

THE UNIVERSITY OF HULL

**VICTIMS AND VULNERABILITIES:
ROMANCE, FINANCE AND FRAUD
FROM WILKIE COLLINS TO AGATHA CHRISTIE**

Being a Thesis submitted for the Degree of PhD in the University
of Hull

by

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November 2023

Acknowledgements

I would like to thank my supervisor, Catherine Wynne. Thank you for your endless support, patience, and advice throughout this whole process. I would not have been able to do this without you. You have not only been my supervisor but also a friend and I cannot thank you enough.

I also wish to express my sincerest gratitude to my parents. Your unwavering support, love and encouragement has made me the person I am today. I cannot thank you enough for teaching me to reach for the stars and chase my dreams. I am eternally grateful, and this thesis is dedicated to you.

Additionally, I would like to thank the team at Club Doncaster Sports College who have been a great source of support throughout the writing of this thesis.

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Introduction

I

Fraud is a term that we hear every day. It is a crime we see committed frequently and punished within the British legal system. However, it has not always been like this as the eminent legal historian, Fitzjames Stephens, observes in volume two of *A History of Criminal Law in England* (1883):

There has always been a great reluctance amongst lawyers to attempt to define fraud, and this is not unnatural when we consider the number of different kinds of conduct to which the word is applied in connection with different branches of law ... I shall not attempt to construct a definition which will meet every case which might be suggested, but there is little danger in saying that whenever the words "fraud" or "intent to defraud" or "fraudulently" occur in title definition of a crime two elements at least are essential to the commission of the crime: namely, first, deceit or an intention to deceive or in some cases mere secrecy; and, secondly, either actual injury or possible injury or an intent to expose some person either to actual injury or to a risk. (Stephens, 2014: 121)

The crime of fraud is defined as one in which trust is violated and individuals perpetrating fraud falsely represent who they are, their intentions, their person, or their engagements. While crimes of fraud have become more known in the twenty-first century, with advancing technologies, the capability to perpetrate fraud seems easier. The Office for National Statistics notes: "Fraud offences increased by 25% (to 4.5 million offences) compared with

the year ending March 2020, driven by large increases in "advance fee fraud" and "consumer and retail fraud" and "cyber-related [fraud] increased to 61% from 53% in the year ending March 2020" (Office for National Statistics, 2022). Action Fraud, the UK's centre for reporting fraud, notes that the cost of fraud to the UK is between £130bn - £190bn a year" and that "the Office for National Statistics (ONS) say that people are more likely to fall victim to fraud or cyber offences above any other crime" (Action Fraud 2019). A recent article in the *Journal of Economic Criminality* questions: "Can the contemporary fraud epidemic be ignored as just another cyclical change in crime that will eventually decline or is it a permanent feature of 21st century British society?" before concluding that it cannot be ignored as a "blip" (Button, Hock, Shepherd & Gilmour, 2023: 1).

Victims and Vulnerabilities: Romance, Finance and Fraud from Wilkie Collins to Agatha Christie is inspired by the contemporary rise in and focus on fraud. An interdisciplinary study, this thesis examines, however, how crimes of fraud perpetrated against individuals, such as 'romance fraud' or 'finance fraud', are not new, even though some of the terminology, such as 'romance fraud' was coined in the twenty-first century. It further examines bigamy as a form of fraud, investigating both actual, historical bigamy and fictional representations. Crimes of bigamy (this thesis examines) are often perpetrated alongside other crimes, or other crimes are perpetrated to mask the crime of bigamy, both in real-life cases and in fictions. Research shows that the "most prevalent type of fraudster is the individual, the ordinary citizen who is motivated by need, greed or lure to exploit everyday opportunities" (Button, Hock, Shepherd & Gilmour, 2023: 3). This thesis equally examines crimes against individuals and specific fraudsters who commit crimes against other individuals.

For example, the criminologist Elizabeth Carter defines 'romance fraud' as "typically a long-term scheme, reliant ... on the trust borne from the development of a relationship through which to exploit their target" which involves "distorting the victim's reality" (Carter, 2021). While Carter's work examines contemporary forms of fraud, including the language of fraud against individuals, this thesis uses the work of Carter and others to argue that this form of fraud, and non-romantic financial fraud against individuals, predates contemporary culture and, though undefined, can be identified in the nineteenth century. The law, as this thesis explores, is supposed to protect the victims but often creates victims, exposing its own vulnerabilities which are liable to abuse. The thesis demonstrates the significance of nineteenth and twentieth-century fictions to contemporary debates on fraud.

As such, this study represents a new area of research and a novel intervention in the interdisciplinary field of law and literature. In an examination of the rise of the interdisciplinary study of law and literature, James Seaton argues: "Literature has the potential to broaden and deepen the individual's understanding of ethics, politics, and human relations in general" (1999: 479). He continues: "Literature, however, does far more than merely report on the way things are in diverse locations, eras, and milieus, though it surely does that. Literature, more than any other art, is a vehicle for moral reflection and discrimination" (506) and urges "a turn to poems, novels, and plays for insight about the law as an aspect of the human condition" (507). The thesis deploys the recent work of Carter and Cassandra Cross on romance fraud and the methodological approach is to draw on these criminological theories underpinned by feminist approaches to literature to work at the intersection of law and literature. Carter's work looks at romance fraud from the perspective of a criminologist. I am using her findings as a springboard to go further and

explore the poorly progressing legal system and how this, alongside Carter's 'romance fraud,' is used decades before in literature and in real-life cases. This thesis unveils the significance of earlier literature, both fictional writings and historical cases, to rethinking our understanding of contemporary crimes.

The law on fraudulent crimes has developed and changed throughout the years. However, unlike many criminal offences it has been attended to less than other criminal transgressions. Compared to other crimes the progress of the law on fraud could be seen as almost neglected in comparison to other crimes. Between 1827 and 2006 the acts have changed ten times. However, this is negatively compared to statutes and acts on the crime of murder which has changed a great deal more.

The crime of fraud was not commonly known as its name but was described in British law as 'Larceny' until around 1968. This was not defined by the legal system until 1916. It was then outlined as "The wrongful or fraudulent taking and carrying away by any person of the mere personal goods of another, from any place with a felonious intent to convert them to his own use and make then his property, without the consent of the owner" (Larceny. The Police Journal, 1957: 30(4): 69-274)

The crime of fraud did not get defined until The Fraud Act 2006 was put into practice. This was the first law put in by the British government that recognised fraud as a serious crime and that it was a web of many yet distinct crimes. When fraud was finally defined in the Fraud Act 2006 it was thus described:

A person is guilty of fraud if he is in breach of any of the sections listed in subsection (2) (which provide for different ways of committing the offence). (2) The sections are—(a)section 2 (fraud by false representation), (b)section 3 (fraud by failing to disclose information), and (c) section 4 (fraud by abuse of position). (3)A person who is guilty of fraud is liable— (a) on summary conviction, to imprisonment for a term not exceeding 12 months or to a fine not exceeding the statutory maximum (or to both); (b)on conviction on indictment, to imprisonment for a term not exceeding 10 years or to a fine (or to both). (Fraud Act 2006)

The history behind the criminal offence of fraud is quite unusual. While researching this crime, it has been abundantly clear that the law has neglected this crime, not only by not making it an 'official' crime until 2006 but also by the failure to define it. This thesis explores fraud in fiction from Willkie Collins to Agatha Christie and real-life bigamy cases in the city of Hull, a port town in which the thesis discovers perpetrators of bigamy had means of escape, as well as true crime cases investigated by Arthur Conan Doyle. It separates fraud into two categories: romance fraud and non-romantic fraud. It further examines how both forms of fraud interlink in fiction, real-life historical cases and with each other. Fraud underpins the 'crimes' uncovered in this thesis from identity to finance. Fraud is made up of a web of distinct crimes which, as this thesis will show, and often generates other crimes in order to shield or hide the original fraud.

This thesis primarily focuses on the crimes of romance fraud and finance fraud and the impact such crimes had. A key finding which is explored throughout this research is that

romance fraud is always connected to finance fraud. The two are intertwined. However, finance fraud can be a stand-alone criminal offence. You can have finance fraud as a crime, and you can have romance fraud as a crime but romance fraud is always interlinked with finance fraud but not vice versa. Bearing this in mind, the thesis also examines the fact that the legal system in the nineteenth century always seemed to be on the 'backfoot' when trying to identify, define and punish such crimes.

Law and literature are often entwined with each other, particularly in the nineteenth-century realist fiction of Dickens and the sensation narratives of Mary Elizabeth Braddon and Wilkie Collins. Doyle's Sherlock Holmes stories involve the law with Holmes acting as an 'unofficial' or private detective, intervening where the police and law fail, while Christie's Poirot is influenced by Holmes, as Christie relates in her autobiography: "I considered detectives. Not like Sherlock Holmes, of course: I must invent one of my own, and he would also have a friend as a kind of butt or stooge" (Christie 261). These fictions reflect societal issues and concerns surrounding identity and the lack of authority around identity theft, manipulation, and stolen identities as well as the development of victim types. As will be seen through this research, vulnerable victims are examined alongside the development of gender roles in the late nineteenth century. In the chronological progression of the texts there is a clear switch in victims, from the classic vulnerable woman to anyone of any gender being in the position of victim. This does not just show the development of women's rights within the law from the end of the nineteenth century but societal change within literature as well.

