: “What do I have? I have my brain. That’s it!” (“No Reason”). This is all untrue. House’s physical body is in fact essential for his work. He runs tests, takes histories, and even breaks into patients’ homes with ease. His case-solving insights regularly emerge from physical proximity with patients in the hospital’s walk-in clinic, or from his own bodily experiences as when stealing half a sandwich from Wilson inspires him to conclude that a patient has a tapeworm (“Insensitive”). The insistence that his ratiocinative male brain is all he has or needs is a patent fiction, predicated on the fallacious interpretation of such minds as the organising principle of detective fiction and constantly undermined by the series writers, who seem to take pleasure in both affirming the tradition and debunking it repeatedly over eight series. Important for my argument, however, is that *House* relies on it as an *a priori* axiom that defines it as a detective series.

The example of *House* highlights perfectly the paradox at the heart of the word “clinical”: both referring to working with bodies in a medical context (that is, not in a laboratory or conducting research), and to the “coldly, calculatingly intellectual,” devoid of “sympathy.” Palmer, in exiling the female detective from the roots of the detective genre – to her they can only produce a “redefinition” or “destabiliz[ation]” as a “challenge or reformation of the form and its foundational ideology” – positions “clinical” as a defining trait for the genre (2001: 56). She posits that, at the *fin de siècle*, “no literary genre better reflected the ideological potency of the clinical, disciplinary gaze than the detective novel,” deploying “clinical” as code for the mental detachment apparently required for detective reasoning, an emotionless and rigid approach, making the same error as the characters in *House* (59).

A clear illustration, of this commitment to the ratiocinative emerges too in Joseph Kestner’s *Sherlock’s Sisters*, which does a superb job of bringing to the fore many of the characters and stories analysed here, but which fails to escape the Holmesian paradigm dominated by the male mind. For example, in suggesting that Adler’s besting of Holmes in “A Scandal in Bohemia” in 1891 “gave the opening” for *fin-de-siècle* authors to create female detectives who could become Holmes’ “sisters” in the detectival tradition, Kestner has to rely on a partial interpretation of the extant literature and a presentist interpretation of the importance of Holmes to the genre (2003: 3). The two novels preceding “Scandal” were not huge bestsellers (*The Sign of the Four* (1890) was overshadowed by Lippincott’s simultaneous commission, Oscar Wilde’s *The Picture of Dorian Gray*). It was only in the set of short stories beginning with “Scandal” that Conan Doyle found a large audience for his detective. Merrick’s, Ruth “the Betrayer”, Mrs Paschal, G, and Miriam Lea all predate even *The Sign of the Four*. Kestner similarly interprets chronological evidence in a curious way when he argues that there is a gap in the extant literature featuring both amateur and professional female detectives between 1894 (when Mary Elizabeth Braddon’s *Thou Art The Man*, Corbett’s *When the Sea*, and the final of Pirkis’ Brooke stories were published) and 1897 (when the Dene stories were published) because Holmes had temporarily disappeared from print – the so-called “Great Hiatus” (2003: 54). It is equally logical to argue that we might expect *more* female detectives to appear then, just as Arthur Morrison’s Martin Hewitt did.

It is very clear that, while the (re-)emergence of the female detective of the late nineteenth century parallels Holmes' success, it does not derive from it. The female detective was already firmly established in a genre so routinely interpreted as "always already a masculinist genre" (Palmer 2001: 56). Thus, while Kestner suggests that the authors of "Sherlock's sisters" had a "challenge ... to differentiate their detectives ... from the masculine model," (2003: 29) I argue that these female detectives actually define the sort of detective work that was done by their brothers of the nineteenth century, and indeed that continues today. If we reject the erroneous basis of *House*, we might instead consider Patrick Jane, suggestively referred to by his feminine surname throughout the television series *The Mentalist* (CBS, 2008-2015), in which "an acute eye for those telling details, which appear to others as trivia," "curiosity" that resembles "the stereotype of women's 'nosiness,'" and "'outsider' status" shape and define his effective detective work (Marcus 1997: ix).

By setting aside our assumptions about the necessary dominance of masculine ratiocination, we can resist the attitude that thinking men are the detectival norm. Instead, we can ask: for whom are female detectives "honorary men," and why? For critics who continue to seek to assert that detective fiction is always centred on the masculine ratiocinative mind? Perhaps we might better situate male detectives as "honorary females" in how they use their bodies. Or perhaps, in the future, we can escape that binary entirely.

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