



**‘Parodied, pastiched, pilloried’ and polished: Ngaio Marsh and
Margery Allingham’s development of the gentleman detective**

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Abstract

This dissertation deepens and extends the modern field of study of “golden age” mystery authors Ngaio Marsh and Margery Allingham by closely examining the two writers’ individual development of the classical trope of the gentleman detective.

Since its inception, classical detective fiction has been considered by critics to be both formulaic and conservative. Though this limited perspective has recently been challenged and deconstructed, Marsh and Allingham are still too often sequestered by both genre and sex into a devalued class of writers; this study aims to complicate the regular framing of their work in particular as lesser, homogeneous, and stereotypical.

Each of these authors accomplished the same feat in the same genre, through different methods and in different series, centering on their unique detective protagonists. This dissertation acknowledges Marsh and Allingham’s similar achievements as well as their individuality by analyzing them in separate, parallel chapters which first examine the worlds of detection created by each author; these are followed by sections investigating their nuanced portrayals of the divided morality inherent to the figure of the gentleman detective; finally, each chapter culminates with an analysis of a novel each in which the detective in some way fails to properly detect and emerges triumphant in the narrative anyway, revealing Marsh and Allingham’s considerations of the purpose of fictional detection beyond the purely intellectual crossword-like puzzle it was often considered to be.

Through close-reading analysis spanning each author’s series supplemented by theories of performance, modernism and postmodernism, abjection, and the rich field of crime fiction scholarship, this study illuminates the breadth and the depth of both Marsh and Allingham’s development of the figure of the gentleman detective. Their explorations of the classical detective genre and its central character reveal a far more complicated consideration of class, gender, and the morally ambivalent nature of escapist fiction than that for which they have historically been given credit.

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Series detective fiction of Ngaio Marsh and Margery Allingham

Ngaio Marsh

A Man Lay Dead (1934)

Enter a Murderer (1935a)

The Nursing Home Murder (1935b)

Death in Ecstasy (1936)

Vintage Murder (1937)

Artists in Crime (1938a)

Death in a White Tie (1938b)

Overture to Death (1939)

Death at the Bar (1940)

Surfeit of Lampreys (1941)

Death and the Dancing Footman (1942)

Colour Scheme (1943)

Died in the Wool (1945)

Final Curtain (1947)

Swing, Brother, Swing (1949)

Opening Night (1951)

Spinsters in Jeopardy (1954)

Scales of Justice (1955)

Death of a Fool (1957)

Singing in the Shrouds (1959)

False Scent (1960)

Hand in Glove (1962)

Dead Water (1964)

Killer Dolphin (1966)

Clutch of Constables (1968)

When in Rome (1970)

Tied Up in Tinsel (1972)

Black as He's Painted (1974)

Last Ditch (1977)

Grave Mistake (1978)

Photo Finish (1980)

Light Thickens (1982)

Margery Allingham

The Crime at Black Dudley (1929)

Mystery Mile (1930)

Look to the Lady (1931a)

Police at the Funeral (1931b)

Sweet Danger (1933)

Death of a Ghost (1934)

Flowers for the Judge (1936)

Case of the Late Pig (1937a)

Dancers in Mourning (1937b)

The Fashion in Shrouds (1938)

Traitor's Purse (1941)

Coroner's Pidgin (1945)

More Work for the Undertaker (1949)

The Tiger in the Smoke (1952)

The Beckoning Lady (1955)

Hide My Eyes (1958)

The China Governess (1963)

The Mind Readers (1965)

Introduction: A purity of character

Detective fiction has always hovered on the borders of Literature. Early in the genre's history, there was a "general agreement that detective narratives were not art", leading some authors to claim superiority in the realm of games rather than serious fiction (Pyrhönen 1994: 82). Its early defenders, like those represented in Howard Haycraft's collection of the genre's first criticism (1946), seemed to consider it a kind of passionless escapism, its closest relation the crossword puzzle. This comparison with games has been particularly fruitful for critics in the ensuing century, as excellently summarized by Robert Rushing (2007: 125): "[b]oth are 'escapist' leisure activities, both proceed by inference... and the enjoyment of both depends on a promise of full revelation and the unary solution." This escapist aspect is supposedly crucial to a reader's enjoyment of the detective story, which we generally expect takes place in a rational universe featuring a privileged individual. Richard Bradford (2015: 71-2) points to "the escapist illusion of someone, a detective, possessed of an almost magical ability to make sense of an insoluble conundrum."

What Stewart King (2023) has called the "standard" history of the genre, focused exclusively on the development of the Anglo-American strand, opens by locating the birth of the recognizable detective story – that is, a narrative that a modern reader would readily identify that way – in 1841, with the publication of Edgar Allan Poe's short story "The Murders in the Rue Morgue" (Rushing 2007: 17). "Rue Morgue", which focuses on the ratiocinative feats of the Parisian detective C. Auguste Dupin, was followed by two other short stories: "The Mystery of Marie Rogêt" (1842-3) and "The Purloined Letter" (1844). As pointed out by Patricia Merivale and Susan Sweeney (1999), Poe's Dupin stories arguably established every crucial trope of the detective genre as we know it today: the locked-room murder, the rivalry between amateur and police, the guilt of the least likely suspect, the twist ending, and, above all, the great gentleman detective capable of solving any mystery.

Of course, the "great detective" known to most modern readers is probably not Dupin but his descendant, Arthur Conan Doyle's Sherlock Holmes. Doyle adapted and refined Poe's creation, cementing another of detective fiction's hallmarks: self-referentiality. Even as Holmes was clearly structured to some degree in the shape of Dupin, Doyle had him reference his predecessor as that "very inferior fellow", setting a precedent for the next century-plus of competing, self-aware, consciously fictive detectives (Doyle 1936: 14). Dupin and Holmes also shared the identity of the gentleman detective, combining aesthete natures with rationality and intellectual superiority that made them unquestionable authorities. Poe's first description of Dupin identifies him as a "young gentleman... of an excellent, indeed of an illustrious family"

reduced to poverty (Poe 1938: 143). Holmes's background is equally mysterious, but his tastes and manners attest to similarly genteel origins. These detectives exist in universes that bow to their intelligence *and* to their status, a convention upheld by the next generation of mystery authors.

Beyond Doyle's own desire to move on from his detective, it may have been World War I that finally killed Sherlock Holmes – that supremely rational being foundered in the irrationality of the early twentieth century. Whatever the reason for Holmes's decline, it certainly did not kill the detective: there was a veritable boom in detective fiction published between and after the interwar years, and Haycraft's (1941: viii) oft-cited statistic that the genre accounted for "one out of every four new works of fiction published in the English language" has remained a benchmark for describing the enthusiasm mystery stories generated in this period. There have been many attempts in the past century to catalogue the breadth and depth of what has been understandably called a "golden age" of detective fiction, from Haycraft's *Murder for Pleasure* (1941) to Julian Symons's *Bloody Murder* (1972) and Lee Horsley's *Twentieth-Century Crime Fiction* (2005), to name only a few. Histories of the genre emphasize the golden age's reflexivity, its authors' self-conscious molding of generic boundaries by establishing tongue-in-cheek "rules" of "fair play". It is a subgenre that has been likened to the comedy of manners (Grella 1970) and religious ritual (Auden 1948), its apparent dedication to formal closure and the (variable, but nearly always present) overt prejudices against all those who did not fit neatly into the upper-class social milieu lending it a reputation of being a straight, white, nostalgic defense against the threat of modern progress.

This charge of conservatism, not only of ideology but of style, is consistently laid at the feet of golden age mysteries. As Melissa Schaub (2013: 11) points out, this argument should be linked with the fact that the most prominently remembered authors of the British "classical" school are women, while the American "hard-boiled" – often considered to be more radical than the former – is largely associated with men: "Conservative and feminized are the same positions detective fiction scholars assign Golden Age authors in relation to the rest of the genre. The two terms are seen to go hand in hand; that is, a literature that is feminine must be conservative." The belief in a uniformly conservative classical detective genre was thoroughly routed first by Alison Light (1991: 10). Instead, in her analysis of Agatha Christie, where she argued for the concept of Christie's "conservative modernity": a simultaneous anxiety about both the past and the future, and a fiction that works to explore and accommodate both. Light's theme has been picked up and developed in the ensuing years, particularly by feminist critics who seek to make sense of the complex politics of this era's authors.

Much criticism of this kind, like Light's, has focused on the so-called "Queens of Crime", a grouping of four – sometimes five – female authors of detective fiction whose work was published and consumed in droves from the 1920s onward. These authors include Agatha Christie, Dorothy L. Sayers, Margery Allingham, and Ngaio Marsh – Josephine Tey is sometimes, but not often, categorized with the central four. Just as all genre fiction is often set apart from the canon, "[e]ven amongst feminist critics an unacknowledged *cordon sanitaire* has been drawn to separate these writers from their more 'literary' sisters although this attitude has thankfully had somewhat of a reversal, especially since the 1990s" (Kaplan 2013: 145). Even so, the "Queens" are still usually discussed mostly in relation to each other, and generally with a certain amount of "covert devaluation" that enhances the literary reputation of some authors – particularly Christie – at the expense of others (Horsley 2005: 7). It is with this in mind that I write about two of these authors' work in comparison. Margery Allingham and Ngaio Marsh have frequently occupied the position of the more formulaic, the more conservative half of the group of four, used to construct a picture of Christie and Sayers's comparatively modern literariness. This is a framing of Marsh and Allingham's work – and of their apparent interchangeability – that I aim to complicate.

Margery Allingham (1904 – 1966) published her first novel at eighteen and continued to make a living by her pen for the rest of her life. Of the novels published in her lifetime (to which I limit my attention), twenty-five out of twenty-nine were mysteries, and all but seven of those featured her series detective, the mysterious amateur adventurer Albert Campion. The first Campion novel was published in 1929, and the final adventure completed by Allingham appeared in 1965, a year before her death. Though she experienced "some decades of obscurity after [her] death", the Campion series remains in print to this day (Kaplan 2013: 144). Allingham has been uneasily grouped with the "Queens" – not uneasily because her popularity or skill was ever under question, but because no critic has ever seemed to know exactly what to do with her. Like her contemporaries, she produced a series of successful novels in the interwar period with a focus on a single detective; unlike them, Allingham often dispensed with the classical puzzle element, and "the next Campion" might as likely have been an adventure story as a murder mystery. In the century since her first novels were published, critical consensus has largely been to group – and thus dismiss – her work. Symons, Light, and Pyrhönen (1994) place her alongside Marsh (and occasionally Sayers), a tendency repeated in most inventories of the golden age authors that creates a sense that the non-Christies are a homogeneous bunch, only to be distinguished from one another by the barest traits: Sayers's literary aspirations, Marsh's foreignness and theatricality, and Allingham's experimental attitude to the puzzle-plot. Other critics, more willing to look at Allingham as an individual

author, acknowledge her “sensitivity to changing English culture” (Schaub 2013: 64-5) and “talent for bringing strange and grotesque characters to life” (McDorman 1991: 136-7). While there is a Margery Allingham Society, she has received the least critical attention of the four, with few analyses dedicated to her alone.

The difficulty of “placing” Allingham is due, in part, to critical insistence on collecting these four authors together purely because they are women who wrote in the same vast genre at roughly the same time – which is to say, suggesting that because they can be grouped together historically, it must follow that they can be grouped stylistically and ideologically as well. The advantage of this tendency for me is that it has produced a wealth of criticism in which Allingham is discussed peripherally where she otherwise might not have been mentioned at all, due to her stark differences from the others. Although all the “Queens” explored psychology and morality in their work, more so than the others Allingham was a novelist of the mind and morals of the detective over those of the killer, topics she expertly explored within the broad scope of her chosen genre. She uses her detective, an adventurer who rejects his aristocratic background, to investigate the transitional morality of her age. Because Campion is a gentleman detective, with a hybrid status and multiple codes of ethics, Allingham can consider carefully what it might be like to be burdened with the responsibility of being a walking moral compass, as the detective – the center of the novel’s world – must be.

Meanwhile, probably on one of many ship journeys between her native New Zealand and England, Ngaio Marsh (1895 – 1982) was industriously producing *her* mystery novels; the author-painter-theater director described her life as a “constant though irregular rhythm. So many years in New Zealand, so many in England or abroad. Half the year in the theatre and half writing detective fiction” (Marsh 1946: 273). Between 1934 and 1982, Marsh published thirty-two novels featuring (like Campion) a detective of aristocratic birth. Roderick Alleyn, C.I.D., was unique among the heroes of the four “Queens” in his professional status: over the course of the series, Alleyn rises in rank to become Chief Superintendent, and it is suggested that he began his career as a constable – the negotiation of Alleyn’s class with his profession is a constant focus of the novels. Marsh maintained throughout her life that crime fiction was not her passion – rather, she seemed slightly indignant of her own success in that quarter, and it was not until the second edition of her autobiography, published twenty years after the first, that she succumbed to popular demand and added a chapter on this aspect of her life’s work. In New Zealand, she was known largely by her connection with that art that did seem to matter most to her: the theater. In 1966 she was awarded a D.B.E. for her work in theater production, although there is a popular misconception that the award was due to her work as a novelist.

Like Allingham, Marsh has in many ways baffled critics, though not for lack of analysis. Did she, as Alison Light and Carole Acheson (1985) have individually suggested, abandon her homeland for the comfortable “mainstream of British detective fiction” (Acheson 1985: 172) and “idolise” (Light 1991: 80) the upper classes of a country that she had been brought up to think of as home? Or, as Schaub (2013: 100) argues, perhaps she was “unrelenting in her criticism” of aristocratic excess and the social culture which she was able to view more objectively than her English contemporaries. To some degree, both are true; a reader looking for sharp commentary on the divide between English and colonial lives will find plenty of interest in her work, but, as Blake Allmendinger (2019: 76) says, she was both “a loyal subject of the British Empire and a proud New Zealander.” There is enough of this duality evident in her writing to keep scholars guessing endlessly at her “true” political beliefs. They have certainly agreed, however, on the other facet of her dual identity: that of author/thespian, and the undeniable presence of the theater in her detective fiction. Susan Rowland (2004: 43, 130) describes her as the creator of the “‘camp country house’ in which theatricality becomes the indices of class, gender and sexuality” and notes with clarity that her “typical mode is one of self-conscious theatricality within conservative gender and social aesthetics, complicated by post-colonial instincts.”

While Allingham used crime fiction to write about the frightening forces of the encroaching future and the restrictive past, Marsh used it to deeply investigate the core concept that fascinated her in the theater: people, and the performance of life. Predictably, at a rate of nearly one a year for half a century, Marsh’s novels follow a relatively similar structure, and the puzzle element of her books is not generally what readers remember, or what she herself cared most for. She considered “sheer ‘teckery and plot-contrivances... an exacting chore” in contrast with characterization, an exercise from which she would have “continually” to “pull [her]self together and attend to the plotting” (Marsh 1981: 294, 308). Given the importance of the theater in Marsh’s crime fiction, I find it not unreasonable to observe that though “her private life and her life as a writer were two separate compartments” and the theater constituted a third such compartment, “the compartments” may not have been so “seldom combined” as they seemed to her friend John Dacres-Mannings (in Rahn 1995: 32). Marsh used her fiction to interrogate the same questions about life, death, and the self that she did in the theater, and with a similarly self-conscious style. Through her gentleman detective, the aristocratic professional Roderick Alleyn, she was able to express both her concerns for a modern Britain as the Empire diminished, and to do what she excelled at: analyze people.

It is no mistake that critics like Symons, Light, Rowland, and Pyrhönen have grouped Marsh and Allingham together: they are the “other two”, less known and less studied than the masterful Christie and the academic Sayers, rendered outsiders in their own genre by nationality and lack of adherence to formula, respectively. In one way, this is reason enough to examine them more closely – where there is dismissal, there is often unacknowledged depth. But there are other reasons to look at these two authors together: Marsh herself acknowledged that her books had an “affinity with Marjorie [sic] Allingham rather than with Agatha Christie” (Vinson 1972: 845). The line she drew between herself and Christie was one of “purity”: Christie’s characters, she attested, were “two-dimensional, lively, extremely well-defined and highly entertaining... in form and style Agatha Christie is a purist. I, on the other hand, try to write about characters in the round and am in danger of letting them take charge” (Marsh 1981: 308). This intense consciousness of generic boundaries was shared by Allingham, who herself described Christie as an intellectual “in the purest sense of the term” operating in “the most essentially modern (if, also, one of the most odd) form of literature the language has yet produced” (Allingham 1950). Allingham’s biographer Julia Jones (2012: 359-60) records her intensely negative reaction to her publisher’s expectation that she “write two books a year like Agatha Christie” – both Marsh and Allingham, it seems, set themselves apart from the formulaic “purity” of Christie *and* from “literature”, or the consciously literary style of Sayers, whose earnest academic approach to detective fiction was lightly caricatured by Marsh in her autobiography (1981: 306).

The claim that these authors *did* make for themselves was that of character; though Marsh was more outspoken about this emphasis in her work, Kathryn Slate McDorman (1991: 136-7) describes their mutual achievement of having “created memorable villains and supporting characters in the tradition of Charles Dickens.” Their shared talent for and delight in characterization sets them apart, too, in their writing of sustained series focusing on a single protagonist each. Detective fiction has always been about the detectives – readers recall their favorite Holmes, Wimsey, and Maigret more often than their favorite Doyle, Sayers, or Simenon, and both Marsh and Allingham gave their detectives character enough to carry a series, and developed them through it. The interest we take in a detective is complex and personal; authors may be suggesting that we ask the questions identified by Horsley:

What is it that we find compelling about the detective himself? What is it in modern experience that he represents and appeals to? What are the hidden elements in his own character? What is the nature of his relationship to his society? What anxieties are embodied in the crimes he investigates and the criminals he pursues? What aspects of his society are brought to the fore in his narrative? (Horsley 2005: 27)

This is for me a key set of questions, which I begin to explore in this dissertation. In maintaining a single detective over forty or fifty years' worth of novels, both Marsh and Allingham necessarily investigated all these aspects of their protagonists, and their interest in characterization led them to experiment with and develop the type they each began with: the gentleman detective. Light (1991: 66) vividly describes the development of what we consider "conservative" literature as an eternally self-referential form in which "older models were to be broken up, self-consciously redeployed, parodied, pastiched, pilloried." Though Alleyn and Campion today are the products of ironically canonized "Queens of Crime", though their attitudes and settings are undeniably dated to a twenty-first century eye, Marsh and Allingham's genre-conscious experimentation gives their work the polish of innovation, and it is the concept of the *gentleman detective* that they updated for their modern world.