Certain terminology is used in this thesis which describes aspects of fraud and how it is conducted: 'gaslighting' which is commonly defined as the emotional manipulation of one person by another; the 'ripple effect', a situation which causes other things to happen; and 'societal law', to describe how society views acts which it deems as crimes, even if they are not legally punishable. Gaslighting emerged from a 1938 play by Patrick Hamilton in which a husband attempts to drive his wife mad by manipulating her sense of reality. Appropriately, for this thesis's starting point *Gaslight* is set in the nineteenth century and when gas was widely used in homes for lighting. A retired detective informs the wife that she has married a murderer and a bigamist; she is, in fact, not married at all. Each night her husband leaves her alone and she knows he is merely hiding upstairs, a part of the house barred to her, as the gaslight fades in her sitting room; the gas becomes dimmer because it is being used to light another room. When the gaslight brightens, she knows he is returning. Sherlock Holmes operates a form of 'societal law' punishing crimes which are not easily punishable by the official law. These phrases are used throughout this research and are crucial techniques, consequences and problems that are exposed in the literature and true crimes.

What this research is seeking to achieve is to demonstrate the limitations in the law and the effects of its lack of progression, as highlighted in the texts under discussion here. Research on contemporary fraud highlights how "[r]elative to the agile, innovative capabilities of fraudsters, the evolution of the law is glacially slow. Consequently, new threat forces appear unopposed by the force of existing legal frameworks (Button, Hock, Shepherd & Gilmour, 2023: 5). The tactics used to perpetrate fraud and terminology around fraud that is examined in this research demonstrate that these are not simply twenty-first century issues but were evident from the nineteenth century. The fact that Collins, Dickens, Braddon Doyle

and Christie picked up on such crimes and problems illuminates the impact they had not on just themselves but on society as well. This is, in part, what makes the texts 'classics', their success attributable to their relatability and their exposure of problems people were facing on a day-to-day basis. This thesis focuses on the nineteenth century to the mid-twentieth century and demonstrates how crimes were generated through the manipulation of the gaps within the law.

The texts chosen for this thesis reflect the thesis's key issues and themes and are texts which 'give voice' to the crimes perpetrated against women and the vulnerable, including children and men: Collins's sensation novels launched a new departure in literature which brought together the crimes of real life with the crimes of fiction. A trained barrister, Collins was an able navigator of the legal and social worlds. *The Woman in White* is a case study of the defraudment of women, conducted by conmen. The 'con' is the focus of this interpretation of the novel. Collins's *Woman in White* influenced Dickens's woman in white – Miss Havisham. Miss Havisham, the victim of a jilting by a fiancé who only wants her money, lives in her decaying white wedding dress, reliving forever the moment of her betrayal. Braddon's *Lady Audley*, shows by contrast to Collins and Dickens, how a defrauded woman becomes the fraudster but asks questions about the fairness of a system in which a woman, abandoned by her husband, is punished for crimes that many men get away with. Given the interconnection between sensation fiction and the real-life crimes it drew inspiration from, the thesis explores crimes of bigamy centring on Hull and East Yorkshire, inspired in part by Braddon's connection with the area but also because it is the place of this thesis's genesis. Doyle adapted the sensation novel in the late nineteenth century to focus on the figure of the detective and his navigation of the crimes against the vulnerable. Christie was Doyle's

inheritor, and the thesis focuses on her male detective Poirot who is, like Holmes, a cerebral figure. The thesis brings key male and female writers of this period into dialogue around the issue of romance fraud and importantly in an arena in which the victims are often silenced or remain silent, as Thames Police notes in relation to contemporary romance fraud, recovers the voices of silenced women through the case studies of true crime. “Many people will feel ashamed and blame themselves which will frequently be a barrier to seeking further help and support. It is really important to remember that Romance Fraud is never the fault of the victim” (It wasn’t your fault’, Thames Valley Police).

II

The development of the law on fraud and bigamy

The Larceny Act 1827 was the first act that disclosed fraudulent crimes. It was brought into circulation to simplify and condense the acts that were already in place. However, this act focused more on ‘Larceny’ which was not given a definition until The Larceny Act 1916 which meant that crimes which were frequently perpetrated were not defined in law. In 1957 *The Police Journal* provided a definition of the crime, not legally but for the purposes of the police. It specified that “Larceny, originally from ‘lactrocimium’, was used to signify the violation of the property of another by theft. Prior to 1827, petty larceny was a misdemeanour if the property stolen did not exceed 12d. in value, and for theft of property over that value, grand larceny ... was punishable by death” (*The Police Journal*, 1957: 269). This is not the definition by law of Larceny, but one in which highlights the key elements of the crime. Following the Larceny act 1827 thirty-four years later came the Larceny Act 1861.

This did not particularly change the law but condensed the web of 'Larceny' crimes to streamline the law. By undertaking this it theoretically should have put every Larceny and fraudulent crime under the same act. However, the ambiguity around what these offences were and how they were defined still prevailed.

Following the Larceny Act in 1827 was the Larceny Act in 1870. Similar to its predecessor the Larceny Act 1870 did not change the 'makeup' of the law but just amended the overlooked act that was already in place. The web of crimes that were under this law were still not defined and not properly clarified by the British government. All that was really altered was Section 102. This section was called 'Advertising a reward for the return of stolen property'. This was to prevent the above title proceeding within society.

The next progression was the Larceny Act 1901. This act brought about and implemented fraudulent conversions. This amended sections 75 and 76 of the 1861 act. Fraudulent conversion has been described as "conversion that is committed by the use of fraud, either by obtaining the property, or in withholding it" (*Black's Law Dictionary*, 1989). This was an addition to the web of many yet distinct crimes that lay under this law. It is interesting that the first real amendment to the Larceny Law was an additional fraudulent crime. Succeeding the Larceny Act 1901 came the Larceny Act 1916. This Act was a product of the criminal law revision committee. The crime of theft was not outlined completely in the previous act therefore, this needed to be elucidated. The criminal law revision committee resolved the issue. However, act still remained perplexing. This act nevertheless did define the crime of Larceny:

“A person steals who, without the consent of the owner, fraudulently and without a claim of right made in good faith, takes and carries away anything capable of being stolen with intent, at the time of such taking, permanently to deprive the owner thereof:

Provided that a person may be guilty of stealing any such thing notwithstanding that he has lawful possession thereof, if, being a bailee or part owner thereof, he fraudulently converts the same to his own use or the use of any person other than the owner:

(2)—(i) the expression " takes" includes obtaining the possession—

(a)by any trick;

(b)by intimidation;

(c)under a mistake on the part of the owner with knowledge on the part of the taker that possession has been so obtained;

(d)by finding, where at the time of the finding the finder believes that the owner can be discovered by taking reasonable steps”

(Larceny Act 1916 Section)

Succeeding the Larceny Act 1916 was the newly named Theft Act 1968. All this achieved was the replacement of the previous act and an attempt (unsuccessfully) again to streamline the law. Quite swiftly after this act was put into place, ten years later came an amendment of this act. In 1978 came the Theft Act 1978. This brought in a brand-new section 1 of this act which described and defined what obtaining services by deception was. This was a new

fraudulent crime which was just an addition to the web of other fraudulent crimes. There were other changes in the Theft Act 1978, however these were in relation to debt and debt collecting, which in this research is not pertinent to the discussion.

In 2006 the main and current law on fraud came into force. This act finally defined the crime of fraud to its full extent. This act put a spotlight on fraud and defined it in relation to the current crimes. Unlike all of its predecessor acts, the Fraud Act 2006 examined the crime of fraud on its own, defined what the crime was and put forward what crimes constituted fraud. The Fraud Act 2006 looks at:

Fraud by false representation

Fraud by failing to disclose information

Fraud by abuse of position

“Gain” and “loss”

Possession etc. of articles for use in frauds

Making or supplying articles for use in frauds

Participating in fraudulent business carried on by sole trader etc.”

(Fraud Act 2006)

This was a well-needed addition to the legal system addressing a huge gap within the law when it came to the crime of fraud. It was not actually presented as a crime which branched out into a lot of many yet distinct crimes. The law was previously indifferent to the lengths to which fraud extended and the new act resolved the confusing acts that came before it as

none of these designated a specific place for fraud within the law, which was clear, concise, and compact.

Bigamy, a recognisable societal issue for hundreds of years, can be placed in the category of romance fraud. The Bigamy Act 1603 was the first law that brought into rule the crime of bigamy. This act made the crime of bigamy a capital offence:

... if any persons or persons within his Majesty's Dominions of England and Wales, being married, or which hereafter shall marry, do at any time after the end of the session of this present Parliament, marry any person or persons, the former husband or wife being alive ... then every such offence shall be felony. (Cox, 2012: 1)

The law in 1603 set the law of bigamy very precisely and specifically compared to the developmental history of the law on fraud. This act stayed in place for over two hundred years before it was amended which suggests the strengths of not only the law itself but the punishment as well.