Each author wrote a series spanning decades, during which their audiences' and their own attitudes were inescapably affected by swiftly changing social and political landscapes – and wars. Despite the widely-held belief in the genre's isolation from reality, that "in the British [detective] stories the General Strike of 1926 never took place, trade unions did not exist, and... the fairy tale land of the Golden Age was one in which murder was committed over and over again without anybody getting hurt" (Symons 1972: 104), it is impossible to read through the novels of Marsh and Allingham without noticing their efforts to reflect the changing world around them in their writing. Schaub (2013: 2) characterizes the British women mystery novelists of this period with an "amalgamation of forward-looking gender politics with backward-looking class politics", but analyses like McDorman's (1991) and Laura E. Nym Mayhall's (2021) undoubtedly complicate the notion of a wholly conservative attitude to class in these works. Similarly, the threat of war is never far from either Marsh or Allingham's texts; multiple books in both series are set mid-World War II, each including a pair of wartime novels that display intense anxiety about threats from *within*: Marsh's spy thriller *Colour Scheme* (1943) and her claustrophobic meditation on national character *Died in the Wool* (1945) provide as much constant awareness of war as Allingham's paranoiac duo *Traitor's Purse* (1941) and *Coroner's Pidgin* (1945). Allingham paid close attention to the conflicts of modern capitalism and the remnants of Victorian morality, displaying a near-obsession with the advent of the next generation in her last few books. Marsh "emphatically addresses racism as a stain on English character" (Rowland 2004: 66) as early as 1937, and devoted an entire novel – with limited success – to the struggles for African independence in 1974's *Black as He's Painted*. As Marsh and Allingham grew as writers, however, neither left their detectives behind; nor did they strictly continue to write to the same formula (in Allingham's case, it is debatable whether she ever had one), but adapted their plots and their characters to fit the changing world

around them. As McDorman and B. A. Pike (1987) have excellently established in their respective books, Marsh and Allingham – unlike, say, Christie – deeply developed their detectives not merely to make them better puzzle-solvers, but as characters in their own right.

In both cases, I see this development largely occurring in the authors' investigations of the conflicts inherent to the "gentleman detective": they problematized the escapist fantasy of the man who will always know all – including the "right thing" to do. It is the use of the gentleman detective that truly ties these two authors together, this figure poised to investigate what Christie Berberich (2007: 7) calls "the main question the twentieth century poses in regard to the gentleman: is the ideal dead, has the gentleman become superfluous, or does it (and he) still exist in today's society?" The Victorian "ideal" of the gentleman is a hybrid: he may be the "true" gentleman, born into his status and inherently imbued of all the superiority of manner, taste, dress, and thought that that status connotes; or the "self-made" gentleman, who represents the idea that any man (or, as Schaub points out, anyone at all), however lowly born, can *become* a gentleman by embodying all those values. What links the two in the twentieth century literary imagination, Berberich (2007: 10) argues, is duty: "duty before personal interest, the good of the group (read: society) before that of the individual." The position of the gentleman detective, then, suggests a constant negotiation of identity, an ambivalence of duty. He is the detective, who must pursue truth for the sake of justice and the public good, but who retains at some level a loyalty to his gentlemanly status, his class, and normative hierarchies, the undisrupted society that demands – as aristocrats in golden age novels so often do – special treatment and silence, supposedly for the good of all.

This tension between class and professional ethics is embodied by both Roderick Alleyn and Albert Campion – men born into the aristocracy, possessed of all its advantages and none of its excesses, who have chosen to sacrifice their status to investigate crime: to serve the public good. I fully agree with Mayhall's assertion that Marsh and Allingham professionalized and tamed the concept of aristocracy – which is to say, gentlemanliness – for a modern world through "service: the detective as public servant, acting in a disinterested fashion. Privilege of birth as such is... rejected, as in Alleyn's demeanor, or masked, as in Campion's obfuscations", but both men consistently "put the public good above personal interest" (2021: 781). Marsh and Allingham, committing to character above all, made the gulf between the gentleman and the detective their focus, using their protagonists' unique struggles the two identities – never resolved over the course of their series – as an argument for their inextricability. There are some problems, as Karin Molander Danielsson (2002: 159) excellently observes, that "are too valuable, narratively speaking, to be solved and disposed of as quickly as the murder mystery." Alleyn and Campion are examples of a self-conscious,

intentionally-crafted gentleman detective: a character in whom multiple types of duty, sensibilities of justice, and kinds of moral authority are entangled, and whose authors refuse to cleanly untangle them.

Marsh and Allingham, in the same era and under the same generic umbrella, wrote wildly different series which, in their own ways, ultimately accomplished the same feat. By focusing on the tension of identity inherent to the gentleman detective in the early twentieth century, they considered, developed, and exposed the place of traditional authority in a modern society. They undermined the concept of the solitary, infallible, quasi-omniscient detective by making moral and intellectual doubt central traits of their detectives, illustrating the pressures of being the person to make moral choices for an entire community. Through their investigations of the conflict between the duty of the detective and the ethical complexity of the gentleman, Marsh and Allingham wrote mysteries in which the “pure” search for truth becomes a secondary focus of the detective, and he himself – not the puzzles he solves – is the reader’s primary interest.

In order to analyze Marsh and Allingham as individuals with their own agendas and themes while still acknowledging the similar achievements of their work, I have structured my dissertation into parallel chapters, one per author, with three themed sections each. I first examine the worlds of detection these writers crafted: the ways they situated themselves in their genre. Heta Pyrhönen (1999: 96) memorably suggests that the “detective’s character partly derives from the reason making him or her the right kind of ‘can opener’ for an author’s purposes”, and in these first sections I explore Marsh and Allingham’s development of a correspondence between detective and mystery that served them throughout their respective series. In Marsh’s case, this is an infusion of her own theatricality into both Alleyn’s character and the structure of the novels; she creates an innately theatrical society populated by people who are always performing, and Alleyn becomes the ultimate actor and director who can navigate it. Allingham, meanwhile, wrote a world whose unstable modernity, filled with conflicts of progress and nostalgia, can only be solved by a detective of a wholly unstable identity: *Campion*. Where Marsh delves deeply into the artificiality of her genre and translates it into *literal*, theatrical artificiality, Allingham expands the limited definition of the golden age’s genre into modernism – and even postmodernism. In these broad overviews of the two series, I zoom in closely on a crucial text for each author in which she solidified and defined both her fictional world and her detective’s place in it.

This focus on the detectives extends to the second section of each chapter, in which I investigate the moral nuances of the gentleman detective figure, and how both Alleyn and

Campion juggle their divided sense of ethical duty. Marsh and Allingham write highly self-conscious novels in a self-conscious genre, and their protagonists' attitudes towards detection reflect that fact. In her creation of a professional detective, Marsh wrote a fastidious policeman who believes wholeheartedly in the justice of his work even as he is intensely aware of how it disturbs and frightens the people around him; the social discomfort generated by his boundary-crossing identity as a gentleman detective bleeds into his own perception of himself. By portraying Alleyn as an unsolvable contradiction, Marsh draws our attention to the emotional "mess" of detective work, refusing to allow her reader – or her detective – to relax into the mystery as purely intellectual puzzle. Pushing this concept of the moral mystery even further, Allingham depicts Campion as a detective whose greatest strength is his moral self-control, in direct contrast with a characteristic lack of traditional intellectual detective work. His plots force him to make complex ethical choices far more than they require him to solve complex puzzles, and Allingham sets him up against charismatic, intelligent doubles – false gentlemen – who highlight Campion's self-control as the most important gentlemanly trait. Both Marsh and Allingham use their detectives – one a professional, one an amateur – to explore the position of the law in a mystery novel, and the frustration and pain a murder investigation can cause in a community. Each author focuses on the opposite half of the "gentleman detective" identity: Alleyn attempts to subordinate his gentlemanliness in favor of professionalism, while Campion's gentlemanly morals *are* his detective work – in both cases, the authors argue that the gentleman and the detective are inseparably linked. These sections establish the actual goals of the characters beyond the "pure" pursuit of truth: the detective is the puzzle for the reader to solve.

Finally, in the third section of each chapter, I examine an instance of "failure": a book in which the detective fails, in some way, to properly detect – at least in the way that they are generally seen to detect in their respective series. In neither case does that failure feel *genuine* in the sense that a detective's mistake results in a mystery without an answer, or a killer going free. These are still detective stories with closure – the detectives still discover the solutions, murderers are villains who do not get away with their crimes – but both Alleyn and Campion are proved to be fallible, to be capable of failing not simply at intellectual problem-solving, but at the act of detection as they idiosyncratically perform it. In *Last Ditch* (1977) Alleyn is literally upstaged by a murderer in a dramatic, parodic inversion of the typical climaxes of Marsh's novels; Campion genuinely gets the solution to the mystery wrong in *Dancers in Mourning* (1937b) and is outsmarted by the police – the amateur detective's greatest faux pas. But they are both saved by their own complex relationships with detection: for neither Alleyn nor Campion is the pursuit of the solution their only function, and it is Marsh and Allingham's

ability to preserve the integrity of their characters, despite the tense and complex identity of the gentleman detective, that makes these detectives the modern men they ultimately become.

Marsh and Allingham's experimentation with the trope of the gentleman detective through their aristocratic creations Alleyn and Campion exhibits both authors' evident, and little-remarked upon, dedication to the development of both their characters and their genre. Although I acknowledge Marty Roth's (1995: 9) point that "[d]evelopment is an evaluative bluff; you can find it if you have a stake in finding it", I argue that these authors, writing consistently over such a long span of time with their consuming interests in structure, the boundaries of genre, and character, could not *but* innovate. Marsh and Allingham both are and are not the "other two Queens of Crime": it is for their shared accomplishment as creators of nuanced gentlemen detectives that I examine them together, and for their individual achievements as genre fiction authors we must (re)consider them apart.

Chapter 1 Alleyn: The limits of discomfort

Perhaps it is easier to recognize the individual in the type than the type in the individual, given the importance of deduction in our daily encounters with others. (Brilliant 1991: 32)

1.1 “An audience of one”: Marsh’s world of performance

If the detective story is, as G. K. Chesterton (1946: 4) claimed, the “only form of popular literature in which is expressed some sense of the poetry of modern life”, it is perhaps most accurate to describe the fiction of Ngaio Marsh as deeply concerned with the *theatricality* of modern life. Marsh relates fiction to theater through structure, theme, and the methods of her detective, C.I.D. Inspector Roderick Alleyn. It is hard to read Marsh without noticing her connections to the theater; writers like Kathryne Slate McDorman (1991) have catalogued Marsh’s use of the stage, including the eight novels set literally in theaters and the nearly omnipresent actor character – aspiring ingenues, *grandes dames* of the stage, and self-important actor-managers appear everywhere from New Zealand hot springs to Dorset manors. By 1966, the official (low) estimate maintains that Alleyn has been “concerned in four police investigations in which actors had played – and ‘played’ had been the operative word – leading roles. As a result of these cases he was sardonically regarded at the Yard as something of an expert on the species” (Marsh 1966: 111). The mysteries are theatrical: “Not for her the ‘locked door’ murder; [Marsh’s] sense of drama demanded an audience... and rarely found scope in a surreptitious murder” (McDorman 1991: 3). Add to this the characters’, especially Alleyn’s, propensity for quoting Shakespeare and we are left with a distinctly thespian-flavored series of detective novels.

Marsh was a prolific producer of plays, as well as an actor in her youth, and her passion for the stage is evident in the content of the books as well as in their form. The detective genre, with its emphasis on deceit, maintains “a self-reflexive awareness that the theatre with its make-believe and dramatic masks is all there is” (Pyrhönen 1999: 196), and a talented artist like Marsh uses that awareness as a space for experimentation. Marsh commented on “the living stage” in comparison with film: it “asks its audience to accept many conventions. It makes repeated demands upon the imagination. By Hollywood standards it is shabby, unreal and extremely restricted” (Marsh 1946: 4). We might easily apply these notions of restriction, unreality, and conventionality to the detective novel in comparison with the “straight” novel. Theater is not only Marsh’s method in the creation of her mysteries, but also the heart of Alleyn’s method of unravelling those puzzles. He is a model reader of his own self-reflexive genre’s formulaic “scripts” as Marsh herself was a reader of the plays; he is a

consummate actor who moves seamlessly between “roles” as he adapts to each suspect he interviews; and a director who, as Marsh herself argued was a sign of skill, can “convince his actors” – and his audience – “that his reading is a valid one”: the detective’s ultimate task in explaining the truth at the center of a mystery (Bushnell, in Rahn 1995: 55). Alleyn’s theatricality forms the core of his ability as a detective, which Marsh demonstrates in the least *evidently* theatrical of her novels, *Death in a White Tie* (1938b). This novel is a crystallization in the development of Alleyn’s character in which Marsh draws our attention firmly to the importance of theater in her series, presenting Alleyn as a superior script-reader, actor, and director – her version of the ultimate professional detective.

The theatrical structure of Marsh’s fiction begins in its front matter, foregrounding her favorite arena for experimentation: her characters. Like other mystery novelists of the time, Marsh often opens her books with a sketch plan of the crime scene (the stage) and, more unusually, a *dramatis personae* indicating the characters’ “roles” as stock players in the classical detective story, “introduced as if in a playbill, each representing a social type” (Mayhall 2021: 787). *Death in a White Tie*, for instance, introduces the reader to Lady Evelyn Carrados as “a London hostess”, Lord Robert “Bunchy” Gospell as “a relic of Victorian days”, and Sir Daniel Davidson as “a fashionable London physician” among many others. (In other novels, such varied characters appear as “an authority on church music”, “landed proprietor”, and “a cat”.) Not only are these lists helpful in refreshing readers’ memories, but Marsh uses them to point to the playful artificiality of her characters: how well – or how poorly – do these “players” embody their types, and how do those performances inform our judgment of their potential guilt?

Marsh casts her characters in these predetermined roles and subverts their types through Alleyn’s (re)reading of those characters. Critics have consistently noted Marsh’s particular skill in using the detective genre as a method of “social and political criticism” (Oleksiw, in Rahn 1995: 161) and in creating memorable characters: two techniques, I argue, that go hand in hand. She wrote in a genre which “reflects... the analysis of its own narrative mysteries”, constantly referencing its own tropes, winking at readers alert to its familiar signs (Sweeney, in Walker & Frazer 1990: 13). Marsh’s use of the *dramatis personae* is one element of her self-reflexivity, in which she explicitly highlights the story’s artificiality and suggests that her readers consider these “stock” roles before we meet the individuals who will inhabit them. McDorman claims Marsh wrote no stock characters, that it “is possible to group certain kinds of people together from her various novels, but she gave such specific qualities that none can be reduced to types” (1991: 76). I certainly agree that Marsh’s characters are nuanced, but I suggest that it is precisely her use of “types” that makes them so. The aging diva, a “stock”

character excellently examined by McDorman herself, appears in nearly every stage novel Marsh wrote. Re-experiencing these characters is a large part of the fun of Marsh's novels, as it is an exercise she evidently undertook to play with readerly expectations produced by generic familiarity. As readers specifically of *Marsh's* work, we learn to anticipate her adaptation of these "types", and "[i]t is precisely on this foreseen and awaited reappearance that our modest but irrefutable pleasure is based" (Eco 1972: 19). In Karin Molander Danielsson's (2002) analysis of contemporary detective fiction oriented around such professional and pastime interests as baking and horse-riding, she argues that this kind of "special interest" generates a cohesive through-line for a series. Theater is evidently Marsh's special interest – because of these "playbills" and her experimentation with the character types they describe, every novel in her series comments on the performance of everyday life.

Alleyn's detective work relies on our genre-conscious expectations of these stock characters. Marsh created a theatrical world of eternally-performing characters, and a detective to match it: Alleyn's great skill lies in his ability to recognize and respond to those characters as an actor, and manipulate them as a director. His attention to type is a crucial aspect of his work, as pointed out by Marilyn Rye: Alleyn "is always looking at the suspects and determining which are playing 'roles,' as when he tries to catch them in that one moment when they step out of character" (in Rahn 1995: 83). We can consider this role-playing in several ways: first, in the sense that detectives are in the business of looking for suspects "concealing information... or playing roles to conceal" murderous intentions (Allmendinger 2019: 84). But, having glanced at the *dramatis personae* upon opening the novel, we know that everyone is playing a role. Even the Bright Young Things have secrets and believe they can outsmart Alleyn, as when virtuous heroine Robin Grey lies to his face in *Surfeit of Lampreys* (1941). Marsh's theatrical world certainly brings to mind a Butlerian performance "which the mundane social audience, including the actors themselves, come to believe and to perform in the mode of belief" (Butler 1999: 179). Every single character in a Marsh novel is performing their "type", and they are all performing in their lies to the police.

Perhaps, then, Alleyn is watching for steps out of line in the sense that George Grella (1970) discusses role-playing, in which the classical detective novel illustrates a hunt for an individual who does not properly conform, "exploiting the ritual of his society, posing as a gentleman, but hiding a dark, unacceptable secret" (1970: 42). As McDorman points out, however, Marsh habitually makes her most eccentric characters innocent and creates fashionable, slick murderers, "which raises the question as to what behaviour is normal: the flamboyant eccentric or the apparent conformist who erupts into homicidal rage?" (1991: 108). Let us look, then, at Alleyn's attention to character type as Marsh herself presents it:

“actors” (the characters themselves) playing “roles” (the stock descriptions in the *dramatis personae*). From this perspective, Alleyn’s job is not simply to classify everyone he meets into stereotypes, nor to look at each person only as a liar to be caught out – Marsh described her process as beginning with “characters alone... It becomes a matter of which of these people is capable of a crime of violence”, necessitating that she consider the motivations of every character, lending them all the dimension that McDorman and other critics have observed (Marsh 1981: 300). Remembering Heta Pyrhönen’s (1999) assertion that a detective’s character is formed by the themes an author wishes to explore, “the reasons making him or her the right kind of ‘can opener’ ” (1999: 96), we can easily identify the “cans” in Marsh’s novels as people: people performing familiar roles in a familiar play. It is Alleyn’s task as “can opener” to read past the type and into the individual, to recognize both the role and the actor playing it, and then to outperform them, to goad them into opening on their own.

Pyrhönen calls detectives “textually embedded model readers” who use their skills to read crime scenes and clues, deciding which potential paths to pursue and which to discard on their way to the mystery’s solution (1999: 5). Reading people, too, is a crucial aspect of their work, one foregrounded in *Death in a White Tie*, where Alleyn is confronted with several doubles: multiple characters vying for the same stock roles that emphasize the artificiality of those roles. His investigation brings him face to face with two blackmailed society women (one sympathetic, one vapid and cruel), two cynical débütantes (one successful, one “coming out” to appease her mother), and two blustery retired military men (whom we will examine closely). It is how well or how poorly these characters “perform” their roles that Alleyn analyzes to unearth the truth.

White Tie, on its surface, appears to be Marsh’s least “theatrical” novel – and this feature allows Marsh to focus her reader’s attention on the *inherently* theatrical elements of her series. It is in the extreme minority in that its “cast” includes only one character remotely connected with the stage, and even she has been retired for so many years that her former profession is quickly forgotten; it also contains the murder most closely connected to Alleyn, taking him entirely out of his professional comfort zone. Lord Robert “Bunchy” Gossell, universally-loved “Victorian relic” is engaged by his close friend Alleyn to investigate a series of blackmail incidents among high-society women. After suggesting that he has discovered the blackmailer’s identity, Bunchy is murdered in the back of a taxi whose driver delivers the corpse to Alleyn himself. From this moment, the novel becomes unusually private: confronted with the body, Alleyn struggles to look analytically at the scene – he is simply “alone with his friend” (1938b: 77). This murder is as close as Marsh ever truly comes to a traditional locked-room murder; given her usual near-public killings, it is notable that this death takes place far

from anyone's attention. This case's personal nature and its lack of outright theatrics set it starkly apart from the rest of Marsh's series; if Alleyn himself is a "can-opener" of theatrical mysteries, *White Tie* is the can that cracks the opener right back.

The novel's climax is, however, undeniably theatrical. Like other classical detectives, Alleyn habitually gathers his suspects together at the end of the investigation to reveal the culprit's identity, though – unsurprisingly – in an idiosyncratically dramatic way: "a reconstruction" in which he leads each suspect through their actions up to the moment of the murder "gives Alleyn an opportunity to manipulate events to force some of the suspects to reveal the parts of their accounts they have suppressed. Like a director, he intervenes in the unfolding of events" (Rye, in Rahn 1995: 86). This directorial role is hugely emphasized in the finale of *White Tie*, where even other policemen acknowledge the scene's theatrical theming, one announcing: "Stage set... And now the curtain rises" (Marsh 1938b: 317). As the suspects, gathered in the "wings", are ushered by constables on- and off-"stage" to deliver their testimony and make dramatic revelations, Alleyn guides the conversation to its resolution "into a sort of tableau" (1938b: 338-9) mimicking the "shifting two-dimensional picture" to which Marsh compares a stage performance (1946: 15). Marsh builds her novel to a climax that insists on its own theatricality, the environment in which Alleyn's detection thrives.

In addition to this showstopping finale, the whole of *White Tie* is concerned with performativity – much more in a Butlerian sense than in the rest of Marsh's work, through its satire of London "society with a small 's' and... Society with a large one" (1938b: 264). Alison Light (1991) uses this novel as her example to suggest that Marsh "idolise[s]" the upper classes, as she "lingers on the munificence of the London season" (1991: 80). In fact, it is Marsh's most viciously satirical novel, in which one character reflects, looking over a débutante ball, on the "unscrupulousness", "pomposity", and "stupidity" on display (1938b: 66). Her clearest condemnation of high society is concentrated in Marsh's portrayal of the notably performative characters who populate the mystery and serve as its suspects, whom she compares unfavorably with the legitimate, professional actors of her other novels. She portrays actors as unusually honest people who demonstrate what they feel unguardedly rather than covering their emotions, even within the tension of a murder investigation. In one of her many novels set in a theater, *Killer Dolphin* (1966), Alleyn delivers an analysis of the character of actors:

they make the most of everything they feel. ... It's his job to take the micky out of an audience, and even in the throes of a completely genuine emotional crisis, he does just that thing if it's only an audience of one. (1966: 244-5).

This conception of actors is typical of Marsh's portrayal of them throughout the series; they come across as almost alien, a different species entirely from the laymen who share the stage of her books. Though she never shies away from poking fun at the world of the theater, Marsh's imaging of the actor as an essentially honest, emotive creature in a genre in which all must be assumed to be lying places them in direct contrast with the *dishonest*, scheming non-actor. This is precisely the tone she takes in *Death in a White Tie*, whose actor-less milieu is a far more deceitful crowd than that of any theater: more play-acting goes on in a ballroom than onstage, she suggests, and for more duplicitous reasons than the pursuit of art. Where actors "make the most of everything they feel... on or off the stage" (1966: 244), the characters of *White Tie* are "poseurs... at once so frankly theatrical and so theatrically frank" (1938b: 158), they are "a little too good to be true" (18) and "so true to type" that they almost "seem unreal" (219). In response to this enhanced fakery, Alleyn's own theatrical skills as a reader of type, a director of dramatic scenes, and a player of roles come to the fore of his investigative technique.

McDorman's assessment of Alleyn is incisive: she calls him "the balance wheel between the land of theatrical invention, where people create their personas with care and the more pragmatic world of the police officers. His is the consciousness that translates one world into the other" (1991: 122). This idea of Alleyn as a balanced consciousness neatly parallels Richard Schechner's (2003: 315, 320) concept of the proper mode of performance, a kind of three-headed actor: one half which goes through the motions, one half which watches, critiques, and responds, and, crucially, a "third half" which creates the cohesive performance "without cancelling out the center 'I' self; the theatrical performer never wholly loses self-control." Marsh echoes this principle: "no player, in the last analysis, can be other than himself" (1946: 26). She makes it clear that Alleyn's method is a highly intentional one: he prepares with his right-hand man Inspector Fox, "working out lines to take in the endless interviews... 'Finding the pattern of the case,' Alleyn called it" (1938b: 123). This pattern mimics Marsh's own as a producer of "finding the shape" of a play before directing the actors to reveal it (1946: 20). Alleyn's measured, deliberate attitude towards his interviews and his "performances" in them provide much of the tension of the novels, as it is these interviews that make up the vast majority of his investigations – what McDorman describes as character and plot "revealed almost exclusively in lively dialogue" (1991: 74) and Julian Symons (1972: 124) called Marsh's "long and tedious post-murder examinations of suspects." Perhaps unsurprisingly, I am inclined towards McDorman's view of these scenes, considering their capacity for illuminating the novels' theatrical theming. After the murder, which generally occurs at the novel's midpoint, the next hundred pages of a Marsh mystery are largely

dialogue; Alleyn's central weapon in these interviews is his capacity for handily oscillating between the roles expected of him, keeping his "scene partners" on their toes.

As demonstrated so effectively in *Death in a White Tie*, the interviews in Marsh's fiction act as the arena in which she combines her critique of the "theatrical" world of social performance with her embrace of theatrical methods of detection, as Alleyn (the good actor) outsmarts the suspects. Like most Marsh novels, the post-murder story is split up into chapters dedicated to one or two interviews each, in which Marsh constructs a character portrait of each suspect through Alleyn's analysis of their performances of their type. His interview with Sir Herbert Carrados is entitled "Simple Soldier-man", reminding the reader, like the *dramatis personae*, of the role ascribed this character in his society, and providing us with the opportunity of judging Carrados's performance of "simple soldier-man". Much of Marsh's ire in this book is reserved for Carrados, a "vain and pompous" man who limps from a wound sustained during his "staff appointment of bewildering unimportance" in the First World War (1938b: 19). Before Alleyn meets him, Marsh offers us an image of Carrados at the peak of his performance: a photograph of him "in staff-officer's uniform with shiny boots and wonderful breeches... at Tunbridge Wells, the centre of his wartime activities" (1938b: 178). Alleyn, looking for character in the face, notices only the "gloved hands resting with embarrassing importance on the inside of the thighs. A dumb photograph." It is not the role – the staff-officer – that provides clues, but the individual's performance of it. Marsh reminds us constantly that Carrados is performing: he "limp[s] rather more perceptibly than usual" (1938b: 178), he "scowl[s] importantly" (181), and his speech is peppered with references to duty and his own stiff upper lip. He declares his character: "I am a simple soldier-man, Mr Alleyn" (179). Marsh gives her reader the opportunity to recognize the type Carrados is attempting to play, and his failure to inhabit it with any kind of honesty: he is more complex than a stock character, but her acknowledgment of and experimentation with the very stock type he is trying to present gives Marsh's characters their dimension.

Marsh's depiction of Carrados is especially illuminating in contrast with the interview with Carrados's "double", General Halcut-Hackett, a far more sympathetic figure in whom Alleyn immediately recognizes a veracity missing from Carrados. "Alleyn thought: 'Now, *he* really *is* a simple soldier-man' " (1938b: 219). Halcut-Hackett embodies his role; Carrados's play-acting is all too obvious, offering Marsh ample opportunity to satirize him: "It was pleasant to see the trappings of sorrow fall softly away from Carrados, and to watch his posture change from that of a stricken soldier-man to an exact replica of the Tunbridge Wells photograph... Only the gloves and breeches were lacking. A wise son of Empire sat confessed" (1938b: 180). Marsh further devalues Carrados's performance – inferior because it is so

obviously contrived – by contrasting it directly with Alleyn’s *superior* performance: that of a detective “mistaken for a gentleman” (Rowland 2004: 130).

The tension of Alleyn’s interviews, and their interest for the reader comes from his oscillation between his own split roles of gentleman and detective. I more fully examine this tension in the following section, but for now let it suffice to say that Marsh makes much of his equal capability for playing gentleman *or* cop. Alleyn judges the expectations of the characters he interviews and performs either “gentleman” or “detective” to get the information he requires, and Marsh uses his dual role to expose the ambivalence of both “parts”. When Bunchy’s nephew appeals to the class-loyal, fair-playing gentleman in Alleyn by demanding special treatment (“You’ve been our friend. You can’t treat me like this... You *know* us!”), Alleyn responds “coldly” with a barrier of professionalism: “I am an investigating officer employed by the police. I must behave as if I had no friends” (Marsh 1938b: 119). When the reprehensible Captain Maurice Withers refuses to divulge the name of his partner in an affair, he insinuates that Alleyn’s class status should make him complicit: “You seem to be a gentleman. One of the new breed at the Yard, aren’t you? I should have thought you’d have understood” (1938b: 127). Alleyn similarly shuts him down: “You are very good, but I am afraid you are mistaken. We shall have to use other methods, but we shall find out the name of your partner.” As Rye observes, Alleyn’s “class may claim him, but he does not claim it” (in Rahn 1995: 92). Rather, he weaponizes his professional status in a way no amateur detective can that allows him to distance himself from and establish authority over enemies and friends alike, by performing: declaring his role (“I am an investigating officer”) and inhabiting its tropes (e.g., referring to his “methods”). But it is not simply that Alleyn draws a hard line between his gentlemanliness and his work – with Carrados, he plays Withers’s sly gentleman to a tee: accidentally mentioning a private detail, Alleyn covers his mistake by “achieiv[ing] an expression of gentlemanly cunning”, suggesting to Carrados that they share a language of class, gender, and manners (Marsh 1938b: 182).

Alleyn’s double performance as the gentleman detective, his seemingly effortless sliding between the two “roles”, creates his unique interest for the reader. As exemplified in even this, her least evidently theatrical novel, both Alleyn’s detection and Marsh’s narrative construction are inherently based in the world of performance, a device which she uses to continually bring the genre’s artificiality to her reader’s attention and which allows her to portray Alleyn as the ultimate professional detective for her performative, playful world.

1.2 “Brilliant, but alarming”: The contradiction of the gentleman detective

Although Marsh frequently admitted to finding the construction of mystery plots tiresome, she was emphatic even at the end of her career on whether she had “grown bored with Mr. Alleyn. I haven’t. Conan Doyle became so bored with Sherlock Holmes that he pushed him over the Reichenbach Falls... Holmes returned but it has been said that he was never the same man again. I incline to think that perhaps the trouble is that he was” (Marsh 1981: 295). It may well be that Marsh’s continued interest in her own detective stemmed from the fact that he *was* “never the same man” – that is, she was consistent in her portrayal of Alleyn as a walking contradiction. As she develops the character of her detective over the course of the series in both his professional and personal lives, Marsh emphasizes the contradictory nature of the “gentleman detective”, and undermines the concept of the great solitary genius by making him profoundly self-conscious of the divide in his own identity. Because of his double status as exceptional police detective and aristocrat, Alleyn is a figure of fascination in his world – he is famous in the “lower type of newspapers” as “Handsome Alleyn” (Marsh 1941: 135), a level of sensationalism that makes him deeply uncomfortable, and focuses our attention on his nature as not only a detective – a man who looks at others – but as a notable person: one at whom others look. Marsh makes how characters – including he himself – perceive Alleyn a central aspect of how we understand the “type” of the gentleman detective in her series.

As an aristocrat in the professional ranks who – as Marsh repeatedly reminds us – chose to work his way up from the constabulary, Alleyn’s “self-imposed split personality” (McDorman 1991: 79) both enhances his work as an investigator and generates social discomfort: precisely what neither a gentleman nor a detective is “meant” to do. In many ways he is *the* gentleman detective: both sensitive and logical, with traces of an artistic temperament and a highly methodical approach to his work. McDorman considers these “inconsistencies in Alleyn’s character – a heightened sensitivity combined with a disciplined policeman’s mind... the very keys to his success in solving murders” (1991: 76). I argue that these elements are hardly inconsistencies: they are the source of an unresolvable *conflict* in Alleyn’s character that Marsh is committed to maintaining, one she uses to develop the classical trope of the gentleman detective to include an awareness of the emotional “mess” of detective work. She reveals this element in external and internal perceptions of Alleyn as a character, particularly in his relationship with his wife, Agatha Troy, whose capability for analyzing him allows Marsh to explore Alleyn’s self-conscious awareness of the conflicting responsibilities of gentleman and detective.

Marsh's most obvious use of Alleyn's dual identity is its generation – or uncovering – of social discomfort in the communities he investigates. Whether it is lower-class characters who “keep forgetting [he's] a bobby with all this upstage-and-county manners” (Marsh 1938a: 218) or members of the upper classes who expect to lord their status over professional detectives, “[n]o one is quite certain how a policeman should look, but all agree that whatever that look is, Alleyn doesn't have it” (McDorman, in Rahn 1995: 129). It is his *gentlemanly* status – his good clothes, manners, and speech – which others him. Mayhall (2021: 780) notes that “Marsh uses other characters' inability to read Alleyn's class background as a sign of his modernity”, his ability to easily transcend borders, revealing class prejudice across the social scale. Wherever he goes, Alleyn is a disturbance; his refrain, repeated somehow in every book that “[w]hen someone has been murdered... nothing is private” insistently reminds us that Alleyn's priority is truth above comfort – and therefore above class loyalty (Marsh 1980: 154). Christine Berberich (2007: 10) argues that *duty* is the cornerstone of the broad concept of “gentlemanliness”: “duty before personal interest, the good of the group (read: society) before that of the individual.” Marsh makes clear that his duty as a detective comes before what other characters assume is his duty as a gentleman.

What sets Alleyn apart from other aristocratic gentlemen detectives is that the discomfort caused by his contradictory identity does not stop with the communities he investigates; it is a discomfort felt self-consciously by Alleyn himself, too. In *Scales of Justice* (1955), Marsh reflects on how the detective's responsibilities affect Alleyn's gentlemanly core of identity:

He had been in the police service for over twenty years. Under slow pressure his outward habit had toughened, but, like an ice cube that under warmth will yield its surface but retain its inward form, so his personality had kept its pattern intact. When an investigation led him, as this did, to take action that was distasteful to him, he imposed a kind of discipline on himself and went forward. (1955: 155)

Alleyn's “distaste” appears consistently in the series, a repeated frustration around his inability to “keep his hands clean or indulge private scruples” because he is tied to his detection as a profession, not an amateur's hobby (Acheson 1985: 163). When he must cross boundaries of manners or taste, he does so with reluctance, as when the necessity of going through suspects' letters induces a sense of disgust: “‘An odious trade,’ he muttered to himself. ‘A filthy degrading job.’” (Marsh 1938a: 178). This seems to be a view of his job linked exclusively to his own participation: contrastingly, he repeatedly emphasizes his pride in his colleagues. He remarks that he would be utterly useless without “Detective-Constables X, Y and Z – the men in the ranks who follow up all the dreary threads of routine” (1938b: 95). Marty Roth (1995: 62) argues that this is Marsh's version of the “police paradox” which states that the detective

must always be a step ahead of the police, never one of them, “even when the detective is a policeman. A contemptuous distance between detective and police” is required to make the hero detective appear that much more exceptionally brilliant. Here, it is an internal paradox: this is what makes Alleyn’s character so complex, and so difficult to parse out. His gentlemanliness sets him apart from the other cops, but his self-consciousness around class and his frequently expressed appreciation of and respect for the men he works with create a sense of unity in Marsh’s police. Alleyn’s identity even as a professional detective is contradictory, a fact Marsh is dedicated to keeping in her reader’s attention, but not to resolving: his ambivalence about his work is the centerpiece of her series, and drives our interest in his character.

Marsh emphasizes Alleyn’s ambivalence by making disgust, or nausea – a sensation typically suppressed in the figure of the classical detective – a crucial aspect of his character. David Trotter (2000: 24) looks at nausea as an essentially hard-boiled detective’s characteristic, antithetical to the classical subgenre in which “the monocle-flourishing detective authorises the pleasure and comfort” we take in the *puzzle* of the corpse, while only “the queasy bystander reminds us of our vulnerability to shock.” He goes on to describe sidekicks’ susceptibility to nausea as evidence of their being “someone who does not have the right hermeneutic attitude” as opposed to the detective, who will be energized by a corpse, like Holmes (2000: 24). Alleyn, however, seems to lack this “right” attitude: a corpse is rarely solely an enigma in Marsh’s fiction, and Alleyn is often obviously affected by the sight of a body. When Troy admits to being “terrified of dead people”, Alleyn replies that “[e]ven now”, decades into his work as a homicide detective, corpses “are not quite a commonplace” (Marsh 1938a: 46). This allowance for shock is due, in part, to Marsh’s refusal to provide a neat, clean corpse; only nine of her novels contain murders in which the body is not visibly, often horrifically marked by the method of killing. By disfiguring many of her novels’ victims – and often doing so on a public “stage” of some kind, Marsh keeps the horror of death in her reader’s mind, denying us the intellectual relief enjoyed by Marjorie Hope Nicolson (1946) who describes the difference between the “untrained reader” of detective fiction and herself: “where she has seen, with horrible directness, an old man lying in a pool of his own blood, I had seen – a diagram” (1946: 241). Marsh’s narrative voice is a subdued one; often Alleyn’s is the most descriptive and vivid description of scenes that we receive, and his is not the coldly intellectual voice of the pure logician. With Alleyn as the reader’s eyes, there is room for every detail – including shock.

This element of Alleyn’s character is referred to in the novels as his “fastidiousness”, a word applied to him repeatedly throughout the series: one of the few details Marsh provides

us about Alleyn is her constant observation of “his long, fastidious hands” (Marsh 1936: 121), a physical feature that extends to his mental faculties and is linked explicitly to his class; kneeling beside a corpse, he looks “incongruous. Not his hands, his head, nor, for that matter, his clothes, suggested his occupation. If Mr. Cartell had been a rare edition of any subject other than death, his body would have seemed a more appropriate object for Alleyn’s fastidious consideration” (1962: 97). His fastidiousness is observed by his family and close friends, one of whom remarks on the “distasteful” nature of police work: “I’ve often wondered how you can... You strike me, always, as an exceptionally fastidious man” (1974: 219). Alleyn responds characteristically, with a self-deprecation that positions his detective identity as morally inferior to, but more important than, his gentlemanly self: “I’m sorry to disenchant you.” His capability for nausea, a kind of “fastidiousness” that is supposed to prevent his ability to detect, balances itself in another sort of fastidiousness: his attention to detail. The gentleman’s weakness is the detective’s skill, and Alleyn’s unique style of detection requires both.