In 1828 came about the Offences against the Persons Act 1828. In this act section 22 replaced the Bigamy Act of 1603. This amendment in the law saw the change of punishment of committing bigamy. This crime, previously punishable by death, changed to either a defendant being transported across the seas for seven years, or, imprisoned for no longer than two years either with or without hard labour. The law specified that one "shall be guilty of Felony, and being convicted thereof, shall be liable to be transported beyond the Seas for the Term of Seven Years, or to be imprisoned, with or without hard Labour, in the

Common Gaol or House of Correction, for any Term not exceeding Two Years” (Offences Against the Person Act 1861). The definition of the crime of bigamy stayed true to the original definition set out in 1603. However, the punishment for the crime was less severe and punitive in the Offences against the Persons Act 1828. Rebecca Probert and Liam D’Arcy Brown note that “Between 1805 and 1853, at least 1749 men and women were convicted of bigamy, of whom at least 254 were sentenced to transportation” (Probert & D’Arcy-Brown, 2019: 12).

In the twenty-first century bigamy is still prevalent in Britain, but not at the level at which it created a moral panic in the 1860s.¹ It can be argued that this is because it links to the crime of fraud. During this period, it was too easy to change identities and change individuals into new people. It was too easy to start a new life and become someone else, to have a new family, or to hide from the previous one. This was because identification of people was not methodical or thorough by the law or government. The law was not prompt enough to make changes where changes needed to be made within the law. Up until 1874 it was “remarkably easy to obtain a death certificate” and until the law was changed in 1874 “no medical certification was required, so the informant’s word was enough for the registrar to issue a death certificate” (National Archives, 2012)

A further change to the law on bigamy came in 1861. This was called the Offences Against the Persons Act 1861. This replaced section 22 of the previous act which formerly replaced

¹ *The Leicester Mercury*, for example, ran an article in June 2022, ‘Police reveal how many cases of bigamy they have investigated in Leicestershire’, observing that the police force “has investigated 12 cases of people marrying more than one spouse” in the previous decade. [Police reveal how many cases of bigamy they have investigated in Leicestershire - Leicestershire Live \(leicestermercury.co.uk\)](https://www.leicestermercury.co.uk/news/leicestershire/news/police-reveal-how-many-cases-of-bigamy-they-have-investigated-in-leicestershire-2022-06-01/)

the Bigamy Act 1603. This new section of the Offences Against the Persons Act 1861 changed the punishment of this crime again. This amendment to the punishment of bigamy in this new act stated that the punishment was either penal servitude for no more than seven years but no shorter than three years, or to be imprisoned for no more than two years, hard labour was at the discretion of the judge. A direct quotation from the act displays the change in the law:

Whosoever, being married, shall marry any other Person during the Life of the former Husband or Wife, whether the Second Marriage shall have taken place in England or Ireland or elsewhere, shall be guilty of Felony, and being convicted thereof shall be liable, at the Discretion of the Court, to be kept in Penal Servitude for any Term not exceeding Seven Years and not less than Three Years,—or to be imprisoned for any Term not exceeding Two Years, with or without Hard Labour; and any such Offence may be dealt with, inquired of, tried, determined, and punished in any County or Place in England or Ireland where the Offender shall be apprehended or be in Custody, in the same Manner in all respects as if the Offence had been actually committed in that County or Place. (The Offence Against the person act 1861 c.100).

The development of fraud and bigamy throughout the years have been very different. Bigamy has appeared to have been defined properly with what acts constitute to be the crime made clear. Some amendments were made on the way but not anything too diverse. However, the law on fraud can be comprehended as complete chaos. The lack of definition of the crime made the law confusing and perplexing. Therefore, modifications were needed

to be made but the correct ones unfortunately were not made until 2006. Consequently, a shocking amount of time passed that left the crime of fraud neglected. It was not, however, neglected by writers.

This thesis examines private acts of fraud against individuals and individuals who perpetrate fraud, whether that fraud is 'romance' fraud, the assuming of false identities or bigamy and how these acts of fraud have consequences for the individual, the family, community and public. Underpinning most crimes of fraud explored in this thesis is money. In Arthur Conan Doyle's 'A Case of Identity', the fraud is perpetrated for financial reasons as a stepfather assumes the false identity of a lover to ensure that his stepdaughter remains in the family home where he can have continued access to her wealth. Sherlock Holmes describes it:

"The man married a woman very much older than himself for her money," said he, "and he enjoyed the use of the money of the daughter as long as she lived with them. It was a considerable sum, for people in their position, and the loss of it would have made a serious difference. It was worth an effort to preserve it. The daughter was of a good, amiable disposition, but affectionate and warm-hearted in her ways, so that it was evident that with her fair personal advantages, and her little income, she would not be allowed to remain single long. Now her marriage would mean, of course, the loss of a hundred a year, so what does her stepfather do to prevent it? He takes the obvious course of keeping her at home and forbidding her to seek the company of people of her own age. But soon he found that that would not answer forever. She became restive, insisted upon her rights, and finally announced her positive intention of going to a certain ball. What does her clever stepfather do

then? He conceives an idea more creditable to his head than to his heart. With the connivance and assistance of his wife he disguised himself, covered those keen eyes with tinted glasses, masked the face with a moustache and a pair of bushy whiskers, sunk that clear voice into an insinuating whisper, and doubly secure on account of the girl's short sight, he appears as Mr. Hosmer Angel, and keeps off other lovers by making love himself." (Doyle, 2002: 87)

Romance is used not to inherit money but to keep money. The stepfather did not want his stepdaughter to marry and take her money with her. Therefore, her money remains at home. This thesis examines the crime of fraud and correlations between the committal of crimes and other factors that might have encouraged the crimes to be committed.

This thesis identifies how a fraud frequently committed from the Victorians onward is now designated 'Romance Fraud'. Romance fraud is defined by Sussex police: "Romance fraud is the engineering of a supposed friendship or relationship for fraudulent, financial gain."

(Sussex Police, 2020). The idea behind romance fraud is for the fraudster to place themselves into someone's life romantically. The purpose is to convince their victims to either give access to their money, funds, or items worth significant value. The notion is to gain their victim's trust by inserting themselves romantically into their lives and then use that trust against them. These type of criminals in this specific crime play the "long game". They do not just initiate a romantic relationship and then steal a little amount of money, they invest their time into their relationship with their victim as the reward is likely to be bigger. "Data implies that a high proportion of victims are lonely, widowed or recently bereaved, have suffered from a recent break up and/or suffering from depression. The

financial losses are high, and victims can often be in denial, making self-reporting low and repeat victimisation likely.” (Surrey Police, 2023)

Romance fraud seems more prevalent in the twenty-first century. It is a crime that is commonly now committed online, with technology being the main way of contact with the victim. Yet we can date it much earlier as the fictions in this thesis uncover. The thesis instances it in Charles Dickens’s *Great Expectations*, arguing that Miss Havisham is a victim of romance fraud. Compeyson, her former fiancé, inserts himself into her life, and works with her step-brother, Arthur, to defraud her of her inherited wealth. The fraud comes to a climax on Miss Havisham’s and Compeyson’s wedding day.

III

Literature Review: Critics on Fraud to Romance Fraud

Much critical interest on fraud has been centred on commerce such as Fain William on bank failures (2012), Taylor on banking fraud (2005), Whitlock on retail fraud (1998), rather than on types of ‘personal’ fraud perpetrated on individuals or on individuals perpetrating personal acts of fraud. Taylor’s *Board Room Scandal: The Criminalization of Company Fraud in Nineteenth-Century Britain* (2013) starts with a Hull story which forms an interesting connection to my Hull-focused work in this thesis. However, Taylor deals with the case of a city butcher who discovers that he has been the victim of fraud by being given counterfeit money and Taylor demonstrates that “company fraud was anything but a peripheral feature

of Victorian life” (2013: 3). George Robb looks at women as victims of white-collar crime from 1850-1930 (2006), examining what he describes as the “corporate victimization of women” (1058). While significant critical attention has been given to the examination of the use of fraud against banks, businesses and commercial fraud, the impact of ‘personal’ fraud against the individual and the family is now gaining significant critical attention.