Over the course of *Artists in Crime* and *Death in a White Tie*, Marsh introduces a love interest for Alleyn – the oil painter Agatha Troy – and uses Troy to expose and define the limits of Alleyn’s character, revealing his contradictions and his own extreme self-awareness. *White Tie* includes by far the clearest picture of Alleyn’s bachelor living space: it has “a contradictory air of monastic comfort that was, if he had realized it, a direct expression of himself” (Marsh 1938b: 264). Marsh emphasizes two crucial aspects of his character: Alleyn is a contradiction, and he is unable to apply to himself the kind of detailed observation that characterizes his work and his interactions with all other people. Alleyn’s flat comes back into the story when Troy visits it for the first time. Alone in the room that encapsulates Alleyn’s contradictory personality, Troy’s judgment is simple: “This is peaceful... It’s a nice room, this” (1938b: 308-9). Troy perceives Alleyn as he is unable to, in the way that the reader can: as a contradiction, no more and no less. Marsh uses Troy as a barometer for Alleyn’s self-consciousness by making the obstacle in their love story Troy’s supposedly irrational horror of capital punishment, which lends him, in his words, “a sort of post-mortem disagreeableness” (1938b: 309). She also uses Troy – and Troy’s interruption in Alleyn’s life – to give her readers a fresh perspective on the detective. She frames the early stages of the couple’s relationship as a courtship of perception: specifically, the perception of Alleyn, as he recognizes in Troy an equally skilled observer of people, and demands her interpretation of him in an apparent effort to resolve his conflict of identity.

Troy and Alleyn first meet in an inversion of his usual interactions with other characters: he is off-duty, on a ship journey, and interrupts her at her work as a painter – he is entirely “gentleman”, removed from the persona of the detective. This meeting establishes the

differences – and the complimentary nature – of the characters’ observational abilities. Looking at the same scene, the wharf as their ship departs Suva, Marsh shows us first Alleyn’s perspective followed by Troy’s and draws comparisons between the investigator’s eye and the artist’s, setting the groundwork for Troy’s unique ability to “read” Alleyn as he reads others. Alleyn sees absolutely everything, and the paragraphs describing his impression of the scene are packed with forceful adjectives: the wharf is “fierce”, “sulky”, “fantastical”, “sombre”, “heavy with... ominous depression”, “the darkness of everything and the violence of colour” both demands and exhausts his attention (1938a: 1-2). Under Troy’s hand, the picture loses none of its vibrance or emotional power, but is aesthetically unified on her canvas: “[t]he pattern of the blue-pinks and sharp greens fell across it like the linked syllables of a perfect phrase” (1938a: 4). Alleyn helps her finish her painting by remembering “a repetition of the blueish grey” (1938a: 5) she has forgotten; when she compliments his memory, he calls his observational skill “synthetic” – implying that a professionally-trained mind, rather than that of the artistic amateur, is inferior. Marsh disagrees with him; his skill is a combination of his professional training and his natural fastidiousness which serves him, even as it overwhelms him. Not having “the right hermeneutic attitude”, making room for artistic sensibility and emotional affect, supposedly “forbidden” in classical crime fiction (Roth 1995: 32), makes Alleyn the kind of detective he is. Even off-duty, the sleuth lingers within the gentleman.

Not only does Marsh make Troy and Alleyn equally-skilled observers, but she introduces Troy as someone *qualified to correctly perceive Alleyn* – which is to say, as a contradiction. Once again in an inversion of his typical role, during their ship journey Troy paints a sketch portrait of Alleyn, an experience he later describes:

I’ve never been took a likeness of before – it’s a rum sensation when they get to the eyes; such a searching impersonal sort of glare they give you. She even comes close sometimes and peers into the pupils. Rather humiliating, it is. I try to return a stare every bit as impersonal, and find it tricky. The painting seems to me to be quite brilliant, but alarming. (Marsh 1938a: 17-18)

Of course, this kind of “searching impersonal” look is precisely that which Alleyn directs towards the suspects he interviews. The “humiliation” of allowing someone to create a portrait of your character – here, literally – is an experience to which only Troy subjects Alleyn. Like her simplistic appreciation of his flat, her ability to synthesize a “violence of colour” into a unified painting, Troy sees and communicate the contradictions in Alleyn as they are, not trying to slot him into a type as every other character he meets does.

In these two novels, the unusually noticeable presence of the narrator’s voice serves to remind us that Alleyn is not the only person in his world capable of seeing clearly. By

removing us from our usual position beside (or inside) his perspective and allowing us to look at him more objectively, we can see his self-consciousness about his own contradictory identity. Both *Artists* and *White Tie* include a moment in which the narrator points our attention to a blind spot of Alleyn's – and in both cases, Marsh emphasizes the discomfort of the gentleman and detective identities' coexistence in a single character. She structures her couple's interactions around Alleyn's inability to read Troy as she reads him, and his desire for her to either confirm or disabuse him of his belief in the lack of integrity wrought in him by his work. After they meet again, this time amid a murder enquiry, the narrator's voice makes itself known, reminding the reader that Alleyn is not the only authoritative power in this narrative. *Artists* contains the only instance in the series of the narrator explicitly indicating a mistake on Alleyn's part: "the whole of this case", we are informed, "is coloured by his extraordinary wrong-headedness over Troy's attitude towards himself" (1938a: 87). Alleyn's overwhelming self-consciousness about the relationship between his work and his character blinds him to any other explanation for her discomfort: "He thought she was very stiff with him and supposed she resented the very sight of himself and everything he stood for. It did not occur to Alleyn that his refusal to answer [her] friendly grin had sent up all Troy's defences." In other words, it is his self-conscious professionalism, his attempt to divide unambiguously between Chief Detective-Inspector Alleyn and the friend she made on her journey from Suva, that Troy finds so objectionable. Troy later admits that her difficulty in realizing that she was in love with Alleyn stemmed from her resentment that he "made some sort of demand whenever [they] met" (1938b: 314). These demands, repeated over the course of *Artists* and *White Tie*, are for interpretation: every time Alleyn mentions Troy after their initial meeting, he claims she dislikes him, and every time they are together, he either suggests as much to her or asks her outright if it is the case (1938a: 260). By making this relentless need for analysis fundamental to Alleyn's relationship with Troy, Marsh prompts her reader to interpret the character as well, to look closely at how he inhabits the role of the gentleman detective just as Alleyn looks at the "performances" of the other characters – like Troy, we know his methods, and the detective himself is the greatest puzzle the series can offer us.

These demands for resolution of his conflicted character reach their apex in *White Tie* in Alleyn's most "morbidly self-deprecating" moment (McDorman 1991: 79). He describes what he sees as the reason Troy cannot love him, and reveals the core of his understanding of himself in a proposal of the kind of portrait she might paint of him, now that she has gotten to know him properly:

I would be made of Metropolitan Police notebooks, one eye would be set in a keyhole, my hands would be occupied with somebody else's private

correspondence. The background would be a morgue and the whole pretty conceit wreathed with festoons of blue tape and hangman's rope. (Marsh 1938b: 309)

His insistent, self-conscious, frightened sense of the detective identity's corruption of his gentlemanly integrity culminates in this hyperbolic image of himself. Troy's response,

characteristic of both her and Marsh, refuses Alleyn this interpretation of his character:

" 'Nonsense,' said Troy." What Alleyn misses, in his quest for confirmation of his own worst fears about his moral character, is that Troy has already interpreted him: her original portrait, "brilliant, but alarming" is the complete picture. Marsh proves to us over and over that Alleyn is a contradictory figure – his closest friends and his wife see that the battle between the "brilliant" fastidious attention of the gentleman and the "alarming" moral duties of the detective is what makes him so capable. By making him so deeply aware of his own contradictions, so desperate to be only one or the other, she argues for the *existence* of this conflict: that the idea of the gentleman detective is inherently complex, and its tensions cannot be easily resolved.

After this point, in the novels in which Troy appears Marsh offers the reader her perspective on Alleyn as the most trustworthy perception of him, one far more accurate than Alleyn's of Troy. Following their marriage, their only point of conflict is

Alleyn's refusal to allow his work a place in their relationship. [...] Troy knew very well that Alleyn accepted [her fear of capital punishment] as fundamental and implicit in her nature. She knew he did not believe that for her, in love, an ethic unrelated to that love could not impede it. It seemed to him that if his work occasionally brought murderers to execution, then surely, to her, he must at those times be of the same company as the hangman. Only by some miracle of love, he thought, did she overcome her repulsion. (Marsh 1947: 229-30)

Marsh's gentle slip here into free indirect discourse (we may hardly notice the transition from "*Troy knew*" to "*it seemed to him*", "*he thought*") allows us to forget that we are reading Troy's perspective – as it turns out, Troy's voice is essentially the novel's own, and she is perfectly right about Alleyn's beliefs; they use the rest of the case as a "beastly object lesson" (1947: 230) to "resolve" their conflict. Marsh does not permit the fastidious, sensitive Alleyn to come to this realization on his own, and she never entirely resolves his disgust with his work. Where Melissa Schaub (2013: 109) sees "Troy's horror at her husband's job" becoming "enough of a problem that Marsh purged her of it", I see quite the reverse: Marsh using Troy to define *Alleyn's* horror. Whatever hatred of capital punishment or policing Troy is meant to have, it is never explored more deeply than her acknowledgment that it is "just one of those nightmare things" (Marsh 1938b: 312). The character who expresses horror and disgust for the

activities and implications of police work is always Alleyn, and this moment only resolves Alleyn's fear that Troy despises him for his work – he remains just as self-conscious, self-deprecating, and irritated by what he calls the “squalor, boredom, horror, and cynicism of a policeman's lot” as ever (1977: 112). Marsh uses Troy, like her narrator, to provide readers with an authoritative external perspective on Alleyn – one that rejects his own conception of himself, which enforces rather than elides his contradictions.

Marsh's final novel, *Light Thickens* (1982) is more of an analysis of *Macbeth* than it is a murder mystery – given her series' theatricality, and her emphasis on *Macbeth*'s formulaic and fatalistic nature, however, it is worth considering it as her rumination on the detective genre, too. At one point, her fictional director Peregrine offers this analysis of the complexity of the character of Macbeth himself: “I don't find any major difficulties or contradictions in Macbeth. He is a hypersensitive, morbidly imaginative man beset by an overwhelming ambition” whose “wife knows him better than he knows himself” (1982: 6). It is not clear whether Marsh knew *Light Thickens* would be her last novel, but this description is a fitting epitaph for her detective. Throughout the series she maintains his ambitious, relentless drive to secure justice in its constant conflict with the morbidity of his apparent belief that he is being corrupted by the immoral, emotional mess of his work; and through it all, Troy, who sees him as clearly as the reader does. And yet, as Peregrine sees Macbeth, as Marsh sees Alleyn – these are not contradictions in the sense of inconsistencies: this internal battle *is* the character, and a clean division between gentleman and detective is not simply undesirable: it is impossible.

1.3 “Like men in dinner jackets do in the theater”: The knowledge of death

Alleyn, as a rule, does not fail. Rowland suggests that “Marsh's writing is designed to endorse Alleyn's early assertion that no one is ever wrongly hanged in England” (2007: 198). Certainly Alleyn never wrongfully accuses anyone, but Marsh does let him stumble. In *Light Thickens* he misses a crucial clue and has to find the murderer through process of elimination; in *Killer Dolphin* he fails to prevent the theft of an historical artifact that results in a fatal accident; and in both *When in Rome* (1970) and *Black as He's Painted* (1974) the murderer slips out of his grasp. His most definite “failure”, however, is 1977's *Last Ditch*. Sent to the Channel Islands to investigate a drug trafficking ring, Alleyn is forced to contend with a murder that may or may not be related, as well as the presence of his grown son Ricky, whose holiday is interrupted when he inadvertently becomes a target of the drug runners, who kidnap and torture him. Understandably distracted, Alleyn never clearly solves the central murder, and the solution is revealed when the killer confesses and commits suicide. As Fox puts it, the police “haven't had

what you'd call a resounding success. Missed out with our homicide by seconds, lost a big fish on the drug scene, and ended up with a couple of tiddlers. And we've seen the young chap turn into a casualty on the way" (Marsh 1977: 263). Besides these obvious errors, *Last Ditch* contains two others: Alleyn fails at his self-imposed task of keeping his personal and professional lives separate, and his narrative authority is appropriated by the murderer, who literally "upstages" him by reducing the detective to the role of powerless spectator. In the end, none of these "failures" damage the series' conception of Alleyn, because he retains his central function as a screen for both the reader and the other characters, protecting us from a confrontation with abject – undeniable, horrifying – death. In Marsh's theatrical world, death is the most terrifying truth, and Alleyn's combination of professional capability and sensitive awareness of horror enables him to defend others from that knowledge. Marsh uses *Last Ditch* as a late-series reflection on her protagonist, emphasizing that the work he does – the pursuit of truth – is a universally fascinating subject (thus acknowledging and encouraging the reader's interest) even as she suggests that Alleyn, with his self-conscious repulsion for his own profession, is unusually capable of that work.

Marsh makes Alleyn's failure inevitable, and even *positive* in that it underlines the affirming universality of detection. This book is concerned with the loneliness of Alleyn's profession and, at the same time, its irresistibility to Ricky, whose arc takes him from a complacent lack of interest in detection – fostered by Alleyn from childhood – to active amateur sleuthing. Marsh uses *Last Ditch* to demonstrate Alleyn's conviction that his work carries an unalterable burden of loneliness. Fox remarks that it is a "frequent" comment of Alleyn's that "ours is a solitary class of employment" (1977: 122), and the close collaboration Fox and Alleyn share with the local Sergeant Plank prompts several reflections on "the country policeman's loneliness" that mirrors Alleyn's own (1977: 170). Marsh chips away at that loneliness through his interactions with Ricky. We learn that "[f]rom the time when his son went to his first school, Alleyn had been at pains to keep his job at a remove as far as the boy was concerned", testifying to Alleyn's commitment, even after reconciling with Troy, to his belief in policing's inherent conflict with a normal, happy life (1977: 112). As much as Alleyn seems to hate Ricky's involvement in the case, Marsh makes it clear that he is instinctively pleased by it, too – Ricky functions in this novel to establish that the detecting impulse is natural and admirable.

When we meet Alleyn in 1934, he is already a detective and we never learn his reasons for leaving the Foreign Office for Scotland Yard – it is through Ricky, now, that Marsh explores the complex pull of curiosity and horror that drives both father and son. Having agreed to

separate himself from the investigation after Alleyn bans him from it, Ricky attempts to block the whole thing out of his mind:

And then, with a certainty that quite astonished him, Ricky tumbled to it that the reason why he couldn't write that morning was not because the events of the day before had distracted him or because he was bruised and sore and looked a sight or because the horror of [the victim] Dulcie Harkness had been revived but simply because he wanted very badly indeed to be up there with his father, finding out about things.

"Oh no!" he thought. "I won't take that. That's not my scene. I've other things to do. Or have I?" He was very disturbed. (1977: 139-40)

This is the mystery reader's dilemma: we recognize the violence and horror of the detective's job, but the drive to solve the puzzle is overwhelming. Even as Ricky's interest is portrayed as a good thing – we are in a detective novel, after all – we never lose the sense that detection is hardly an easy or rewarding calling. Ricky's reluctant yet irrepressible curiosity is mirrored in Alleyn's own view of his son's attitude: "Get him out of it", he tells himself, "smartly, now, before there [is] any further involvement", but he is forced to recognize that it is too late, that Ricky is an adult whose interest must be accommodated (1977: 113). "And at the back of his extreme distaste for this development why was there an indefinable warmth, a latent pleasure? He wondered if perhaps an old loneliness had been, or looked to become, a little assuaged." The loneliness of the detective – even when he is a professional with a team – is not essential, Marsh suggests, and because of our natural curiosity, it is not even maintainable. In *Last Ditch*, Marsh universalizes the urge and capability for detection – not only in Ricky, but even in the murderer himself. She explores the fascination of death that pervades detective fiction, beginning with the innocent Jasper Pharamond's admission of a "horribly strong impulse to go up to the stretcher and uncover it... like Antony revealing Caesar's body to the Romans" (1977: 74). Marsh complicates the concept of a "normal" reaction to death by making the corpse inspire intense curiosity, even as the novel's other subplot works to remind us that not every responsibility of the detective can be a free-for-all.

By making the murderer "upstage" Alleyn in the climactic scene of the novel, Marsh playfully inverts the classical revelation scene to emphasize which elements of the detective's role *actually* matter in her series. In this case, it is the defense of the non-detectives – including the reader – against the horror and spectacle of death. The climax of *Last Ditch* is a self-conscious mockery of all the dramatic pronouncements of guilt that Marsh had written up to that point – in 1977, she had published twenty-eight novels that typically ended with Alleyn convening the suspects for his carefully contrived, director-like maneuvering of them into confessions of their guilty secrets. In *Last Ditch* Marsh distracts us with Ricky's kidnapping until we are suddenly reminded of the murder by a literal invitation to the revelation of guilt: once

again, a deliberate parody of the dramatic gathering of suspects that appears at either end of most classical murder mysteries. The victim's uncle, drunken religious fanatic Cuthbert Harkness, distributes pamphlets inviting the whole of the island's population to a slightly sinister event:

I am in possession of certain facts – in re slaying of my niece – and been guided to make All Known Before The People since they sit heavy on my conscience. Therefore on Sunday next (please see enclosure) I will proclaim All to the multitude... The Sinner will be called an Abomination before the Lord and before His People. Amen. Amen. I will be greatly obliged if you will be kind enough to attend. (1977: 227)

The comically heightened formality of this invitation draws attention to the contrived nature of the golden age convention of the murderous house party, giving that trope dimension with Cuthbert's ludicrous combination of social niceties and a genuine sense of the moral weight of murder. In the self-conscious theatricality of this revelation scene, Marsh simultaneously demonstrates that anyone *can* perform the duties of the detective, but Alleyn's perfect balance of sensitivity and narrative authority makes him the *right* person to do it.

In an almost unprecedented move in her series, once the community gathers to hear Cuthbert's accusation Marsh portrays Alleyn as wholly without control – intellectually, socially, and narratively. She goes out of her way to show the reader that he is nowhere near being a figure of genuine authority here, either literally as a police officer or intellectually/morally as the novel's detective. Cuthbert's accusation party is massively attended – not only by the other suspects with whom we are familiar, but by the entire town “with a smattering of rather more stylish persons who might hail from Montjoy or even be tourists come out of curiosity. Alleyn recognized one or two faces” (1977: 237). As Pyrhönen observes, the traditional “closed community” of the golden age mystery portrays both the criminal and the detective as intruding outsiders, freeing “normal” society from guilt (1999: 217). Here, Marsh widens that community to include complete strangers not just to the reader but to Alleyn – Alleyn, whose job it is to know everything and everyone. Like us, he now occupies the position of audience, neither active participant nor orchestrator; Marsh removes the comfortable sense of security associated with our expectation of Alleyn's absolute control of all knowledge in these climactic scenes.

Marsh heightens our sense of observing a detective story gone off the rails: instead of making Cuthbert's revelatory speech a calculated, logical explanation of the crime, it is a series of wild accusations, singling out character after character as if to implicate all in communal guilt. But because we have discovered through Alleyn's investigations that Cuthbert's claims

are accurate, his attacks come across not as the ravings of a lunatic but as a levelling of the meaning of guilt within the fictional world of the mystery, through a mind so overwrought by the knowledge of his community's corruption that all crimes become equally reprehensible. Alleyn, the experienced detective, must sort out not just the bad people from the good, but the bad crimes from the worse. Pyrhönen (1994: 35) argues that "the detective's success is nothing but a radical reappropriation and reconstruction of narrative" from the murderer, and that is precisely what Marsh explores in *Last Ditch* by giving Cuthbert – the killer – the final word on his own guilt. When he announces that he has "nursed awful knowledge like a viper in [his] bosom", that he has "suffered the torments of the Damned... and all shall be made known" before pointing into the crowd and crying that "Guilt encompasseth us on every hand", Marsh shows us the dangers of the detective's knowledge and authority being placed in the wrong hands – in this case, the murderer's (1977: 259-60).

Pyrhönen describes two conceptions of the detective's responsibility of exposing guilt: first, that a detective's revelation of one character's guilt frees all others of responsibility – including the reader (1999: 223). This is a widely held view of detective fiction's attraction, espoused by its earlier critics such as W. H. Auden (1948) as a para-religious cleansing of communal guilt through the murderer's scapegoating. Pyrhönen herself productively develops this idea, interpreting the detective as the answerer of two separate questions: "Whodunit?" and "Who is guilty?" – the detective must not only discover the perpetrator of the central murder, but also uncover the other guilty secrets, the red herrings, and act as judge to indicate the *relative* guilt of each character according to the fictional community's values (1999: 4). While Alleyn, as a professional, is not as freewheeling with the allotment of guilt (or punishment) as his amateur counterparts, he is certainly the arbiter of the novels' moral values. Marsh frequently, if not always, endorses his opinions of murderers, victims, and innocents alike, and he is reliably given the authoritative word on guilt – Alleyn, as the best of his class and his profession, reliably guides both the reader and the fictional community in their assessments of the "guilty" characters at the end of the story. It is this privilege that Cuthbert Harkness appropriates, and it is for that transgression that he is punished.

Marsh makes the conflict between Cuthbert and Alleyn blatant by not merely placing them at odds as revealers of communal guilt, but by having Cuthbert literally upstage Alleyn. This climactic scene takes place onstage, during an absurdly dramatic thunderstorm even Marsh acknowledges is a bit on the nose: "One might be forgiven, Alleyn thought afterwards, for supposing that some celestial stage manager had taken charge, decided to give Mr. Harkness the full treatment, and grossly overdone it" (1977: 260-1). That "celestial stage manager" is, of course, Marsh herself, using her special effects toolkit to restore narrative

authority to its rightful place. When Cuthbert attempts to divulge the identity of the murderer, the storm intervenes:

“Behold the man...”

He raised his right arm to the all-too-appropriate accompaniment of a stupendous thunderclap and turned himself into a latter-day Lear. He beat his bosom and seemed at last to become aware of the storm.

An expression of bewilderment and frustration appeared. He stared wildly about him, gestured incomprehensively, clasped his hands, and looked beseechingly around his audience.

Then he covered his face with his hands and bolted into the inner room. [...]

Alleyn and Fox were on the stage... Nothing they said could be heard. (1977: 261)

Nature itself silences the false detective, who “dries” on his lines; Marsh’s narrative guardian angel, Shakespeare, manifests himself; Alleyn takes the stage – though not by performing (he cannot be heard by the audience) – and balance is restored. When the police arrive backstage, they discover that Cuthbert has hanged himself, a confession pinned to his chest. Anyone, Marsh suggests, even a murderer, can detect, can gather a community and report the guilt amongst them, but only a detective like Alleyn, eternally conscious of the consequences of his actions, can comprehend and communicate that knowledge without combusting. Marsh separates him from the audience and the readers in this scene. When we see Cuthbert’s suicide, it is not his body but his confession that Marsh describes – but we understand that Alleyn sees everything. Even when the narrative power is returned to him it is not to become the moral arbiter, but to do the one part of his work left to him: to screen the reality of death.

More than anything else, this novel is interested in the effects of firsthand experience of death, and Alleyn’s foremost function as a screen against that experience. It is because he thoroughly succeeds at this responsibility that his other errors are failures in name only. As much as Alleyn is outperformed by Cuthbert, he does – at least symbolically – apprehend the murderer in the end. The most concrete “failure” on Alleyn’s part, the escape of the “big fish on the drug scene”, matters the least to Marsh. She calls back to this strand of the plot in the final paragraphs of the novel, in which the innocent characters discuss the emotional burden of seeing death, leaving the reader with the suggestion that *someone* must know these things but that not everyone can or should. These final moments reveal that Alleyn’s role as both the discoverer and the concealer of knowledge is at the center of Marsh’s conception of her detective. Early on, after the murder (presumed to be an accident), Jasper Pharamond describes his theory that “the full shock and horror of a death is only experienced when it has been seen”, a reasonable suggestion Marsh underlines in her portrayal of Jasper’s wife Julia’s hysterical response to seeing the body (1977: 74). Marsh’s point here aligns with Julia

Kristeva's (1982: 3) depiction of *abject* as opposed to *signified* death: "A wound with blood and pus... does not *signify* death. In the presence of signified death" – as we might call, perhaps, the corpses of detective fiction – "I would understand, react, or accept. No, as in true theater, without makeup or masks, refuse and corpses *show me* what I permanently thrust aside in order to live." The tension between curiosity about death and the horror of actually seeing or experiencing it is the core of readerly interest in the entire genre, and Marsh's treatment suggests that any other failure on Alleyn's part is permissible so long as he maintains his function as a screen between abject death and the rest of the community, doing for them what detective fiction's gentle, curious experimentation with death does for its readers. Robert Rushing (2007: 123-4) points out that the body in crime fiction must be involved in a bit of intellectual sleight-of-hand to keep the reader from considering it too deeply: "the operations of the classic detective novel are entirely bent toward making the reader forget, turning, as quickly as possible, blood [i.e., a literal corpse] into *too much blood* [i.e., a clue, a puzzle to be solved, a game]." By bringing this tension directly to her reader's awareness, Marsh points out the seriousness of the game we are playing with her novel. Alleyn screens us from the impulse to uncover the body by doing it himself – it is his perspective that transforms the nightmare into the puzzle – but Marsh insistently reminds us of what he takes on in becoming that screen, and who he protects by bearing the burden of the knowledge of *blood* that allows other characters and the reader to think only about *too much blood*.

I discuss this moment with Jasper not only because it informs our understanding of Marsh's conception of what the knowledge of abject death does to a person, but also because she makes extensive use of it in the very end of *Last Ditch* to portray the complex ambivalence of Alleyn's position as a detective who, "while ruthlessly determined to ferret out the murderer, knows that revelations that are bound to surface in a murder investigation can cause pain to the innocent and guilty alike" (McDorman, in Rahn 1995: 132). Marsh emphasizes the conciliatory, screening aspect of Alleyn's role as Julia Pharamond excitedly describes the immediate aftermath of Cuthbert Harkness's suicide: "after they broke in the door a large man pulled the stage curtains across and then [Alleyn] came through like men in dinner jackets do in the theater and asked for a doctor" (Marsh 1977: 264). This moment expresses Alleyn's function quite clearly: his self-consciously theatrical behavior, his awareness of exactly what effect every action has on every person concerned in the case, and his own ability to manipulate those effects with authority. In other books, when he discovers a body, Alleyn's first instinct is to keep others from seeing it: in both *Artists in Crime* and *Killer Dolphin* he physically prevents others from directly observing a disfigured corpse to protect them from the experience. Alleyn's "failure" to capture the Pharamonds' drug-running cousin Louis hardly

matters in comparison with his navigation of the repercussions of the deaths he investigates – the world outside the investigation, Marsh suggests, is much more important than the puzzles that make up the detective story.

All this exploration of Alleyn's role as communicator and concealer of truth comes to a head in the last moments of the novel, when Marsh twice returns to Jasper's theory of the horror of direct interaction with death, establishing the seriousness with which she looks on the subject even from the perspective of the classical mystery author, and the deliberate choice Alleyn has made to bear the responsibility he does. As Julia breathlessly remembers the thrill of Alleyn's intervention in Cuthbert's self-accusation, she is inevitably reminded of her own powerfully negative reaction to the original corpse: " 'Of course if we'd –' Julia stopped. Her face had gone blank. 'If we'd seen,' she said rapidly, 'it would have been different' " (1977: 264). Death is fascinating, but Marsh is careful to remind us that even for the most frivolous characters, it is hardly fun. Just a paragraph later, Jasper defends his family's ignorant relationship with the villainous Louis by admitting that although he has "thought from time to time that something like [drugs] might be going on... it all seemed unreal. We've never known anybody who was hooked" (1977: 265). Unadulterated, abject truth is a complex tool in the detective novel – the truth of Cuthbert's death is, like his niece's, unbearable to spectators. It exists on "the boundary of what is assimilable, thinkable" (Kristeva 1982: 18). But the truth of Louis's character and his addiction, equally unthinkable to these people who have never "known anybody who was hooked", might have spared those same innocents a great deal of pain. "Alleyn echoed Julia. 'If you had,' he said, 'it would have been different' " (1977: 265). Alleyn knows what it is to comprehend a terrible truth: it is his job to know, and to know what knowledge cannot be shared.

Marsh might have tidily ended her novel here, with this full-circle moment that acknowledges but forgives Alleyn's failure to capture the villain and reminds us of his ability – exceptional in the world of the series – to bear the burden of the truth he seeks out. Instead, Marsh retrieves Alleyn from his isolated position as the sole possessor of painful knowledge. Leaving the Pharamonds behind, he finds "Fox and Troy and Ricky quietly contented with each other's company" and gathers up his family: "Pack up your bags, chaps. We're going home" (1977: 265). Alleyn's life outside his detective work ultimately takes precedence in the story, if not, apparently, in his own estimation of his work. If Alleyn's self-conscious ambivalence about his chosen profession is a defining feature of Marsh's series, it becomes the emotional centerpiece of *Last Ditch* and provides an arena for Marsh to make a case for what she portrays as the profoundly natural and communal desire to detect. By making Alleyn see the impossibility of keeping his family properly separated from the horror of his job as a failure on

his part, even as she reminds us that such a division is neither possible nor desirable, Marsh maintains her emphasis on the moral conflict of the gentleman detective figure, complete in its unresolved state forty years after Alleyn's first appearance.

Alleyn's idiosyncratic performance as a gentleman detective causes and exploits social discomfort as he exposes and manipulates the theatricality of the world around him. Marsh establishes him as a creature of discomfort in his hybrid identity, and then uses him to explore the limits of discomfort through his sensitivity and his exposure to abject death; in the end, he still embodies the gentleman's duty of defense and social protection, but in an explicitly literal sense. Rowland describes Marsh's postcolonial sensibility, as well as her depiction of Alleyn, as one in which "difference (of gender or culture)" – or, we may say, of narrative responsibility – "is not simply eroded but can be negotiated... an acknowledgement of... difference, not its overcoming" (2004: 33). Whether in her side characters, her protagonist, or her plots, Marsh holds tension taut, keeping her reader aware of it, never offering us an easy answer, even when the mystery is solved.

Chapter 2 Campion: The burden of freedom

The narrative *makes* knowledge by setting the detection in motion, but, first, it has to matter – and the reasons and ways it matters are very much subject to change. (Plochocki 2010: 19)

2.1 “You *are* Campion.”: Allingham’s modern identities

Margery Allingham displays a consistent awareness of the boundaries of genre – and an instinct for crossing them. Nicola Humble (2001: 24), analyzing the long-running critical debate over the relative “modernity” of middlebrow fiction, observes that popular texts constitute “the ‘other’ of the modernist or avant-garde novel” even as they “[provide] the brimming bowl into which recent revisers of the modernist canon have dipped for new plums.” Lee Horsley (2005) and Susan Rowland (2004) also highlight the frequency with which interwar authors stepped outside the supposed bounds of their genre, how, “by manipulating formal expectations... writers like [Agatha] Christie and [Dorothy L.] Sayers critiqued the idea of a stable, knowable self in modern society” (Horsley 2005: 42). I would argue that of all four “Queens of Crime”, no author emblemizes this modern sensibility more than Allingham. Her novels are liminal in genre and style, packed with “what literary history wants to claim as modernism’s defining preoccupations – the breakdown of closure, for one, and its relation to the decentering of the self” (Langbauer 1999: 40). It is in the shifting center of the self – the unstable identity of her detective Albert Campion – that Allingham’s modernism is fundamentally located.

Many critics have noticed Allingham’s fascination with the tension between modern and archaic sensibilities; Rowland (2004: 43) refers to her “trademark of colliding worlds in modern society.” Her series is irrepressibly, and consciously, modern: as Julia Jones (2012: 395) points out, Allingham “tried to ensure that her work didn’t date... In the later novels come urban redevelopment and high-rise flats, advanced scientific research and cold war spying, mods, rockers, and purple hearts often in slightly odd conjunction with the ripe romantic language and 1920s slang which remained her natural mode of expression.” Jones’s point here about “the later novels” is key – Allingham constantly developed her work, making it possible to identify clear “early” and “late” sections of the series; interwar novels like *Look to the Lady* (1931a) and *Sweet Danger* (1934) are quasi-fairy tales with supernatural aspects and characters descending from ancient bloodlines. Following World War II, these Gothic influences all but vanish except as holdovers to be debunked, as in the scathing portrayals of out-of-step Victorian dynasties in *More Work for the Undertaker* (1949) and *The China Governess* (1963). Allingham’s skilful transformation of the jarringly different worlds of these

two halves of the series highlights Shani D’Cruze’s (2004: 263) point that the novels “deserve to be considered as a series because of the internal continuities of character and preoccupation with the orderly progression of English social order from past into future.” Karin Molander Danielsson (2002: 13) argues that the cohesive seriality of detective fiction is a contemporary innovation in direct contrast with the classical genre, where “[s]ociety is stable with stable values”, and there was no need for a sense of progression: “the early series was not supposed to be seen as a number of steps to achieve a better world... but as a number of entities connected by static similarities” (144-5). I argue that though Allingham began her series in this kind of “static” world, she quickly revised it into an intensely, undeniably modern series whose very instability defines its detective’s development.

Allingham’s unstable modern world requires a detective to solve its crimes whose identity is not only under question, but barely exists. The earliest version of Albert Campion is a trickster figure, whose impish personality quirks and lack of concrete personhood generate a sense of the mystical or fantastical: Rowland (2004: 54) claims his “evasion of a fixed identity in the modern world... suggests the role of a knight errant out of his period”, while Kathryn Slate McDorman (1991: 136-7) goes so far as to describe him as “a magical sort of detective/hero whose identity and even substance is never quite ascertained.” His identity is indeed a secret, one we never fully learn. Allingham defines her detective in relief: what we “know” about him we construct almost entirely from what we are told is *not* true, and his only consistent identity – the name on the cover of the book we are reading – is one composed of falsehoods. In his early appearances Campion is anything Allingham needs him to be to serve the plot: in one book he is engaged by the government on a secret mission, and in another we find him working with thieves and the criminal underground. “[T]hat was the beauty of Campion”, as one of his “oldest friends” remarks: “one never knew where he was going to turn up next – at the Third Levee or swinging from a chandelier” (Allingham 1933: 21). The Campion of the 1920s and 1930s is unpredictable to the point of appearing inconsistent – or he would, were it not for Allingham’s efforts to hold him together.

There are a few consistencies Allingham writes into his character to maintain a kind of sham integrity and allow the reader to recognize Campion no matter in what guise he appears. Each of these consistencies is – in its own way – a falsehood. Allingham repeatedly identifies Campion through epithets, identifying him as “[t]he young man with the simple face and gentle ineffectual manner” (1931b: 106) and “[t]he tall, thin man in the horn-rimmed spectacles” (1945: 214) almost as much as she uses his name. In each novel she re-introduces him by reiterating these fundamental aspects of his character: “His clothes were good enough to be unnoticeable and behind unusually large horn-rimmed spectacles his face, despite its

maturity, still possessed much of that odd quality of anonymity which had been so remarked upon in his youth" (1949: 2-3). She emphasizes these recognizable elements: his vacuous expression (which hides his intelligence), his enormous glasses (an affectation that actually impedes his vision), and his anonymity – eventually, the fact that he goes by a false name. All these elements I see collectively as “crutches” of identity: it is not until *Traitor’s Purse* (1941) that Allingham gives her detective a true unity of character, and until that point she relies on these crutches to give Campion substance. As long as we see a tall, thin man with a blank face and glasses who calls himself Campion, he can have any personality traits, any skills, any connections at all and still appear to be the same man. By grounding Campion’s entire personhood in lies, Allingham refuses to invest any kind of “genuine” identity in her detective, leaving it an open question for her reader.

B. A. Pike (1987: 7) catalogues these “crutch” characteristics as they appear in Campion’s first adventure, pointing out that “Campion’s features do not in essentials change over the years: rather, they are modified as [Allingham] takes him increasingly seriously.” Allingham, in writing an entirely unpredictable detective whose only consistent features are revealed to be lies, created the perfect “can-opener” for her conflictedly modern world: a postmodern detective. As Patricia Merivale & Susan Sweeney (1999: 16) describe it, a key element of postmodern “efforts to establish identity” is that they “are confounded by solipsism, self-projection, and the inability to position oneself in time or space or even one’s narrative.” Failure is certainly the “endpoint” of any attempt in the early series to understand Campion’s identity, but Allingham uses the postmodern tool of narrative confusion itself to transform her detective into a man with a complete identity, whom we can better understand through the development of the false elements of his earlier self.