A recent and important critical text from this perspective is Clayton Carlyle Tarr’s *Personation Plots: Identity Fraud in Victorian Sensation Fiction* (2022) which examines fraud on a more individual level. Tarr claims it as the “first full-length study of identity fraud in” (Tarr, 2022 blurb) literature. Tarr’s work examines how identity fraud has gained significant pace in literature and in true crimes. A specific approach in section one that Tarr takes is examining the use of physical changes in literary characters to get away with criminal offences. Tarr details how these changes are made and how one can change one’s appearance, further exploring how the physical body is one’s identity and the changes of one’s identity can be made cosmetically. This first section of *Personation Plots: Identity Fraud in Victorian Sensation Fiction* examines these physical changes and suggests that physical changes to body, appearance and physique can actually change the personality of that person: “The ubiquity of these plots not only demonstrate how identity fraud “loomed large in Victorian culture ... entering into many facets of daily life,” but also highlights the paradox at the heart of this study: In the Victorian period, the body both formed and frustrated identity” (Tarr, 2022: 2). Tarr argues that disguise, clothes and make-up are used to commit the crime of fraud (impersonation, identity theft and false identity). These are to disguise the criminal and then these superficial changes are removed, and the person and their crimes revealed. The tactics used to commit such crimes as fraud are explored in Tarr’s

research and are invaluable to the development of my own thinking, but Tarr's research does examine in detail how these physical changes were made to the body of the criminal. My thesis investigates the world of romance fraud, finance fraud and bigamy and how these are committed. It also explores how these crimes were executed within the law and why. Tarr examines Elizabeth Braddon's *Lady Audley's Secret* in section two, a novel which is explored in this thesis. Tarr examines this novel from a 'mental health' approach and suggests that it is Lady Audley's mental health that causes her to change identity and commit heinous crimes: "Sensational novelists regularly used madness to illustrate personal identity as an unstable and mutable construct" (Tarr, 2022: 68). Although Tarr's research is a useful model for my own research, this thesis examines *Lady Audley's Secret* in a similar yet different way. My analysis looks at Lady Audley's crimes and fraudulent acts from the perspective of the 'static woman' and the lack of development within the law. While Tarr takes a sympathetic approach to Lady Audley, my analysis explores how and why Lady Audley committed such crimes through exploring the lack of progression in the English law for women and women's inability to move (legally, emotionally and physically). Section three of Tarr's works examines the use of objects to commit fraudulent crimes. This includes items such as wills, photos, handwriting and so-forth. Tarr explores Wilkie Collins *A Woman in White* which is a text also under scrutiny in this research. Although Tarr examines the fraudulent crimes and acts committed by the use of such objects, he looks at this from a condensed perspective through examining the forgery of legal documents and how this was abused for inheriting wealth from family members: "Sensation writers were fascinated by this new world of documentary identities. Sara Malton observes that sensation novels "insist on a connection between corrupt individuals who have refashioned their identities by means of falsified texts" (Tarr, 2022: 119). However, Tarr neglects to explore the gaps within

the law and the causes of why such crimes were being committed. Objects and their roles are explored in this thesis; however, this idea is more explored in the *Great Expectations*' section of this thesis. The use of objects in *Great Expectations* allows us to see the static Miss Havisham and the consequences the crime of romance fraud had on her. This research uses Tarr as a facilitator to further explore the poor progression of the law and the newly defined crime of romance fraud. Tarr's work is a useful model for this research, particularly as Tarr conjoins both 'real-life' cases and fictional texts, a model which I deploy in this thesis. Overall, Tarr examines the Victorian period and literature from the perspective of how fraud and the physical body worked together to be a signifier of identity. My research orients around how the lack of definition within the law caused crimes, and what effects this had on individuals.

Rebecca Stern's *Home Economics: Domestic Fraud in Victorian England* (2005) examines the crime of fraud from the domestic perspective, arguing that the financial sphere of life and the domestic sphere are entangled with each other and that:

Far from being an isolated haven of fiscal safety and ignorance, even the most modest home was a site of purchase, exchange, and employment. Within its walls, men and women hired or worked as servants, contracted marriages, managed children, and obtained furniture, clothing, food, and labor. While popular representations of market fraud reinforced the fact that domestic life was vulnerable to the stings of the marketplace, Victorian culture at large identified the home itself as a place of business. (Stern, 2008: 5)

A key chapter within Stern's work is 'Speculating on Marriage: Fraud, Narrative and the business of Victorian Wedlock'. Similar to my research, Stern explores the Divorce Act (1857) and the 'true-crime' case of Maria Theresa Yelverton. Stern examines the crime of bigamy and the implication it had for Victorian fiction. Stern states: "fraud is a crucial subtext to the increasingly blighted marriage plots that captivated mid-Victorian popular culture, and that to understand those plots without reference to their economic underpinnings is to understand them only partially" (Stern, 2008: 114-115). Stern's work on the Yelverton case is intriguing and significant to this research. However, this research explores the Yelverton case from a different viewpoint, arguing that the Yelverton case is an example of how the legal system was unjust and signifying how movement helped people to escape their crimes. Maria Theresa Yelverton demonstrates a woman attempting vindication and playing out their case in public.

In a review of Stern's work, Susan Bernardo observes: "This compelling book describes a culture of fraud that threatened to nullify class boundaries (thieving and fraudulent servants), posed a danger to citizens' health (ingesting adulterated food), and took aim at one of the most fundamental financial and personal institutions of society- marriage" (Bernardo, 2008: 514). Stern's findings, although different from mine, are useful in understanding the Victorian era and its perception on the crime of fraud. While Stern primarily focuses on food, poems and art, it is crucial in that it is one of the first works to examine the impact of fraud on the individual through its focus on the domestic space. This thesis also examines fraud within a homebased setting. Stern gives us insight into the world of fraud from the perspective of the individual in the Victorian period. This thesis examines

the effects romance fraud and finance fraud has on individuals and the ability to manipulate the law to commit such offences.

This thesis marks a new departure in deploying criminological research on romance fraud by Carter and Cassandra Cross to inform analysis of fictional and real-life crimes. Carter is one of the first criminologists to define and examine the crime of romance fraud: “Romance fraud is a crime where the fraudster must strike a balance between the romantic and financial aspects of the communication for their criminal intent to remain hidden” (Carter, 2020: 283). Carter explores this newly defined crime from contemporary perspectives and contemporary cases. Carter’s main findings are the use of ‘visceral language’ and techniques to isolate and sequester a victim from their lives, loved ones and happiness. Carter also explores the power that is gained by the criminal and removed from the victim. She has worked on romance fraud, not only defining the crime but examining the techniques used to commit the crime and the consequences of the criminal act looking at “strategies akin to coercive control and domestic violence and abuse and expos[ing] the inaccuracies of popular narratives surrounding victims and in awareness-raising and crime prevention strategies” (Carter, 2020: 283). Alongside her published critical work, Carter has also worked with the Thames Valley Police to create *A guide to spotting romance fraudsters* using her research for real-world application, while also underlining how the crime of romance fraud has gained more attention and that the crime itself in the twenty-first century is becoming more prevalent.

Carter’s work on the techniques used are key to this research. She examines the financial aspect of romance fraud and how the culprits use such techniques to commit the crime:

“Fraudsters work hard to make sure that when they ask for money, and require urgency or secrecy from the victim, it doesn’t set off alarm bells” (Wynn, D. & Carter, E 2023: 3). When examining the texts by Collins, Dickens, Braddon, Doyle and Christie, this thesis identifies how these techniques can be dated to Collins. Although we see romance fraud as a twenty-first century crime, these texts alongside the true-crime cases suggest otherwise. While romance fraud is more prevalent because of the use of the internet and social media, this does not mean that it was not committed before this. This research fuses the lack in the law with the manipulation of individuals. Terms that we are identifying today as ‘gaslighting’ and ‘coercive control’ can be located in fictions as far back as Collins. ‘Coercive control’ is newly defined in law and is associated with romance fraud:

Coercive control is often associated with domestic abuse, but it also has a clear link to romance fraud. This is evident through the similarity in the behaviour and tactics used by both domestic abusers and romance fraudsters. This means that the experience of coercive control within a romance fraud is often similar to the coercive control found within in domestic abuse. It is often hard for a victim of a romance fraud to associate any form of abuse with what they perceive to be a perfect relationship. The reality is that the victim has been manipulated into being unable to see beyond the false reality that the romance fraudster has created. Psychological grooming is used by romance fraudster to trap victims in a situation that is difficult for them to recognise as abusive, and is difficult to seek help or escape. This is the same type of grooming that is used in domestic violence and coercive control. The imbalance of power that is created without the victim’s realisation creates a situation in which the fraudster gains the means to exploit the victim. This in turn

unknowingly relinquishes any control the victim may have had over their own emotional wealth prior to becoming involved with the victim. (Wynn, D. & Carter, E - Thames Valley Police)

Carter explores romance fraud from a criminological perspective. However, I use her findings and apply it to the crimes committed in literature and true-crime cases in the Victorian period and beyond. By applying her definitions and findings of romance fraud the thesis asks what we can learn from the literature produced in the time period examined in this research. This research looks at enabling new ways of interpreting classic literature from an interdisciplinary perspective. Cassandra Cross also makes a vital contribution to the field of romance fraud by looking at domestic violence, psychological abuse and non-violent tactics. Cross acknowledges that in fact romance fraud is an undeveloped topic: "Romance fraud affects thousands of victims globally, yet few scholars have studied it. The dynamics of relationships between victims and offenders are not well understood, and the effects are rarely discussed" (Cross, 2018: 1303). Cross explores the world of romance fraud from a twenty-first century perspective, examining how the crime is committed using online means and on different platforms. She describes the 'foot-in-the-door' technique, in which the perpetrator initially asks for a small sum and, then having gained this small sum from the victim, manufactures new or escalating crises requiring larger and larger sums of money. The other is the 'face-in-the-door' technique, in which the perpetrator initially asks for a sum of money so extreme that most would refuse, followed by a request for a far more modest sum(s) to persuade the victim to part with their money. A third technique used by perpetrators is to obtain sexually explicit webcam footage of the victim under the ruse of the relationship and then use this to blackmail the victim (Whitty 2013). (Cross, 2018: 1306).

Many of these (non-technological) techniques which Cross identifies are what we see in the literary works examined in this research. Although Cross explores these techniques, she like Carter, only examines them from a criminologist's perspective.