Perhaps the most essential component of a fixed identity, a name, is Campion’s least stable attribute. We learn that “Albert Campion” is not his real name in the first novel, and we proceed to the end of the series never learning his “true” identity. We know he is an aristocrat who has been disowned by his illustrious family; his rejection of his name is framed explicitly as a decision made to avoid the burdensome responsibility and implied lack of modernity of his entitled, original name: “my own is rather aristocratic, and I never use it in business. Campion will do quite well” (Allingham 1929: 83). This does not mean, however, that “Campion” is any more a genuine expression of his identity in the early novels; that is only one of his “many *noms de guerre*” that appear through the early series, reminding the reader of the impossibility of pinning down this detective’s “true” self (1931: 123). In the postwar novels, Allingham almost entirely disposes of the notion of a discoverable secret identity. She still introduces him as “Campion, the amateur, a man who never used his real name and title”, but

for all intents and purposes he *does* (1952: 12). It is the name he uses, and the name he shares with his wife Amanda and son Rupert, the familial structure Allingham maintains for the rest of the series. She brings the threatening responsibility of Campion's ancestry back into his life in *More Work for the Undertaker*, which finds Campion negotiating his apparently inevitable appointment as governor of a remote colony. He encounters a "dowager with a name to conjure with", representative of all the status he has consciously abandoned, who congratulates him on his opportunity "to take a place which even [his] grandfather would have considered suitable": "You're going *back*, and you must realise it. A long happy way back, quite sixty years they tell me... Such a much more *expected* world, as I remember it" (1949: 13-15). Three pages later, Campion has delightedly refused the governorship and taken up a new case in London. He rejects the explicitly nostalgic comforts of his family name. By 1949, he knows who he is: Albert Campion, not the scion of an illustrious family who has no real place in Allingham's modern world.

Campion's personality, too, takes the form of a misleading disguise that shifts from a parodic joke in his early appearances to become a tool for detection by the end of his series. He's described as "quite inoffensive, just a silly ass" (1929: 17) in the very first novel, and his mannerisms, voice, and face – which Allingham describes almost compulsively as "vacuous" or "foolish" – are a light ribbing of the Bright Young Things of the '20s, a distinctly modern type that made up the "Gang" of literary and artistic friends to whom Allingham dedicated her first novel (Jones 2012: 175). Jones is perfectly correct in her assessment that the "Campion of the early novels was... a type, not a personality" (2012: 179). In the later novels, Allingham's new set of moderns sees clearly though Campion's "act. It's an affectation of his time", one young woman says. "Young men invented it in the 'twenties" (1958: 124). He is often supposed to be a parody of Sayers's Lord Peter Wimsey, whose flippant language and behavior set him apart as the particular target of authors of hard-boileds and other detective fiction more dedicated to a "realism" they saw lacking in the classical subgenre's "papier-mâché villains and detectives of exquisite and impossible gentility" who, because they "did unreal things", "ceased to be real themselves" (Chandler 1944: 57). Campion's "unreality" is entirely intentional, at least on Allingham's part; we see over and over moments in which his "vacuity" suddenly "vanishe[s]" from his face, leaving him unexpectedly capable", keeping us on our toes as to *which* Campion, the fool or the expert, we are dealing with (Allingham 1934: 116). It is never wholly clear how much control he has over his facetiousness; the question is worth asking not to consider Campion as a "real" person, but as a tool of Allingham's, to guide or distract the reader – the more of a puzzle Campion is, the less attention the reader pays to the puzzle-plot. Campion is

her method of control over us, just as his foolishness acts as a measure of protective control in his work as a detective.

It is notable, then, that following World War II, Campion's outrageousness utterly gives way in a retreat to the background of his own adventures. No longer does he appear to be the "silly ass" of the 1930s: he is now "blank as a plate" (1955: 42) and can be found "standing quietly... effacing himself with his usual success" (1962: 124). He still wears a mask, but it is one of reticence and hesitation rather than what seems to be a courageous kind of stupidity. Allingham was highly conscious of this maturation in her detective; in the final novel published before her death, *The Mind Readers* (1965), she used the perspective of Campion's wife Amanda – whom he first meets in 1933 – to reflect on the detective's transformation:

And there had been something about him which had reminded her of someone she had half forgotten: a pale, blank-faced youngster whose continuous flippancy had masked an acutely sensitive intelligence which as a teenager she had adored. An explanation occurred to her suddenly.
'Albert, you're frightened,' she said. (1965: 141)

Amanda considers the masterful masking effect of Campion's early vacuity, and discards it – fear, rather than confidence or immaturity, becomes the definitive explanation for his interwar personality quirks. Allingham quietly builds yet another distinctly modern aspect into the foundation of her series: a memory of anxiety. In her own diary in September 1939, she reminded herself strictly: "Whatever happens, whatever happens... never go pretending that things were going well before the war" (Jones 2012: 258). Where she had originally created a character whose effervescence and lack of concrete identity primed him *only* to pretend, she stabilized him: with one name, a consistent personality, and a retroactive explanation of his baffling behavior as a young man, Campion becomes a realistic modern man.

This is not a transformation that takes place slowly, but almost literally overnight in *Traitor's Purse*, a strangely postmodern novel that finds Campion on the hunt for his own identity after an amnesia-inducing knock on the head. The postmodern – or metaphysical – detective story is a subgenre of detective fiction that reached its height in the mid-twentieth century and "subverts traditional detective-story conventions... Rather than definitively solving a crime, then, the sleuth finds himself confronting the insoluble mysteries of his own interpretation and his own identity" (Merivale & Sweeney 1999: 2). As we have seen, Campion's identity is already a mystery and it is the narrative's primary focus in *Traitor's Purse*, which I would argue fits quite neatly into the parameters of the postmodern detective story – only, here, Allingham uses those postmodern qualities to ultimately *strengthen* the integrity of

Campion's identity, rather than extend its fragmentation. It is worth quoting at length Rowland's description of the novel:

Traitor's Purse is narrated from the point of view of a man who has lost his memory, is accused of murder, is haunted by some tremendous destiny he is neglecting and whom other people call Albert Campion. ... He may be an 'impersonator' of Campion in the sense of being a criminal, but he is certainly an 'impersonator' for most of the novel as he tries to trace his unknown identity in relation to an imperilled country in the early stages of the Second World War. (Rowland 2004: 77)

This is a narrative of frustrated detection, both for the reader and for Campion, who – as an amnesiac – fulfils “two functions of the detective story: the detective and the corpse. He is simultaneously the one who advances and the one who blocks the story” (Botta, in Merivale & Sweeney 1999: 218). At every turn, Campion's attempts to reconstruct his own identity are obstructed by the impenetrability of his own consciousness, which Allingham depicts as a “curtain of darkness [hanging] between the front and the back of his mind” (1941: 94). This curtain separates two distinct versions of Campion: the amnesiac protagonist of the novel and the “true” self he tries desperately to return to, which finally meet in the novel's climax, when “his two minds and personalities merged at last, as the new Campion's witless discoveries fitted over the old Campion's certain knowledge” (1941: 180). Allingham frames *Traitor's Purse* as a bridge between two Campions, a “new” who attempts to return to the “old”, and yet the Campion at the end of the novel is an *entirely* new man – in the course of his adventure he rejects the Campion of the early series: “He had a vision of a damned superior young man who must always have been laughingly tolerant, gloriously sure of himself. The new Campion turned from him with loathing” (1941: 121). By the final pages, he has become the sensible, self-effacing man of the postwar novels: “[f]or the first time in his life... he felt completely adult” (1941: 207). Allingham creates this adult Campion by stripping the character of his crutches – his name, his vacuous disguise, even the glasses which obscure his family resemblance – and sending him on a fruitless hunt for an identity that never existed, allowing her to build a wholly new, stable detective.

Allingham uses Campion's reclamation of his misleading mask of personality to retroactively establish that exterior as a *tool*, rather than a hampering but unavoidable characteristic. Where in the early series Campion is an unpredictable trickster, “foolish-looking and ineffectual” (Allingham 1933: 229) even in the face of mortal danger, who claims that his “amiable idiocy is mainly natural” (1931: 23), in *Traitor's Purse* he becomes dangerously, visibly adroit, his protective disguise dropping away. This is the only book in which Campion's glasses do not appear; Allingham makes a single reference – and it is oblique – to their absence, when

Amanda, unaware of Campion's amnesiac state, remarks that he looks "much more intelligent than usual" (1941: 29). His lack of glasses allows anyone to see him clearly, with his face and his intelligence unguarded. Allingham's complete omission of the spectacles suggests their masking function's lack of importance to Campion's fundamental character; the regaining of his other attributes is paid close attention. Attempting to cover his amnesia by playing the role of "Campion", he shocks himself with his own inanity: he "had intended to sound ignorant, but even he was unprepared for the degree of fatuous idiocy he managed to present" (1941: 83). He is similarly surprised by other skills like lock-picking and scaling walls, suggesting that his idiotic mask is a highly cultivated tool, and not, as he claims in the second novel, "an affliction, like stammering or a hammer toe" (1930: 26). Allingham utterly destabilizes her detective, removing his disguise by definitively revealing it *to be* a disguise and creating a freshly stable identity which he can comfortably inhabit in the new, modern world following the war.

Without his memory, Campion loses the trappings of his character right down to his name: the pointless investigation he pursues over the course of the novel requires that he hunt for himself – but the only identity he can possibly recover is one based entirely in a lie. Pike (1987: 81) claims that "[h]is name is easily assimilated – [a side character] soon calls him 'Campion,' and Amanda, 'Albert' ", but in fact that is only the *reader's* assurance that the man we are reading about is Campion; he himself is not certain until over halfway through the novel. Upon first hearing the name he "seized on [it] eagerly and tried to think it was familiar. At first he was convinced that it was, and relief rushed over him. But the next moment he was not sure again and despair returned" (Allingham 1941: 18-19). He tries to grasp onto the name as a place to locate his lost personhood, but, because neither he nor Allingham has ever imbued it with any kind of substantive meaning, it has nothing to offer him now. Having lost control of himself and that identity (such as it was) Campion must rebuild it from the ground up, inventing a self that is more than a negation or a disguise. To save himself, Amanda, and the country, "Campion must become whole and undivided to face the external threat" as well as the internal, metaphysical threat: an absence of self (Rowland 2004: 78). The first time in this novel that Allingham gives Campion any power over others occurs when a minor antagonist confirms his identity:

He was annihilatingly helpless. He knew so horribly little, even about himself. [...] Bending forward suddenly, he allowed the full light from the chandelier to fall upon his face.

It succeeded. Miraculously the outside chance came home, proving him right beyond all question. The effect on the man was immediate and sensational. [...]

'Campion!' he ejaculated in a thin voice. 'Campion. You *are* Campion.'

(Allingham 1941: 116)

Claiming this identity as the whole of his being rather than a single, unimportant facet of it allows Campion to gain command both of himself and of his enemies. At the end of this novel, he marries Amanda; by claiming his own name, he enables himself to share it with his wife and, eventually, their son. As in the postmodern detective story, the missing man at the end of the hunt is the detective himself, but here that discovery of the self is a whole, triumphant one that acknowledges the integrity, not the dissolution, of the identity.

Allingham's biographer Julia Jones quotes a lecture given by Allingham in 1958: "Enormous amount of our stories have this second meaning or main meaning: the way one keeps on murdering one aspect of a person to give birth to another" (Jones 2012: 403). Just as the postmodern sleuth collapses "the triadic multiplicity of detective, criminal, and victim" into a "solipsistic unity" (Merivale, in Merivale & Sweeney 1999: 107), Allingham engages her readers in a constant hunt alongside Campion for his identity, an element of his character that he himself has "murdered" and which is only recovered in *Traitor's Purse* when both detective and author confront the absence of his concrete self. Allingham's investment in keeping her series fresh, in modernizing at all costs and depicting honestly the clash between modernity and outmoded ways of being manifests itself most clearly in her development of her detective, and in his transformation from a walking identity crisis into a man of integrity.

2.2 "Inwardly wretched, outwardly a trifle insane": Detecting like a gentleman

An integrity of moral character is the trait that Allingham maintained consistently in the depiction of her detective, and because of it, self-control is the most crucial part of Campion's toolkit. His great enemy, too, is the threat of the loss of that control: madness appears repeatedly in the series as the worst fate imaginable. In *Death of a Ghost* (1934) the unflappable Campion is horrified by an insane murderer, and in *More Work for the Undertaker* (1949) he is almost as deeply alarmed by a woman who uses her natural intelligence for apparently pointless purposes. Allingham describes these people and Campion's visceral reactions to them in the same way, as "the strange horror which is purely instinctive, a primitive horror of that which is not a right thing" (1934: 202); "such a terrifyingly and indefinably wrong thing" (1949: 81). These wastes of potential, these otherwise great intelligences gone berserk, are Campion's greatest threat because they manifest as a total, irrecoverable loss of control.

Christine Berberich (2007: 4), in her catalogue of the impossibility of defining the concept of "gentleman", cites Nikos Kazantzakis's description of "the invisible, quivering tilting

of the scale... between sensitivity and psychological control, between passion and discipline.” Madness, in Allingham’s novels, is the combined loss of intellectual and moral self-control, a tipping over from the safety of civilized “psychological control”. This loss of control is most frequently figured in Allingham’s work in a “recurrent (significantly masculine) villain: a megalomaniac killer who fragments into madness” but appears to be a person of supreme self-control in his early appearances: a false gentleman (Rowland 2004: 8-9). Allingham makes modern gentlemanliness a burden as much as it is an asset; she provides us with a clear picture of how deeply the requirement of self-control affects Campion: “[s]ince he was a highly bred product of a highly civilised strain, his natural instincts were offset by other man-implanted cultures and taboos, and the result of the war between them was to make him, if inwardly wretched, outwardly a trifle insane” (1937b: 199). Campion’s work in his adventures is far more about his being a gentleman than it is his being a detective; by making his gentlemanly self-control his foremost skill – and comparing him with uncontrolled, villainous doubles – Allingham both toys with the concept of the great intellectual detective and shows us Campion’s own development into a gentleman of a highly modern morality.

Through his moral self-control Campion becomes more firmly a descendant of Holmes than either author or detective would have us believe. He divides himself from his great rational predecessor; in 1932’s *Police at the Funeral*, we first encounter Campion “perched insecurely on a pile of debris” next to a coal stove, where “[t]he final note of incongruity was struck by an old-fashioned deerstalker cap set jauntily upon the top of the young man’s head” (1932: 12-13). He is in “fancy dress” so as not to disappoint the expectations of a client, he says, “who has been so grossly misinformed that she believes I’m a private detective” (14). These comparisons with Holmes indicate a central aspect of Campion’s character: his own self-imposed distance from the figure of the detective. Allingham constructs Campion primarily as a solver of moral puzzles, rather than of intellectual knots – her novels are murder mysteries, but she structures them more as thrillers than puzzles; Rushing (2007: 28) argues that the “tension of the hard-boiled novel is not based around what a third-person character already did (the killer and his means)... but rather around what the detective himself might do” with the information he has collected. By this measure, Campion resembles the action-oriented hard-boiled hero far more closely than he does Stephen Knight’s (1980: 135) assessment of him as “an intellectualised, languidly triumphant detective.” The one time he attempts to attack a mystery with his mind alone, he finds the classic “big leather armchair” in the library, sits down to “think things out” and promptly falls asleep (Allingham 1937a: 96). Almost as soon as Allingham developed her hero beyond his initial appearance as a mysterious adventurer, she made him a self-conscious parody not only of other aristocratic detectives like Lord Peter

Wimsey, but of Holmes and all his intellectual ilk. “She had”, Jones (2012: 104) suggests, “a limiting prejudice against the intellect” that generated a strict “dichotomy between intelligence and the intellect” throughout her work, and which perhaps accounts somewhat for the energy devoted to preventing the reader from considering Campion too intellectual.

Despite Allingham’s placement of Campion in ironic opposition to Holmes, he is arguably the closest of his contemporaries to that forefather of detection in a *moral* sense. Much of what is interesting about Doyle’s stories is, of course, what miraculous feats of rationalism Holmes will perform, but the other dimension is always what he will do with the knowledge he was acquired. As an amateur, Holmes was free to let some murderers go – and he did, with few qualms: when, in “The Adventure of the Abbey Grange”, Holmes justifies a sympathetic murderer’s release by engaging Watson as “gentleman of the jury” and claiming his verdict of not guilty as evidence that “*vox populi, vox Dei*” (Doyle 1936: 760), readers recognize Holmes upholds “order, if not always law” (Clausen 1984: 113). As much as Doyle represents the early incarnation of the “pure puzzle” story in Holmes’s singular and fierce dedication to truth, he is also a predecessor of the opposition to the law featured in the hard-boiled. Just as Holmes reminds Watson that he is “not retained by the police to supply their deficiencies” (Doyle 1936: 291), so is every amateur detective placed to some degree in the position of judge, however unwillingly – without the restrictions of being bound to the law, the freedom to decide is also a burden. It is this aspect of the great detective, rather than his scientific mind, that Campion inherits.

Campion’s presentation of himself as an almost anti-intellectual detective is borne out by Allingham’s depiction of his mental machinery: she takes great care to illustrate precisely how Campion’s mind works, and the general impression we are left suggests that, more often than not, his eventual attainment of a puzzle’s solution has very little to do with any strenuous mental work on his part. In *Case of the Late Pig* (1937a), the only Campion novel narrated in the first person, he describes his methods:

I am not one of these intellectual sleuths, I am afraid. My mind does not work like an adding machine, taking the facts in neatly one by one and doing the work as it goes along. I am more like the bloke with the sack and spiked stick. I collect all the odds and ends I can see and turn out the bag at lunch hour. (1937a: 35-6)

Campion relies mostly on instinct and the next most obvious lead; he is a man of action, not a sitter-and-thinker, as his episode in the library chair demonstrates. Even the most literal interpretation of the puzzle-solving detective’s work undermines any perception we might have of Campion as the “great detective” actively picking apart clues to reach the solution. Instead, his attention is focused on what I call moral puzzle work: untangling his intricate,

doubled codes of ethics to reach a “solution” that will cause the least harm and disturbance to everyone concerned.

Campion’s identity as a gentleman is required for *his* kind of detective work: solving the ethical predicaments which Allingham uses to contrast him with her capable but law-bound policemen. The law occupies a complex position in Allingham’s series, reminiscent of but more fully developed than its depiction by Doyle. Like Holmes, Campion consistently teams up with a few recurring police officers – where Holmes had Lestrade and Gregson, Campion has Oates, Yeo, and eventually Luke – but the latter are far more intelligent and successful than their forerunners. Still, Allingham’s police are never permitted the upper hand over Campion for long, and he remains the moral compass of the novels, directing our attention and our sympathy more than the law does. Allingham puts effort into the depiction of this relationship, though, never losing sight of the divide between the gentleman amateur and the working-class professional – she emphasizes both his discomfort at being the odd man out as well as the police’s envy of his freedom from the law they enforce. “That’s where you have the advantage over us professionals,” Yeo once replies “acidly” to Campion’s request to be left out of an investigation he finds distasteful. “I can’t choose myself” (1937b: 192-3). Similarly, Scotland Yard’s attempts to exclude Campion from his usually privileged position as a police confidant make him “very angry indeed” at not being allowed his normal ability to have all the information and none of the restrictions (1945: 38). Throughout the series, Campion’s sticking point with the law is his “freedom” – his ability to make his own moral choices, a responsibility we learn to trust with him because of his superior self-control: his gentlemanliness.

Rather than through the police, whom she configures as uniformly good men, Allingham creates an adversary for Campion’s moral sense of duty in her portrayals of charismatic, powerful characters (usually men) who act as his doubles, visions of a gentleman who makes the *wrong* moral choice – who loses self-control. Pike has also noted the influence of this character type, “who dominates, in typical Allingham fashion, a gay, glamorous, and tight-knit group” (1987: 89). In every single one of the eighteen Campion novels Allingham published in her lifetime, she included a character of some extraordinary ability and charisma whose influence pervades their community and whose morality comes into question – in fact, this character’s goodness or badness is often the true puzzle Campion is set to work out. Over and over, Campion confronts the possibility that this figure, responsible for many other people and supposed for some reason – beauty in *The Fashion in Shrouds* (1938), wealth in *Sweet Danger* (1933), intelligence in *Traitor’s Purse*, talent in *Death of a Ghost* and *Dancers in Mourning* – to be inherently superior, might have committed a terrible crime and need to be dealt with, thus obliterating the little world that orbits them. The responsibility of sorting this

mess out falls on Campion's shoulders by virtue of his being a gentleman; he is almost always engaged as a friend of the family or person in question because of his being "someone... not bound by edicts or – well – scruples of convention to assist the police... someone who is a gentleman" (Allingham 1931: 42). The position of a gentleman in Allingham's world is one of power, and one she does not take lightly; Campion's job in his adventures is to solve the problem of how to deal with the potential guilt of a powerful person, in the context of his own conflicting loyalties.

These charismatic characters offer contrasts to the kind of privilege and (lack of) charisma embodied in Campion himself, whose decisive split from his aristocratic roots, avoidance of responsibility for others, and self-effacing personality underline his opposition to all these powerful men, these people with all the advantages he has except for his central weapon: moral self-control. Allingham hints that Campion is an immensely self-controlled man; every time his facetious disguise momentarily slips from him to reveal his natural intelligence, we recognize that he is constantly working to maintain that mask. In *The Fashion in Shrouds* he proves himself capable of manifesting the kind of awe-inspiring charisma that only his doubles seem to have, capturing the attention of a house full of people: "He was leaning over the drawing-table, his strong, sensitive hands, which no one seemed to have noticed before, gripping the sides of the board. His natural vacuity of expression had vanished and he had taken off his spectacles. He looked vigorous, deeply intelligent and by no means unhandsome in his passionate sincerity" (1938: 257). It is his self-control, his constant battle against utilizing these tools of personality at his disposal, that separates him and makes him the detective he is, rather than – solely – his intellectual power or his *status* as a gentleman. Allingham uses his mirror image, the potentially-villainous charismatic character, to define the difference between men who appear to be gentlemen and those who truly are, investigating the power of privileged identity and its relationship to justice by repeatedly asking her reader to consider what makes one person freer to do something than another. Her most extended rumination on this theme is 1945's *Coroner's Pidgin*, in which Campion must consider the disturbing possibility that his friend, the popular aristocratic pilot Johnny Carados, might have turned traitor during the war. Allingham uses Carados as a focal point to explore how unacceptable behavior is excused when it appears in a person who happens to be exceptional, whether in character or in status. Crucially, she frames Carados as Campion's double, reminding us of her detective's superior self-control and self-awareness.

Rowland (2004: 174), who accurately observes Allingham's interest in critiquing social hierarchies, suggests that these charismatic figures are evidence that "naked 'power' corrupts in Allingham's world with her love of traditional structures set up as a bulwark against crazed

would-be 'dictators.' " Certainly power is a dangerous thing in Allingham's world, but I argue rather that it is precisely those "traditional structures" that come in for a querying in her fiction, if implicitly. When he discovers that some of those around him believe that Carados is "privileged beyond all the normal bounds of civilized behaviour" and are therefore willing to turn a blind eye to his supposed crimes, Campion is reminded of an incident of his childhood in which a bullying peer's actions had been defended by virtue of his being a duke:

At the age of four and a quarter, Mr. Campion had taken a poor view of the excuse and did so now, with the added advantage of knowing that ninety-nine per cent of the world agreed with him. All the same, he found it interesting to note that the remaining one per cent existed. (1945: 130)

Allingham makes it clear that status alone does not make a gentleman; that Carados himself fears that he is losing his mind only underlines the danger he embodies, of a kind of power and privilege outside all control that threatens the rest of the self-controlled, civilized world, represented by the true gentleman: Campion.

Allingham used this figure of the charismatic man, Campion's double, to strain his moral puzzle-solving abilities to the limit in two novels: *Dancers in Mourning* and *Traitor's Purse*, both of which feature that man as a romantic rival to Campion and force him to engage deeply with his own place in an ethical tangle. Unlike Holmes, Campion is quite capable of falling in love – he does so repeatedly, and in each of these two instances, he is confronted with an enhanced difficulty in navigating moral choices. The novels are strikingly similar, and form bookends to Campion's transformative arc: both are romances in which Campion finds himself distressingly in love with a woman whom he believes to be inaccessible; both contain a charismatic man who occupies the position of his rival both romantically and in the central mystery plot; and both focus on a suspension of Campion's moral and intellectual faculties. Each story contains the same central decision for Campion to make: whether to burden a woman he loves with the knowledge of the apparent villainy of the man *she* loves, and whether to remain in her life having done so. Allingham gives him the opportunity to remake his choice from *Dancers* in *Traitor's Purse*, combining her investigation of the gentleman figure with Campion's moral puzzle-solving abilities to tell a story about the reshaping of gentlemanly codes of ethics at the beginning of World War II.

Dancers in Mourning depicts Campion's reluctant investigation of a murder committed at the home of Jimmy Sutane, a dancer possessed of a powerful "personality which dominated the house, both before and behind the curtain" (1937b: 8) that immediately singles him out as the figure around whom the rest of the milieu circles – literally, as the suspects are Sutane's theatrical colleagues, who rely on him for work. Campion's instinctive liking for Sutane (he is

explicitly not immune to charisma) is complicated by his equally immediate attraction to Sutane's wife Linda, a feeling so strong that it gives him "a sudden terror that he had gone completely out of his mind" – an absolute loss of control (1937b: 41-2). As the possibility that Sutane is the murderer becomes ever more inescapably obvious, Allingham focuses on Campion's misery over his divided loyalties: Sutane himself has engaged Campion's help and Campion's unacceptable love for Linda ties him even more strongly to the cause of the Sutanese, but his conviction that Sutane is a murderer puts him at odds with his own ethical code. In order to untangle the knot, Allingham shows Campion to be capable of doing what he cannot for the "pure" intellectual puzzle – sitting down to think it out:

Campion set down the paper and forced himself to look at his own problem coldly... Regarded dispassionately, it resolved itself to a simple enough question. If you are violently and unreasonably attracted to a married woman, to discover immediately afterwards that to the best of your belief her husband has killed, either by accident or design, a previous wife, in order, presumably, to retain his present ménage intact, do you involve yourself further in the situation, denouncing him for his crime and walking off with the lady?

"No, you don't," said Campion aloud (1937b: 142-3)

This is Campion's great skill, his ability that balances out his lack of classical intellectualism or even hard-boiled toughness: he can analyze himself, applying the ethics and the values of the gentleman to complex problems and acting by his own codes. Allingham shows us the power of the gentlemanly identity: it can stop detection in its tracks.

Compare this plot with the subplot of *Traitor's Purse*, published four years later: it focuses entirely on the workings of Campion's mind and heart as he realizes that he is genuinely in love with his fiancée of eight years, only for her to announce the transfer of her affections to another man, Lee Aubrey. Campion's sense of gentlemanly duty to Amanda demands that he step aside: "to appeal to pity is very loathsome in love. He was appalled to discover how much love there was to be reckoned with" (1941: 31). Aubrey is the novel's charismatic center of an intellectual universe: like Sutane, he is "a personality; that is to say he exuded a force and a spiritual flavour as actual as if it had been warmth, or a small electric current" and he is the Principal of the Bridge Institute of General Research, "one of the most valuable centres in the country" (1941: 27-8). The little of Aubrey we see in the early scenes of the novel presents him as a kind of "Campion-plus", a notion first introduced by Amanda: "He's like you... Except for the one important thing... He loves me so" (1941: 56-7). Having ourselves followed the turmoil of Campion's newly-awakened romantic nature throughout the adventure, by the time Allingham reveals Aubrey to be an evil mastermind it comes as a relief, if not a wholly unexpected one. What we discover at the core of Aubrey is not a gentleman, but the shell of one: "To Campion it was the most ghastly moment of them all. The man was

brilliant, able, in his own limited sphere doubtless extremely useful, yet as he stood there, smiling faintly at them, his mistaken belief in his own superiority cut him off from reality as completely as if he were living in a coloured glass jar” (1941: 205). Aubrey is the image of the gentleman, intellect and charisma only and no morals – besides being an unsuitable match for Amanda, he was never a “better” version of Campion, the actual complete gentleman. Campion himself has been transformed into a “Campion-plus” through his experience of amnesia, and the story can therefore proceed to its appointed end of Amanda and Campion’s reunion. This moment is not one of relief for Campion, however, who has been dreading her “reaction to the affair... The present situation was irretrievable as well as being so miserably awkward that, had she been anybody else in the world” – perhaps Linda Sutane – “the only possible thing to have done would have been to hurry back to one’s job immediately and concentrate on other things with one’s eyes, ears, and heart shut” (1941: 206). The final puzzle for Campion to solve, his mind repaired, the country saved, is an apparently impossible one for the self-aware gentleman, and yet one he has made before: how do you tell the woman you love that your rival is a murderer and a villain, without appealing to pity or appearing callous?

Allingham’s solutions in each case form a clear picture of Campion’s role in his adventures: he never tells Linda his suspicions, and he does tell Amanda – but in neither novel does his choice alter the story’s outcome. Allingham’s mysteries are about the *process* of Campion making his decisions, not the solutions or even the outcomes for the characters: it is Campion’s moral puzzling machinery that drives our interest. Confronting Amanda at the end of *Traitor’s Purse*, Campion forces himself to tell her the truth – as he could not tell Linda: “he intended to say it, not because it might comfort her – if she was human and female it would probably infuriate her – but because she was Amanda and her education was important” (1941: 206). But Amanda has already realized the truth about Aubrey; she barely registers surprise at Campion’s revelation. The process of his coming to realize that he *must* communicate the truth to her, rather than hide it to save both his and her feelings, is what really counts to Allingham. The postwar gentleman understands the difference between the gentleman’s duty to do no harm, and his duty to do the best by the people he protects.

Allingham uses Campion to undermine the figure of the “great detective”, problematizing the concept of the gentleman detective through her emphasis on moral over intellectual puzzles. Campion’s task as a detective is to be the ethical center of his world, to recognize his dangerous doubles – which is to say, the danger of the combination of status, charisma, and intelligence embodied in the character type – and to deal properly with them. Allingham explores the concept of the gentleman *as* detective, making the two identities inextricable from each other and arguing that Campion, as gentleman and detective, is

uniquely equipped to recognize and combat the versions of himself running amok with the power granted them by their status and abilities. He can only protect his world from the gentleman run mad because he is just barely not one himself.

2.3 “Gloriously wrong”: The impulse of escapism

Campion’s greatest point of departure from the figure of the great detective is his fallibility. Allingham wrote, in *Dancers in Mourning*, a detective story in which the detective *gets it wrong*, in which everyone around him gets it right – including, potentially, the reader. She demonstrates Campion’s alternate function to puzzle-solving, born out of his complex moral code: he explores the impulse of escapism without outright condemning or endorsing it. Campion fails to properly detect in *Dancers in Mourning* because he refuses to acknowledge his natural fallibility – like Lee Aubrey, he believes too strongly in the escapist fantasy of the superior gentleman: a myth all too easy for the genre reader to believe, and which Allingham repeatedly proves false. She gives us constant signs not to trust him, often by reminding us that he is not as exceptional as he believes himself to be. The novel is unique: Campion’s refusal to hunt for the truth, a rejection of his basic function as a detective, (1) forces the reader into the position of central investigator, and (2) underlines that Campion himself is not above common errors. Allingham reveals Campion’s fundamentally unexceptional humanity in his desire for escape from the painful knowledge of what he believes to be the truth – discovering a mystery’s solution does not inherently both solve “the case and [resolve] the conflicts caused by it” (Malmgren 1997: 122), but creates another puzzle: what to do with the truth, how to keep it from hurting more people. The tone of triumph coloring Campion’s failure at the end of *Dancers in Mourning* reveals that though the passive, conciliatory ethics of the gentleman may not have a place in the modern world, the desire to preserve them is a sympathetic – and deeply human – impulse.

Before looking at the reasons behind Campion’s errors in *Dancers*, it’s worth examining how Allingham typically uses her detective to play games with the reader. Part of the fun of Campion is rarely knowing what he’s up to; Allingham dances between depicting him as a figure of ridicule and one of awe-inspiring ingenuity, depending on how he presents himself and how much information she shares with us. Even in the later novels, in which Campion takes a backseat role to younger investigators, his unpredictability remains a crucial part of his character. In *Hide My Eyes* (1958), Yeo, a series regular policeman, acknowledges Campion’s secretive side: “That’s Albert... He doesn’t miss much. You’ll find he’s had an idea and trotted off to test it” (1958: 158). Even in the fictional world, the mystery of Campion’s methods is part and parcel of his detecting. In nearly every book, even those concerned with

his interiority like *Traitor's Purse*, Campion “trots off” to find some clue, interview some suspect, or set up some domino chain with no hint given to the reader until the completed plan is revealed. In the second novel, *Mystery Mile* (1930), we discover belatedly that the whole origin of the mystery – a missing man – has been orchestrated by Campion himself and hidden from his allies. Like Campion’s aristocratic identity, his moments of inspiration and ingenuity are acknowledged but obscured, “an explicit gap that draws attention to itself... an answer known but deliberately withheld” that only increases our focus on the detective rather than the mystery (Horsley 2005: 46). Both detective and author have the upper hand over the reader, reminding us that Allingham is just as willing to delude us as Campion is to trick the other characters.

On the other hand, as I noted in the previous section, Allingham is concerned with keeping Campion from appearing omniscient. Because she (or the narrator) is the real figure of intellectual authority in the novels, Campion is permitted – unlike most other detectives of this subgenre and era – to fail. In all the Campion novels, Allingham proves herself willing to make a fool of her detective by undermining him, demonstrating just how much he does not, or cannot, know. In his first adventure, he vanishes from the story before the murderer’s identity is discovered; both *Mystery Mile* and *The Mind Readers* (1965) contain criminals explicitly inferior to Campion who handily ambush and outwit him. Reminiscing on his work in *Case of the Late Pig*, Campion admits that “I was absolutely wrong. I was wrong not only about the position of the snag but about everything else as well. However, I had no idea of it then” (1937a: 36). Allingham has no qualms about making her detective look a fool, and making sure that he knows it, too.

Because Allingham presents Campion as a dynamic character who at any moment might know significantly more or less than the reader, *he* becomes the mystery we are attempting to solve in each book. In all detective fiction there is play between the author and the reader, as there is between the detective and the murderer they pursue. The core of the game boils down to whether the reader is able to “beat” the detective by solving the mystery before its solution is revealed, while the author tries to hold back as much information as possible while still abiding by the “fair play” rules of the game. These rules were tongue-in-cheek guidelines for the construction of mystery plots that, theoretically, made it possible for readers to detect alongside the fictional detectives. The concept was somewhat tied to the concept of English gentlemanliness; even American Marjorie Hope Nicolson (1946: 121) described the lack of a “fair play” attitude as simply “not ‘cricket.’ ” “Fair play” seems almost an oxymoron in Allingham’s novels, however, where the game becomes figuring out whether we and Campion are even solving the same puzzles. Campion’s fallibility merges with his

characteristic unpredictability to create a character naturally suited to experimentation with the “fair play” rules of the genre, which Allingham exploits to their limits in *Dancers in Mourning*. *Dancers* is almost an exercise entirely in the notion of fair play – both in the sense of Campion’s book-long tortuous decision over how to proceed fairly in the delicate moral conundrums of romance, and in Allingham’s constant toying with her reader around our confidence in Campion’s detecting abilities.

Having trained her reader to keep one eye carefully on Campion, Allingham sets up *Dancers* as a study in Campion’s failure that reveals the dangers of believing too strongly in the myth of the gentleman detective. Having been called in to uncover the identity of someone playing a series of violent pranks on the famous dancer Jimmy Sutane, Campion travels to Sutane’s house and meets his menagerie of co-performers and hangers-on, who naturally make up the closed community of suspects when one is killed in an apparent car accident. After becoming infatuated with Sutane’s wife Linda, Campion attempts to remove himself from the household, only to become entangled in it when he is further engaged to investigate the death of the aging ingenue Chloe Pye. Campion quickly comes to what appears to be the inescapable conclusion that Sutane is the murderer, and despite his decision – explored in the previous section – not to interfere due to his guilty conscience around Linda, and his consequent refusal to properly aid the police, as the bodies pile up he is unable to escape the case. The twist, revealed in the final pages of the novel after Campion has resigned himself to Sutane’s arrest, is that Sutane is not only innocent but has been doubling Campion: out of guilt for having seduced the murderer’s wife years previously, he has been hiding the killer’s identity and relying on Campion to act as his conscience.

Besides the simple thrill of a detective being *wrong*, what makes *Dancers* so fascinating is Allingham’s framing of the story. She has trained her series reader to focus their attention on the detective more than the puzzle-plot by making Campion’s moral decision-making the central focus of each novel. She emphasizes this dimension from the beginning of *Dancers*, when at Campion’s first meeting with Sutane she points out “the essential charm of the man, a charm which was to puzzle and finally defeat an Albert Campion who was then barely in existence” (1937b: 13). This line not only plots out the story as one of frustrated detection, but also as transformative in some way for Campion, keeping the reader’s eye fixed on his character more than the chaos surrounding him. It is up to us to decide whether to pay attention to his missteps or to assume his superiority as a detective and follow his erroneous conclusions. Allingham pushes us to look more critically at Campion than we are often expected to look at our detective-heroes.

Repeatedly, Allingham highlights Campion's intellectual commonness, his lack of exceptional ability, as if to prompt the reader to strike out on our own to try to solve this particular mystery. When we finally hear it, the case's solution reveals more than the true meaning of each clue we have encountered: it also exposes, upon rereading, the opportunities Campion has had to "go right" and either refused or simply failed to do so. The revelation is world-shifting for Campion, but not for anyone else – its very pedestrian nature is what makes it so shocking, and Allingham's interest in the workings of Campion's mind is on full display in her description of the moment of inspiration:

His brain seemed suddenly to turn over in his head. It was a definite physical experience and was comparable to the process which takes place when an unexpected train in the underground station appears from what is apparently the wrong tunnel and the mind slips over and adjusts the phenomenon by turning the universe other side out, substituting in one kaleidoscopic second east for west. (1937b: 258)

Campion's utter misreading of the case is unthinkable only for him. Allingham vividly communicates his complete bafflement, all the while underscoring its simplicity. His shock is that of a man fooled by a commonplace illusion, not an elaborate deceit – had he looked at the facts *from a different perspective*, he might, in fact, have been able to understand them properly. The truth has not been hidden outside the realm of his intellect, and yet it blindsides him; he is unique as a detective and as an adventurer, but he is not above human error.