Cross's research into "psychological maltreatment" (Cross, 2018: 1318) is useful. If we look at her idea of 'psychological maltreatment' and apply it to the novels explored in this thesis, then it gives a new sense of the damage romance fraud can do to an individual. In *Great Expectations*, Miss Havisham's mental health is explored alongside her immobility and self-imprisonment in Satis House. Cross's exploration of mental abuse is valid to an understanding of Miss Havisham who is a prime example of Cross's "psychological maltreatment" and the consequences of such actions.

This thesis applies this criminological research to a different time period: Collins to Christie. I explore how these techniques were used before and how the crime of romance fraud developed and gained momentum in the twenty-first century. It is not a new crime. The applicability of this work is wide, as it can help the development of our understanding of the crime of romance fraud, explore older techniques not used in the twenty-first century to commit such crimes and also investigate the problems faced by the law in attempting to keep abreast of such crimes.

IV

The thesis commences with *A Woman in White*, a foundational text which defined the development of the genre of fiction which we now describe as sensation. First published in serial form in Dickens's *All the Year Round*, a point which cements the connection between the two writers, it will be examined both in its own right and as the foundational text which influenced the development of *Great Expectations* and *Lady Audley's Secret*, the subjects of chapter two. Chapter one will examine both the novel and Collins's stage adaptation *A Woman in White*. It argues that the focus of Collins's novel on the defraudment of Laura is underscored by Collins's play. This chapter explores how important the techniques used to defraud Laura are not only central to the plot but to society and the legal system at this time. The chapter will 'spotlight' the Laura, Fosco, Glyde dynamic on page and stage to identify and examine what I term the operation of 'third party' romance fraud, the dynamic between the three parties within the fraud and the magnitudes of the crime. Carter's work is prevalent in this chapter when defining the crime romance fraud. I use her definition and explore the Laura, Fosco Glyde triangle, exploring how Fosco and Percival take different roles and use different techniques to defraud Laura. These techniques include gaslighting, coercive control and manipulative language. The lack of identification is also very important in this chapter, and I will highlight the issues around identity. This section will examine how people are interchangeable. Laura and Anne are removed from their lives as one is replaced by the other. The consequences of this will be acknowledged alongside the legal reasons why interchangeability was possible within society and the law.

Great Expectations follows *The Woman in White* in this thesis. Defined as literary fiction, the text absorbs aspects of the earlier Gothic tradition and coincides with the development of sensation fiction in the 1860s. As such chapter one of this thesis reads *Great Expectations* alongside *Lady Audley's Secret*, which is designated as sensation fiction. "Literary scholars agree generally that, in or about November 1859, Victorian literature changed, and that the definitive moment came" (Braddon, 1998) as sensation literature emerged. Popular in the 1860s and 1870s, sensation fiction is a combination of the gothic, crime fiction and romance genres. Sensation fictions were focused on societal anxieties, exploring themes which would distress, shock and alarm readers such as bigamy, murder, theft of possessions and identity, fraud and crime. Both Braddon and Collins are classified as sensation fiction writers and they produce novels with "sometimes several secrets, in which new narrative strategies were developed to tantalize the reader by withholding information rather than divulging it" (Brantlinger, 1982: 1-2). Not well received by 'highbrow' critics such as Henry Mansel and Margaret Oliphant, sensation fiction was seen as a "vulgar literature" which was "creeping upwards from the gutter into the drawing room" (Maunder, 2004). Sensation novels were often deemed unsuitable and yet these novels pointed out issues within society, illuminating their readers to the crimes, acts and omissions (legal or otherwise) that were going on around them. Andrew Mangham notes, "That bitter term of reproach, 'sensation', had not been invented for the terror of romancers in the fifty-second year of this present century; but the thing existed nevertheless in divers forms, and people wrote sensation novels" (Mangham, 2013: 1). Enjoyed by the readers, the more critical disdain they received, the more popular they became. Margaret Oliphant notes that sensation fiction changed "all the grand laws of existence" (Maunder, 1864: 210).

Sensation writers were not just providing popular texts and novels but were exposing the law and the issues around it. Take *Lady Audley's Secret*, for example. This novel highlights the abandonment of Lucy Graham by her husband. He leaves her and their child. However, because they are married and there was no divorce available to her, she legally cannot move on with her life. She cannot legally remarry and having relations outside of marriage would lead to a charge of adultery and fallenness. Her only option is to change her identity. To become someone new and leave her past and child behind her. Braddon is revealing the issues around the law: that if a woman is left by her husband she is trapped within the law.

Chapter two's examination of *Great Expectations* and *Lady Audley's Secret* reveals the interconnection between the crime of fraud and romance fraud and how one is normally linked to the other. A key finding will be the use of objects within the two novels and how these objects become evidence or amplify the crimes of fraud. This chapter explores how both these different authors take different approaches to the fraudulent crimes committed. Dickens allows Miss Havisham to be totally consumed by the romance fraud committed against her. Miss Havisham imprisons herself in her home and has her wedding decaying around her, from the dress to the cake. This is an example of Cross's work on "psychological maltreatment" and how Miss Havisham crumbles as a person because of the crimes of romance and finance fraud committed against her. However, Braddon lets her female protagonist use different frauds to move out of the situation she was left in by her husband. The objects used in Braddon's work do not show Lady Audley's entrapment but rather her story and actions she used to become entrapped from the situation she was left in.

The most important finding of this chapter is the reactions of the female protagonists in both novels to the fraudulent crimes. Miss Havisham removes herself from the world, whereas Lady Audley puts herself back in the world with a new identity. Although Miss Havisham is the key area of focus in *Great Expectations*, the chapter will also examine how the crimes of Compeyson have a 'ripple effect', incorporating Magwitch, Pip and Estella. Compeyson is the shadowy figure who wreaks devastation in lives and the crimes of fraud conducted on 'parental figures' reverberates in the succeeding generation. This chapter also explores how Lady Audley uses the apertures within the law to create a new life for herself. This section will illuminate how both these authors take different approaches to romance and finance fraud and how the legal system is so far behind of the crimes of fraud that novelists used their works to express the backwardness of the law.

The sensation genre was tied to the crimes of real life and chapter three of this thesis explores the crimes of real life focusing on real-life bigamy narratives centred in Kingston upon Hull and the East Riding of Yorkshire. The third chapter of this thesis focuses on 'true crime' cases. This section will validate the findings of the literary texts when exploring different crimes of fraud through an exploration of the Yelverton case, the Toddington Landlady, the cases of Agnes Sharp and John William McCartney and others. These key cases will demonstrate the major gaps within the law, how criminal acts such as fraud were being committed and how authors were using these crimes to express the problems society and the law faced in their fictions. It also gives voice to the voiceless and lost victims of these crimes.

The thesis explores how the ability to travel was essential to committing the crime of bigamy and other fraudulent offences, how perpetrators of fraud abandoned their old lives

to start new ones and how proper identification of individuals was lacking. Bigamy is revealed as one of a series of crimes often committed but bigamy often created a ripple effect as other crimes were perpetrated to hide the initial bigamy.

While the fictions of Collins and Braddon have elements of detection, late century saw the emergence of crime fiction with the arrival of Holmes whose cases incorporate varieties, as we will see, of fraud. The genre has “stimulated growing academic attention, especially since then 1970’s with the rise of scholarly interest in popular culture” with much focus “on a handful of canonical narratives, above all by Charles Dickens, Wilkie Collins and Arthur Conan Doyle” (Shpayer-Makov, 2016: 730). Chapter four examines several of Sherlock Holmes’s cases which engage with fraud.

This chapter will illuminate the layers upon layers of fraud Doyle has in his Sherlock Holmes stories. This section will split off Doyle’s works into two sections: private fraud and public fraud. I will look how Doyle uses his work to show how the crime of fraud was not only committed in the corporate world but also on the everyday individual. I determine how Doyle exposes the irregularities and apertures within the law and how he allows Sherlock Holmes to provide justice either legally prescribed justice or Holmes’s own sense of justice. Vulnerability is at the core of this work. Doyle exposes how both genders can be victims and become vulnerable. This chapter will commence with Doyle’s earlier works focusing on female victims before proceeding to examine male victims, showcasing how Doyle changes the gender of his victims as his work progresses and how he takes a modern view on male vulnerability.

Doyle investigated true crimes and this chapter further explores Doyle's real-life crime investigations centred on fraud. The cases he explored were focused on identity which is something investigated throughout all the chapters in this thesis. However, this chapter will look at Doyle's investigation of the 'real life' cases of Adolf Beck and Oscar Slater, and an historical case which he examined in the *Strand Magazine*. Alongside his own detective work, Doyle, as well as Sherlock Holmes, became beacons of light to society and both Doyle and Holmes became figure heads for moral justice. I will explore how Arthur Conan Doyle and his Sherlock Holmes both sought 'legal' justice for the vulnerable, the forgotten and the defenceless, and how if this did not work, they would seek their own form of 'moral' justice.

Finally, chapter five explores Agatha Christie's Poirot fictions. This chapter contextualises her fictions within her real-life disappearance in 1926. Christie was a victim of a love triangle, caught up in the betrayal of her husband. Christie used her own experiences, beliefs and ideologies to inform her fictions. *Unfinished Portrait*, the novel she wrote under the name of Mary Westmacott, functions as auto-biography of her personal issues with her husband. This chapter will introduce the term 'the triangle of fraud' to explore how three people are often involved in romance fraud: There is the victim, the culprit and the accomplice. This research will examine the roles of these willing and unwilling participants, alongside, the consequence of their actions. These consequences then allow this chapter to proceed onto the examination of the collateral damage within Christie's works. I will look at how the crimes of fraud create innocent, unknowing and unwilling victims that usually play no part in the original fraud. This then moves the chapter onto romance fraud and the fact that romance fraud is always connected to finance fraud. This research will also look at Christie's ability to layer her literary crimes with crime after crime after crime. There is

never just one criminal offence in a Christie novel. There are different levels of crimes, and usually the main crime is murder which is surrounded by smaller yet just as important crimes. This chapter will acknowledge the 'main' crime of murder but will focus primarily on the 'smaller' crimes such as fraud, romance fraud and bigamy. The 'main' crimes of Christie's work benefit from significant critical attention, but these lesser but still as significant crimes are just as important. This chapter will delve into these 'lesser' crimes and show the consequences and magnitudes of these criminal acts.

Similar to Doyle, this chapter will expose how Christie gave a voice to the vulnerable and the forgotten, showcasing the limitations of the law and how she made connections between the crimes and lack of legal recourse. Often seen as a conservative writer, Christie, this thesis shows, was far ahead of her time by exposing the weaknesses of the law and demonstrating in *Death on the Nile* and elsewhere the sophisticated operation of romance fraud.

Chapter One

Finance Fraud in Wilkie Collins's *The Woman in White* and its Stage

Adaptation

The Woman in White was celebrated by an article in the *Guardian* in 2009 on the 150th anniversary of its publication. It underscored its claim to establishing a new genre which mirrored and accentuated the crimes of real life while showcasing the novel's potential as a stage drama.

One hundred and fifty years ago this week, Victorian readers opened Dickens's weekly magazine *All the Year Round* to find the concluding instalment of *A Tale of Two Cities*, and, immediately following it, the opening instalment of a new novel with no author ascribed. They joined a new protagonist, "Walter Hartright, by name," on a night-time walk over Hampstead Heath, winding on moonlit paths until they reached the intersection of the Hampstead, Finchley, West End, and London roads – somewhere in the area of where the Finchley Road tube station now stands. There they were stopped, every drop of blood in their bodies frozen still by "the touch of a hand laid lightly and suddenly" upon Walter's shoulder. And there, for the first time, they met the mysterious Anne Catherick – better known as *The Woman in White*.

Often singled out as the foundation text of "sensation fiction" – a genre distinguished by its electrifying, suspenseful, and sometimes horrific plots, as well as its unsavoury themes of

intrigue, jealousy, murder, adultery, and the like – *The Woman in White* was an immediate sensation in its own right.

The Woman in White explores a range of criminal offences, setting them off to dramatic effect, thus making it easily adaptable by Collins for the stage. Written in serial form, the novel contains numerous cliffhangers to whet the reader's appetite. Collins's "plots often had their origins in historical or contemporaneous legal cases and criminal trials" and the book almost functions as a legal deposition. Collins acknowledged that *The Woman in White* was inspired by his reading of a collection of French trials" and "Collins also drew parallels between literature and legal discourse through his experiments with narrative form" as the "multiple narrators of *The Woman in White* [are] imitative of legal trials and testimony", as William Baker and Richard Nemesvari attest (2023: 262). As they illuminate, Collins, a trained but non-practicing barrister, had a keen understanding of the law in his own time and used his fictions to highlight the law's fallibilities:

The law, then, for Collins, is always a complex and tangled entity, which cannot be separated from individual social and psychological identity. From the outset of *The Woman in White*, Collins makes clear his critical stance in regard to the law, which he implies is not only imperfect, but also potentially corrupt. 'If the machinery of the Law could be depended on', Hartright suggests, "the events which fill these pages might have claimed their share of the public attention in a Court of Justice. But the Law is still, in certain inevitable cases, the pre-engaged servant of the long purse. (Baker & Nemesvari, 2023: 263)

Moreover, while Collins presented himself as a “bachelor clubman” (Lycett, 2), dedicating himself to exposing society’s “double standards and hypocrisy” through the sensation novel (Lycett, 2) he also kept two mistresses in two separate households until the early 1870s. As Andrew Lycett elaborates:

One feature of [his] stories was the gap between appearance and reality – something that Wilkie highlighted in his recurring references to the injustices perpetrated against women as a result of the unthinking hypocrisy of laws and conventions, particularly relating to marriage. The irony was that in 1868 the author was himself living secretly with two women, neither of whom was his wife. His duplicity involved no great crime, but it hinted at a fascinating, willfully muddled story about the interplay between his own complex domestic arrangements, the racy, topical books he wrote, and the cant-ridden world he inhabited. (Lycett, 4)

Following on from Lycett’s idea, Collins uses his own occupation and private life to influence his own works to demonstrate key issues of the time, particularly relating to the situation of women and how women are defrauded through acts of marital deceit. Collins used his legal mind to express the lack in the law, not only demonstrated in *The Woman in White*, but compounded by *No Name* (1862) in which he explores how women are “victims of marriage laws that discriminate against women” (Lycett, 228). Lycett notes that although “Wilkie was only dimly aware of it in 1862 ... *The Woman in White* and *No Name* had ... pioneered a popular literary genre that would endure through the 1860s and come to epitomise a

decade of great social and political change. The genre was dubbed the sensation novel” (Lycett, 232).

While *The Woman in White* is a novel of fraud conducted on several levels the focus of my work in this chapter is on romance fraud. The first section looks at what I term ‘third party’ romance fraud. Third party is usually defined “as a person or group besides the two primarily involved in a situation, especially a dispute.” (*The Oxford Pocket Dictionary of Current English*, 2023). I am adapting the term ‘third party’ in terms of romance fraud to mean a ‘third’ entity, an individual who is not the primary perpetrator of the crime but functions as the mastermind behind it, often operating as an almost anonymous entity, or presenting themselves, at least initially, as a benign figure. The first section of the chapter examines how Count Fosco functions within this role and how Percival is the face of the crime. The second section explores the unravelling and the consequences of the third-party fraud. I also examine the 1871 stage adaptation of the novel by Wilkie Collins. The critical approach in this chapter is informed by Carter’s work on romance fraud. While Carter looks at contemporary romance fraud, I am applying Carter’s thinking to *The Woman in White* and its adaptation, thus offering a new and innovative interpretation of this sensation novel and its stage adaptation. The chapter focuses on the Glyde-Laura-Fosco triangle because it expresses Carter’s findings of romance fraud but showcases how romance fraud, although not named as such, can be located in this mid-nineteenth-century fiction. While Carter’s work focuses on contemporary real-life online cases, this chapter’s focus on the triangle and its consequences, both in the fiction and in the stage adaptation, which I argue accentuates the operation of the fraudulent behaviour, provides a new understanding of Collins’s classic work, as experienced both on page and stage.

‘The Conscience of Fosco’: Third Party Romance Fraud and its consequences

The focal point of this section is the romance fraud committed within the novel. Collins examines not only romance fraud as a criminal offence but also romance fraud by proxy along with the consequences of the crime. Sir Percival Glyde and Count Fosco devise and undertake a calculated and unforeseen plan to romance and steal Laura’s money. However, before this can be examined in more detail romance fraud needs to be defined for the purposes of understanding *The Woman in White* from this perspective. Carter elegantly defines romance fraud, and the chapter considers what it might mean in the context of this novel:

Romance frauds are typically a long-term scheme, reliant as they are on the trust borne from the development of a relationship through which to exploit their target. The unsuspecting participant is also likely to experience a degradation in decision-making capabilities simply due to their extended exposure to it (Baumeister *et al.* 2008). For a successful romance fraud to be complete, the fraudster needs to create the appearance of a romantic prospect with whom a genuine, meaningful relationship is developing and surreptitiously segue into types of talk likely to be at odds with this romantic scenario. Requests for money are the sole, yet hidden, function of an interaction where romance is collectively the façade of, rationale for, and the conduit through which the fraud is performed and need careful management as monetary demands are likely to cause alarm. (Carter, 2021)

Carter explains what it takes to commit the crime of romance fraud from a modern perspective. However, this can be applied to this Victorian novel. This is because even though romance fraud has only been recently theorised and defined in the twenty-first century, it can be traced back to the Victorian period, as noted in the introduction to this thesis. It was easy to commit in a period without internet technologies, modes of identification, without the safeguard of law, and in a period when women's social and legal position in society was fragile. Much sensation fiction of the mid-Victorian period highlights the abuses of law and Collins's novel can be read in terms of romance fraud, as he illuminates the issues that crime raises, the lack of law around the crime and the rippling effects the crime can have not only on the victim but on those around them. Baker and Nemesvari comment: "In Collins's fiction, the law is always inextricably entangled with the moral and the social. There is rarely a sense of 'pure' justice, no legal question untainted by moral implications" (Baker & Nemesvari, 2023: 263).