And this is the secret that Campion himself misses: just as he is not above common errors, so his motivations and skills are not above others' capabilities. He has been unconsciously mirroring Sutane's actions throughout the investigation, revealing that he is not the only one operating in this world with a gentleman's principles. Sutane's final entreaty to Campion, his attempt to explain his own behavior, is constructed in these terms of mutual understanding: "I had to have you here. I had to, Campion! Don't you see, you were my conscience. You had to find him out. But I couldn't direct you. I couldn't give him away... I was his only friend, and, oh, my dear chap, don't you see, I was the beggar who pinched his wife" (1937b: 262). Sutane's language here, his refrain of "don't you see", reveals the grounds on which the two men double each other: it is a plea to another gentleman, and the discovery that there really *is* another gentleman in Campion's world is the actual twist ending of the story that emphasizes Campion's unexpected normalcy.

Dancers inverts nearly every aspect of the world we know in Allingham's series. Even Campion's usual realm of investigative superiority, his "trotting off" to further the investigation, is twisted to warn the reader to question him. In the immediate aftermath of the

murder, Campion sabotages the car of the local Dr. Bouverie in order to get him alone – because Allingham guides our focus to the characters investigating the corpse, it may only be after the car fails to start that we remember the subtlety with which she told us Campion merely “raised the bonnet” before we cut away (1937b: 50). Even from our privileged position, watching Campion closely, Allingham restricts us to the same realm as the victims of his trickery. In the same scene, however, she hammers home the idea of Campion’s fallibility by drawing a parallel between her detective and the comic Dr. Bouverie. We glimpse Campion’s perspective as he anticipates the doctor’s failure to correctly assess the corpse: “Mr. Campion was not a medical man, but his experience of violent death was considerable. Dr. Bouverie, he knew, had seen many car accidents in the last twenty years, so many that he was used to them, and that therefore there was a real chance that a certain vital and obvious fact might escape him” (1937b: 57-8). In 1937 Campion was approaching his tenth year as a fictional detective – his “experience of violent death” is just as profound as Dr. Bouverie’s, and the danger of his making a mistake due to overfamiliarity, or even arrogance, just as present. Allingham indicates that Campion’s judgment is not to be relied on, raising our awareness of his capability for error when it then fails to “occur to him to consider... his own unprecedented behaviour” (1937b: 58). She prompts us to wonder: what about his behavior is unprecedented? Should we be watching him more closely? His failure to recognize his doubles – like Sutane and Dr. Bouverie – is the nail in the coffin for Campion, but it need not be for the reader: as Allingham makes clear, we should be paying attention to Campion in a way that he cannot, and if we do so we may be able to best him.

The only way for a reader to solve the puzzle-plot of *Dancers in Mourning* is to recognize that Campion is not the only character equipped to solve mysteries, and place our trust in Allingham rather than solely in her detective. This is arguably the most traditionally “fair play” of any of Allingham’s mystery novels, at least in the sense that it is quite possible for the reader to solve the puzzle long before Campion does. The core of his final epiphany consists of an almost psychological analysis of the real murderer, Squire Mercer, and of the kind of mind that could have committed his crimes: “Mercer, who had the one type of mind which was sufficiently ingenious and sufficiently devoid of humour... who would not be particularly disturbed by the news that a number of strangers had met with an appalling accident on a railway station, so long as it took place twenty miles out of his sight” (1937b: 158-9). This is an unusual novel of its kind in that there is no “onstage” confrontation with Mercer in which we see him stripped of his disguise of innocence; the only vision of Mercer-as-murderer Allingham gives us is Campion’s conception of his mind. This is precisely how Mercer is depicted in the entire book: there is no true disguise, and if we pay attention to the police’s

theories and the way Allingham portrays any character other than Sutane – on whom Campion alone is laser-focused – we will know who the murderer is a hundred pages before Campion ever suspects.

Part of the horror of Campion's mistake is his failure to demonstrate superior investigative ability: he fails at every level of classical detection, and the mystery becomes, with a sense of retrospection that demands its own rereading, how he failed. When, at the end of the book, we are made to look back and ask this question, the answer becomes that he *should* have known, *because we could have known*. Underlining Campion's failure, Allingham democratizes the skill of detection by placing the key moment of analysis in the mouth of Yeo, obliterating the convention that "the hero [and not the police] must be the sole recipient of celebration and applause" whether within or without the world of the text (Roth 1995: 61). Yeo, whom Allingham has only ever portrayed as thoroughly sensible, describes his conception of the murderer to Campion, who by this point has miserably committed to his belief in Sutane's guilt: "If you ask me," Yeo says, "the man who did this job wasn't the imaginative type. He's straightforward and ingenious; that's how I see him. Single-track mind" (1937b: 190). Now, evidently, that tallies with Campion's description of Mercer once he realizes his guilt, but without that knowledge it simply appears to be the theorizing of the police, which the trained genre reader knows to discard. Yeo's description most certainly does not match up with any impression we have received of the sensitive, distractible Sutane, further suggesting its inaccuracy. Campion never stops to consider alternative suspects, but the reader has the more objective position and the opportunity to do so – however, with knowledge of generations of bumbling law enforcement, and perhaps hoping that Campion's emotional turmoil could not be for nothing, we may convince ourselves to dismiss Yeo entirely.

If we choose, however, to consider Yeo's theory, we may notice that Allingham only offers this kind of psychological portrait of one suspect other than Sutane – Mercer. Twice she provides us with detailed descriptions of his mental state, each time explicitly through Campion's eyes: he accurately observes "the state of multiple minds populating the scene of the crime" but fails to interpret them (Zunshine 2006: 128). First, "he [sees] suddenly" that Mercer is "a simple literalist... His face was bland and innocent; he meant exactly what he said" (Allingham 1937b: 22). The use of "innocent" in this description and Mercer's characterization as a man of exacting and embarrassing honesty may be enough to suggest Mercer as a key "least likely" suspect for some active readers, but by the second, nearly identical analysis of Mercer any reader might be suspicious. Campion still finds himself puzzled by Mercer "until the simple truth dawned on him. Mercer did not think at all in the accepted sense of the word. Ideas occurred to him and engendered other ideas. But the process which linked any two of

them was a dark procession taking place in some subconscious part of the brain" (1937b: 69). Allingham's focus is always the construction and processes of the mind, and Campion's failure to recognize even the possibility of Mercer's guilt despite his acquisition of the necessary facts is explicitly due to his refusal to investigate as deeply as he needs to. More people die because he believes only his first instinct, but Allingham's exploration of Campion's desire to be freed from the case is non-judgmental; Campion's work in this book is not to permit but to *admit* the impulse to look away from horror, to demonstrate that it is a detective's right just as it is anyone's to hide one's eyes.

Hiding one's eyes, or refusing to acknowledge painful truths, is a constant theme in Allingham's novels, one she both presents sympathetically and uses here to underline Campion's lack of division from the rest of his fictional world. Other characters do it: *Hide My Eyes* focuses on one woman, Polly Tassie, and her refusal to accept the horrible truth that a young man she has all but raised is a remorseless serial killer. Jones (2012: 387) aptly summarizes this novel's central puzzle, revealed in its "challenging first chapter": "Two old people sit in a lighted bus in the pouring rain. They witness a murder but do nothing. That's because they are not human. What then are living people who deliberately choose to act thus?" Allingham never condemns a character for the impulse to escape from the burden of knowledge; it is rather her ultimate admission of the *universality* of this impulse that she also gives it to Campion, whose ostensible purpose in every narrative is to hunt the truth out and reveal it no matter the cost.

By choosing not to detect, through his repeated efforts to escape the investigation and even to obstruct its progress, Campion places his gentleman's responsibility to avoid discomfort firmly before his detective's responsibility to seek the truth, *and* proves himself to be a part of the normal milieu of Allingham's series, not uniquely above the rest of his community intellectually or morally. He recognizes this impulse, realizing the social disruption that would be caused by pursuing Sutane for the sake of "justice": "It came to him suddenly that he did not want the truth to come out... He did not want the Sutane ménage to become disorganised by the tremendous emotional and physical upheaval of a murder enquiry... Because of Linda" (1937b: 88). His shame over his infatuation with Sutane's wife Linda activates his gentlemanly code of ethics, leading him to literally flee the investigation. Because of his abandonment of the case and his refusal to further engage with it, more innocent victims – some not even connected with the central characters – are killed. It is explicitly Campion's choice to indulge in denial that leads to the deaths of innocents, and that is what haunts him and forces him to return to the job. When the police nearly beg him for information, offering him the psychological clues that could lead him – and should lead us –

directly to Mercer, Campion wallows in his own self-imposed ignorance, going beyond a mere desire for the truth to remain obscured; he begins actively trying *not to know*: “Mr. Campion found he was doing his best not to think at all” (1937b: 191).

Allingham wrote a detective series – an escapist genre – in which the desire not to know, the impulse to escape from escapism, is not only acknowledged but present within the character of the detective. Even when Campion discovers his own failure to properly detect, it is presented to us in undeniably triumphant language: “Relief burst over Campion, engulfing him, soothing him, comforting him with the old magic cry of his childhood – ‘It isn’t true! It isn’t true!’ He was free. The load was lifted. Sutane was not the man... He had been gloriously wrong. It was not true!” (1937b: 260). His impulse not to know is sympathetic and his failure triumphant because being human and engaging emotionally with the world in a flawed, human way is Campion’s triumph: not being an isolated, pure, superior genius-aristocrat, but seeing and exploring the moral entanglements of his age.

Proved wrong, crossed in love, and reminded of his own happy inadequacies, the Campion of *Dancers in Mourning* emerges a raw and unfinished character, a gentleman unmoored from his sense of moral identity and capable of anything – just in time for his ultimate transformation into a modern man, just two books later in *Traitor’s Purse*. Allingham retraces her steps in every one of her books, reminding us both of whom Campion is and is not, making and remaking her gentleman detective and keeping him fresh and modern, even when that modernity looks like failure: through him, she admits the limits of knowledge.

Conclusion: The eternally unknown

Here, having travelled from the 1920s to the 1980s and back, following the tracks of these two aristocratic sleuths, I find it useful to return now to Lee Horsley's fundamental questions about the function of the detective in a text:

What is it that we find compelling about the detective himself? What is it in modern experience that he represents and appeals to? What are the hidden elements in his own character? What is the nature of his relationship to his society? What anxieties are embodied in the crimes he investigates and the criminals he pursues? What aspects of his society are brought to the fore in his narrative? (Horsley 2005: 27)

In both the case of Marsh and Allingham, all these questions' answers can be tied to their innovative experimentation with the figure of the gentleman detective. Alleyn and Campion's status as liminal authority figures, their constant renegotiation of their place as aristocrats in a modern world, influences their every action as mystery-solvers. Through this inescapable theme, these authors developed and transformed the archetype of the gentleman detective, making him a character capable of sustaining readerly interest over decades by leaning into and investigating the conflicts inherent to that type.

Both authors redefined the gentleman detective for his existence in the modern, self-aware twentieth century: where Marsh created a world of reflexive theatricality in which Alleyn's job becomes the appraisal of social performance, Allingham experimented with parodies of modernism, even postmodern elements, leading Campion on a hunt for his own evasive identity. Marsh's consciously artificial world keeps the genre's theatricality in the reader's eye at all times, both in her structuring, with metatextual *dramatis personae* and theatrical, stagey murders, and in her theming, where Alleyn's work is to assess the performances of the suspects he interviews. Allingham, meanwhile, continually updated her series, making both modernity and anachronistic nostalgia central features of her novels and turning the unstable identity of Campion into an asset in his fragmenting world. Her transformation of Campion into a more "realistic", centered character takes place through a curiously postmodern search for his own non-existent identity. Both Marsh and Allingham, by emphasizing the unresolvability of identity as a crucial element of their detective novels, actually pre-empted the kind of self-aware fictionality of the postmodern metaphysical detective, so frequently considered a more "literary" reaction against the apparently stifling conservatism of the genre's earlier forms.

Even as these authors generated a new version of the gentleman detective, one whose work necessitated a reconsideration of the kind of world that could even *accommodate* such a

detective, they also undercut the very concept of his existence. By repeatedly acknowledging that the social duties of the gentleman are often in direct conflict with the public duties of the professional detective, Marsh suggests that a self-conscious man like Alleyn, deeply aware of the ambivalence of his responsibilities, cannot easily or definitively separate his two halves. His contradiction is a part of his nature, as it is of all characters who fall into the archetype of the gentleman detective, whether or not their authors choose to deeply investigate that conflict. By allowing Alleyn to display emotional affect in the face of death, by writing him as consumed by a fear that his gentlemanly core of identity is being corrupted by the “dirty work” of a job he paradoxically deeply identifies with, Marsh makes the conflict of the gentleman detective’s identity inescapable in her texts. Similarly, Allingham’s choice to make Campion a detective with an emphasis on moral rather than intellectual puzzles highlights his status as a gentleman-as-detective rather than a detective who merely *happens* to be a gentleman: it is his complex moral attitude that enables him to solve the mysteries he does, and is what makes his stories resemble a less violent hard-boiled fiction more than a typical whodunit. She contrasts him with false gentlemen, demonstrating the importance above all of Campion’s moral self-control, which defines the true gentleman. Both authors illustrate the burden of the intellect: how detection’s intrusion into the life of the gentleman is not easily assimilated, but becomes a conflict that remains a constant element of his character and the text of the novel. In both authors’ series the gentleman detective is an inherently conflicted character type, and in neither series are those tensions ever wholly resolved: their in-between existence, neither insider nor outsider, is what makes them so capable.

Finally, and certainly going the farthest towards a disintegration of the concept of the great detective as it had existed until that point, both Marsh and Allingham showed their protagonists to be fallible. Perhaps Campion is the more obviously fallible of the two, but both characters were permitted to fail at the task of detection, whether that looks like Campion being the very last person to realize the killer’s identity, or Alleyn losing control of the assignment of guilt. Both authors redefined the *purpose* of the detective: not merely to know, to find out, to restore the equilibrium of justice and return the community to Auden’s Edenic “Great Good Place”, but to take on the burden of knowledge and shield both community and reader from death, and to admit – and permit – the impulse to hide one’s eyes, respectively. Alleyn’s failure to keep his personal and professional lives separate and the reminders that he is not the only person capable of detection are fully overshadowed by his *success* in defending the rest of his community from direct experience with the spectacle of abject death. When Campion is “gloriously wrong” it is clear that detection, whether intellectual or moral, is not the only purpose a detective can have, even in the golden age: his deeply human desire to flee

from painful truths – even when they are not truths – grounds the character as a part of his world, not a uniquely exceptional, inherently superior gentleman detective.

In this way, looking at these two authors and their similar achievements, it is evident that they are worth considering together but are hardly dismissible as “the other two”. Marsh and Allingham interrogated and experimented with the genre in which they wrote, and – as was their first priority – they developed and polished the characters they each spent over half their lifetimes with. In my introduction I suggested that some of the dismissal that has characterized much criticism of these two authors is due in part to the complexity of their work, a complexity that has made it difficult to cleanly categorize once investigated. Having now attempted to do some of that investigation myself, I can only confirm that the largely unacknowledged breadth and depth of Marsh and Allingham’s writing demands scholarly attention; any one of these six sections could easily have been developed into its own multi-thousand word chapter, had I had the space and time. My decision to focus the entirety of this dissertation on the concept of the gentleman detective came relatively late in the structuring process – were I to start again from this position of reflection (or to begin a wholly new project), I might ground my discussion through more definitively historicizing methods: the autobiographical writing of both authors is still relatively untapped for their views on class and aristocracy. Besides their evident interest in *using* the gentleman detective to comment on the moral responsibility of knowledge and authority, what was it that made them choose to create these aristocratic characters? Was it simply the “done” thing in 1929 and 1934, were they looking to Sayers’s example, or were these deliberate choices made for other reasons? Their treatment of the escapist fantasy of the gentleman detective is a deep well, and this analysis is only the first bucket I have drawn.

Both Marsh and Allingham acknowledged that their chosen genre was one of escapism; Allingham in particular, according to her diaries as cited by Julia Jones, seemed to look on what she did as a kind of public service, distracting a war-wearied public with her tales of adventure. I contend, though, that theirs was not the escapism described by Marjorie Hope Nicolson (1946: 118), who saw in the golden age detective story “the one form of novel to-day which does not insist that we must lose ourselves to find ourselves”, a fiction in which the detective’s – and by extension, the reader’s – cool intellectual powers towered above tawdry sensationalism. Rather, perhaps unsurprisingly, I would argue that the escapism of Marsh and Allingham is of an intensely self-conscious kind that is inextricable from the passions and insecurities fueling both the heroes and the villains of their novels; a form of escapism that reminds the reader of their own impulse to look away from the horrors of the unsolvable mysteries confronting us in our everyday lives, and yet into a story of a knowable universe in

which the protagonists are those who hunt for the truth at any cost. The comfort of their detective fiction is not the relief of placing our trust in the socially and intellectually superior gentleman detective: what truly makes (or does not make) each author's work "escapist" fiction requires further investigation.

According to Jones (2012: 200) – and there is no evidence to contradict her – Margery Allingham and Ngaio Marsh never met. Certainly they were aware of each other's work, as they were aware of Agatha Christie's and Dorothy L. Sayers's, but there is no more to obviously connect the two authors beyond their status as the "other two Queens of crime", and it genuinely appears that of those four, they are the only two that never came into direct contact. And yet they have been linked by critics, consistently, for nearly a century. Laurie Langbauer (1999), in her analysis of interwar women's series fiction, observes that this kind of dismissal, this attitude that suggests that if authors *can* be categorized, they *shall* be categorized, makes "visible the politics guiding the construction of the canon" (1999: 44), and it is with that in mind that I have hesitated to draw so many connections between these two writers who have been so compulsively linked. I do place them side by side with conviction, however, not because they are the "other two", but because they achieved something strikingly similar, and similarly remarkable.

Karin Molander Danielsson's (2002) incisive analysis of seriality in contemporary detective fiction argues eloquently for the importance of the detective's character – even above the puzzle interest – in maintaining the momentum of a series, in which the addition of "memory and its consequences" creates in such fiction a sense of being "pull[ed] in two directions, toward unity and stability as well as toward disunity and change" (2002: 150). My only contention is with Danielsson's suggestion that this is a contemporary innovation, that reading the "early detective novels in succession as a series does not involve any significant cumulative effect of the kind that the contemporary series displays" (2002: 149). Just like the authors themselves, both Marsh and Allingham's series and their characters might look near-identical on paper: but they took those aristocratic, ironical, gentlemanly detectives and gave them dimension and life. They developed them, and – like any good series author – revelled in the eternally unfinished, unknown, and unstable. What could be more modern than that?

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