Sir Percival and Fosco operate as a double act within the novel. Percival is the front man, the individual who is the face of the crime and the one who is physically committing the crimes.

[Laura] was engaged to be married, and her future husband was Sir Percival Glyde. A man of the rank of Baronet, and the owner of property in Hampshire. There were hundreds of baronets in England, and dozens of landowners in Hampshire. Judging by the ordinary rules of evidence, I had not the shadow of a reason, thus far, for connecting Sir Percival Glyde with the suspicious words of inquiry that had been spoken to me by the woman in white. And yet, I did connect him with them. (Collins, 2012: 78)

Fosco is behind the scenes. He is the figure running the operation but not seen yet as a dominant character within the criminal duo. "Count Fosco, though not a rich man, was not a penniless adventurer either. He had a small but sufficient income of his own. He had lived many years in England, and he held an excellent position in society" (Collins, 2012: 160). The plan these two characters concoct has two stages: the first part concerns the groundwork for the crime and the second is the acceleration of the crime.

Percival (on the orders of Fosco) uses typical romance fraud techniques to lure Laura into his web of lies. Percival and Fosco use power, the overpowering and inverting of relationships, to their advantage. They avoid an expression of being in control and avoid causing alarm to Laura. They create situations where Laura feels that the decisions that are being made are her own but, in fact, they are not. It is a part of the romance fraud and the initial games being played by the fraudster. An example of this manipulation is their attempt to steal Laura's money:

"I admit it," resumed the Count. "The law of England says, Yes, but the conscience of Fosco says, No."

He spread out his fat fingers on the bosom of his blouse, and bowed solemnly, as if he wished to introduce his conscience to us all, in the character of an illustrious addition to the society.

"What this document which Lady Glyde is about to sign may be," he continued, "I neither know nor desire to know. I only say this, circumstances may happen in the future which may oblige Percival, or his representatives, to appeal to the two witnesses, in which case it is certainly desirable that those witnesses should represent

two opinions which are perfectly independent the one of the other. This cannot be if my wife signs as well as myself, because we have but one opinion between us, and that opinion is mine. I will not have it cast in my teeth, at some future day, that Madame Fosco acted under my coercion, and was, in plain fact, no witness at all. I speak in Percival's interest, when I propose that my name shall appear (as the nearest friend of the husband), and your name, Miss Halcombe (as the nearest friend of the wife). I am a Jesuit, if you please to think so—a splitter of straws—a man of trifles and crochets and scruples—but you will humour me, I hope, in merciful consideration for my suspicious Italian character, and my uneasy Italian conscience."

He bowed again, stepped back a few paces, and withdrew his conscience from our society as politely as he had introduced it. The Count's scruples might have been honourable and reasonable enough, but there was something in his manner of expressing them which increased my unwillingness to be concerned in the business of the signature. No consideration of less importance than my consideration for Laura would have induced me to consent to be a witness at all. One look, however, at her anxious face decided me to risk anything rather than desert her. (Collins, 2012: 266 - 267)

Fosco's use of language is an excellent example of his mastery of romance fraud. Fosco here seemingly empowers Laura by commenting that he is only there for her and her wellbeing. He demonstrates this with comments such as: "No consideration of less importance than my consideration for Laura" (Collins, 2012: 267). Fosco is assuring Laura that he is the person looking out for her, he is the person she can trust and rely on. It is similar to the classic 'good cop, bad cop' routine. Percival causes a drama and Fosco comes in and becomes the

face of reason and objectivity. Fosco's use of language is manipulative. He constantly compliments Laura, and he continually reminds her of what a good friend he is. He invokes the name of the law, reminding the audience that the law is on the side of Sir Percival but that his own conscience, which he presents as even more moral than the law, will not allow Laura to be deceived in any way. Another ruse is to invoke the Church and the Jesuits, a Roman Catholic religious order noted for their zealotry. Within this one paragraph he comments several times how he is there for Laura and her needs, outmanoeuvring her ally Marian: "One look, however, at her anxious face decided me to risk anything rather than desert her" (Collins, 2012: 267). Again, he is using his language to reassure Laura that he would do anything for her. It is understandable that a figure such as Laura is vulnerable, both in terms of her gender and in terms of the law, after her marriage. Fosco subtly reminds her of this when he describes how he and his wife "have but one opinion between us, and that opinion is mine" (Collin, 2012: 267) and yet seems to simultaneously establish himself on her side. Fosco 'drip feeds' conflicting and confusing information complicated by the 'good cop, bad cop' routine of the criminal duo. In a good cop, bad cop negotiation, two individuals or parties, working as a team, extend a series of rewards and punishments with the goal of gaining an advantage over their counterpart. A well-known interrogation room technique in law enforcement, the good cop, bad cop negotiation strategy in the business world involves one "cop" acting in a "threatening, hostile, and abusive manner," while the other adopts a "non-threatening, friendly and sympathetic manner" (Shonk 2024).

Carter's examination of the subtleties of romance fraud supports this analysis when she comments that the crime of romance fraud involves manipulation through language: "The use of language as a means to manipulate the victim and distort reality is examined within

sections that explore the ‘set-up and drip feed’ of false information, the use of visceral language and attempts to isolate the victim. This approach captures the non-linear and multimodal nature of manipulative techniques” (Carter, 2021).

Carter explores this through a presentation of the language used by one romance fraudster. The fraudster remains anonymous within the radio interview; however, Carter outlines the case. Carter provides an example of a fraudster who pretends to be a boxing promoter. He conveys to his victim that he is a multimillionaire, but he is currently in debt because he has to invest all his money into his next boxing fight. Carter describes this as “Framing it as part of being good at business” (Carter, 2021 Radio). Carter suggests that he cultivates the victims’ emotions to get them invested in the fraudster. The fraudster convinces the victim that investing all his money into the fight is normal in his line of work. Then he bombards her with financial jargon and language to confuse and bewilder her. Carter suggests that this makes the fraudster seem “very technical” and “makes them seem more legitimate” (Carter, 2021 Radio). This then allows the fraudster to explain these terms to the victim making the victim not only feel intimidated by their knowledge, but it also allows the fraudster gain power over the victim. When the fraudster asks the victim for money, they feel they have knowledge on the subject, an invested interest in the business idea and an interest in the fraudster as well. Carter also examines what she describes as “Visceral Responses” in her radio interview: “Visceral Responses are an emotional or physical response (they are pretence) the fraudster pretends they have these responses to some event which is usually money related or interestingly related to a situation that threatens the position of the fraudster. These are specifically designed to get the victim to either do something or to stop doing something” – “Deaden alarm bells” (2021). We can relate this to *The Woman in White*

as Fosco is the mirror image of the fraudster in Carter's example. He uses his language to manipulate Laura and those around her to achieve his own agenda. Alongside this he acts and reacts in certain ways to obscure any notion that he is not a 'good guy'.

Fosco mirrors Carter's definition and examples. He avoids causing alarm by also trying to manipulate Laura's best friend and half-sister, Marian Halcombe. "I speak in Percival's interest, when I propose that my name shall appear (as the nearest friend of the husband), and your name, Miss Halcombe (as the nearest friend of the wife)." (Collins, 2012: 267). He includes her within the deed, and this suggests to Laura that he is not overpowering her and that others have a say too which in reality they do not. He is using his position to lure Laura into his trap and by unwillingly involving those she cares about inculcates the idea that everyone thinks what Fosco spouts as the truth is the correct way to act. Therefore, this urges her to go along with his plan.

Collins's novel demonstrates what I coin 'The Triangle of Deceit'. Three characters have a role within this triangle which is what causes the romance fraud inside the novel. Firstly, there is the victim: Laura. She is the victim of the romance fraud and plays the part of the vulnerable and susceptible woman. The two other characters that make up the rest of this triangle are Percival and Fosco. Percival is the front man. The face of the crime. He is the man who physically commits the crime. Fosco is the brains of the operation. He is the master mind and who is probably the most vicious and vindictive character. This is because like Miss Havisham, he does not do his own dirty work. He gets others like Percival to do his bidding for him and take the blame for the crime. Collins infers and suggests Percival's

fraudulent nature and the partnership he forms with Fosco. Fosco elaborates to Percival on how to conduct fraud at a sophisticated level, a level which Percival is incapable of:

Human ingenuity, my friend, has hitherto only discovered two ways in which a man can manage a woman. One way is to knock her down—a method largely adopted by the brutal lower orders of the people, but utterly abhorrent to the refined and educated classes above them. The other way (much longer, much more difficult, but, in the end, not less certain) is never to accept a provocation at a woman's hands.

(Collins, 2012: 358)

Fosco presents to Percival his views on how to control women. He tells Percival how to dominate and manipulate them. This is a clear example of the 'brains' behind the operation. Fosco is suggesting either physical violence or what seems to be a long "con". "Con" in this context is slang for "confidence game" — an effort to deceive or defraud someone, usually out of money or property" (Hollis, 2020). The Oxford English Dictionary defines a con: to "persuade, to speak persuasively to; to dupe, to swindle." (Oxford English Dictionary, 2021) Fosco is suggesting that a woman should never see a male's anger but rather that men should act underhandedly and deviously to maintain the male power structure within a relationship. In Carter's example "The fraudster needs to use a variety of techniques here to both empower the victim which sounds contradictory. Really that they need to make the victim seem as though they are empowered, but also overpower the victim in subtle ways. So, they enable the victim to feel in control but also feel like they have no choice to comply with what the fraudster is saying" (Carter, 2021).

Fosco's explanation to Percival illuminates the character he is and that he is the intellectual power behind the fraud committed against Laura. Fosco is so powerful in presenting his beliefs and philosophy that it is not unreasonable to assume that Percival would feel dominated by such a strong character. Therefore, he submissively commits the act of fraud against Laura and being involved in this triangle of deceit that Collins has created to showcase crimes against women in this novel.

The Woman in White on the stage

Collins adapted *The Woman in White* for the stage in 1871, following an earlier adaptation of the novel by J. R. Ware. The play opened at London's Olympic Theatre (1806-1900). As Graham Law and Andrew Maunder point out, a feature of the Olympic "which boasted a 'highly fashionable audience' as part of its attractions – was its gas lighting which could be raised or dimmed as the mood required and the lavishly decorated auditorium, with gold pillars and delicate arabesque ornaments decorating the boxes" (2008: 102). Playgoing at this period started to become more socially acceptable and with improved transport links to the suburbs more accessible for the middle classes" (102). Collins, who was "obsessed by the drama" (101), widened the reception of his work by transferring it to the stage. What is important to consider in this section, however, is what aspects of his novel he focused on in his stage adaptation. "The success of *The Woman in White* as it appeared in *All the Year Round* ensured that there was a rush to adapt it for the stage; serialisation was concluded in July 1860, and J. R. Ware's adaptation was put on at the Surrey, a popular theatre south of the river, in August 1860" (The Wilkie Collins Society, 1998-2020). The Wilkie Collins Society

note that Collins waited to adapt his book for the stage and when he did so he placed an “emphasis on plotting, rather than on the uncovering of secrets.” In Collins’s version, “there is a smooth forward trajectory, the action taking place over six months, each act being precisely placed chronologically as well as geographically.” In addition, the Collins Society makes an important point when they note that it “is important that the action is said to take place in 1862, that is, well before the Married Women’s Property Act that acknowledged the right of a wife to her own property. The production of the play in 1871, so soon after the passing of the Act in 1870, must surely have reminded the audience of the necessity of that piece of legislation” (The Wilkie Collins Society).

It is important to ponder why Collins chose to adapt his highly popular novel and put it onto a stage, beyond the obvious commercial possibility and his love of drama. The audience of the stage play would be different to those who read the novel. The sensation novel was also visceral, affecting the minds of the reader and was readily adaptable to the stage in terms of its tapping heightened emotion. As an article on the Wilkie Collins society homepage observes, audience reaction was of particular interest to the critic G. H. Lewes: “The actor, he felt, needed to involve the audience and provoke them into thinking about how they might behave in the circumstances being represented on stage. Sensation theatre, therefore, had its place, since it provoked audience involvement and discernment.” It also potentially offered an opportunity for learning and theatre serviced a variety of “audiences with varying levels of education. As the article points out, “Sensationalism on the stage, it is clear, does not depend only on the acting out of the text, but can draw on a variety of visual and aural effects: scenery, lighting, sound effects and, at this period, incidental music, to stimulate the audience”. In other words, it can make its point differently by using different

techniques. By creating a stage adaptation Collins was able to hit different levels of education and allow his story, his social themes and issues, to be accessible to all walks of life. This dramatized version, as this section of the chapter reveals, emphasises the love triangle between Glyde, Laura and Fosco. Collins also increases the intensity of the act of romance fraud and its consequences through its presentation on stage as he can draw on the actors' gestures, and the stage directions from the play text become an important means of highlighting how the actor should interpret the role. The dramatized version allowed Collins more freedom in the use of actions, violence and manipulation, offering a different presentation to that of the written page.



Figure 1: Advertisement for *The Woman in White*, Olympic Theatre by Frederick Walker

(1871)



Figure 2: The Auditorium of the Royal Olympic Theatre, London (arthurlloyd.co.uk)

When Collins adapted *The Woman in White*, he retained Fosco's role as a 'friend' to Laura and Marian while working towards his own financial interests. Collins kept the third-party fraud element and the calculating behaviour of his character. The Wilkie Collins Society comments on his stage adaptation:

He chose to adopt a totally different structure for the play, in which the emphasis is on plotting, rather than on the uncovering of secrets. There is a smooth forward trajectory, the action taking place over six months, each act being precisely placed chronologically as well as geographically. It is important that the action is said to take place in 1862, that is, well before the Married Women's Property Act that acknowledged the right of a wife to her own property. The production of the play in 1871, so soon after the passing of the Act in 1870, must surely have reminded the

audience of the necessity of that piece of legislation” (The Wilkie Collins Society, 1998-2020).

The assertion being made here is that Collins focuses the play on the “plotting” side of the story rather than “uncovering” because everyone knew the story already. Therefore, it was inevitable that Collins would have emphasised features of his work that might have not been picked up by readers when reading the novel. These features could be amplified on the stage making it a new experience for the audience. Consequently, he reserved Fosco’s role as a friend to Laura and Marian, but his deviousness and fraudulent behaviour is emphasised. A specific example is:

Sir P. (roughly). That's more than I can say, Fosco. I am welcomed here by suspicion and mistrust. First, I find a hitch in the marriage settlements, a clause introduced by the family lawyer. Not a halfpenny of my wife's money is to go to me if my wife dies first. I remark to Miss Halcombe, here, that it's possible, in a matter of this kind, to be too hard on a man----

Mar. (to FOSCO). And I remark to Sir Percival that it [29]is *not* possible to be too hard on a man who marries for money.

Fosco. Well answered, Miss Halcombe. (*Aside, looking at SIR PERCIVAL.*) The idiot is doing his best to break off his own marriage!

Sir P. (continuing). And that's not the worst of it, mind! The next proposal made to me comes from Miss Fairlie herself. She coolly asks me--with the marriage

settlement actually in the house--to release her from our engagement. I put it to you, Fosco, as a member of the family. I have been engaged to your wife's niece for two years, with the consent of the parents on both sides. Has Miss Fairlie any right to play fast and loose with me after that?

Fosco. My good friend, your tone is deplorable. Moderate it.

Sir P. Moderate it? I am deliberately kept out in the dark. I am sacrificed, for all I know, to a new fancy for some other man. When I ask Miss Fairlie for her reasons she hangs her head; and Miss Halcombe tells me to my face I have no right to put the question.

Mar. I deliberately repeat it, Sir Percival. You have no right to force yourself into my sister's confidence. Are we in the slave market at Constantinople? You talk as if Laura Fairlie was yours by right of purchase!

Sir P. (to FOSCO). You hear her, Fosco?

Fosco (sternly). I recommend you to be silent, Percival. I think Miss Halcombe is quite right. *(Aside.)* A fine woman, spirit, intelligence, courage!

(Collins Play, 1871)

This extract enables us to examine Collins's intentions in the novel and play and what aspects of the story were clearly important to him. Within this section of the stage adaptation there is clear evidence of Fosco using language and manipulation to gain the trust of Laura and Marian and imbue them with a false sense of security. In this section

Fosco states: “*Fosco*. Well answered, Miss Halcombe. (*Aside, looking at SIR PERCIVAL.*) The idiot is doing his best to break off his own marriage!” (Collins Play, 1871).

Fosco is showing Marian that he is on her side. He is agreeing with her and seemingly supportive of her whilst he is, in fact, operating against her. He is being deceptive and is presenting the persona he has created so he can commit the third-party fraud. It is clearly important to Collins to present Fosco as a deceptive, scheming figure. Fosco also uses his language and persona to reprimand Percival in front of Marian to show his support for Laura and her. “*Sir P. (to FOSCO)*. You hear her, Fosco? *Fosco (sternly)*. I recommend you to be silent, Percival. I think Miss Halcombe is quite right. (*Aside.*) A fine woman, spirit, intelligence, courage!” (Collins Play 1871). Again, we see Fosco flatter Marian and presenting himself as being on her side. Fosco is also reprimanding Percival here. He is quite forceful with Percival, inferring to Percival that his aggressive manner is being counterproductive to their mission of fraud. By Fosco chastising Percival in front of Marian the benefits are twofold: one is that Marian is seeing Fosco discipline Percival, and this is an action which will aid Fosco in his mission to gain trust from the women and the second is that Fosco is inadvertently showing his dominance over Percival. As a reader we know he is implicated as deeply Percival is in the fraudulent crime. Therefore, by Fosco being so dominant it makes it clear that he is the dominant party within the duo. This supports the assertion being made here that in fact Collins actively chose not only to retain Fosco as a manipulative figure but to emphasize this in his stage adaptation. He does so by giving Fosco a more physical role on stage.

Later in the play Collins exposes the third-party romance fraud. He illuminates the contrasts between the two men who partake of the crime. Fosco takes the more delicate and manipulative path whereas Percival remains confrontational and aggressive. Collins keeps both characters the same as he presents them within his novel. A particular scene when both these characters show their scheming characteristics is when Percival tries to manipulate Laura to sign some legal documents.

He holds out the deed, so folded as only to show the blank space left for the signature.

Mar. (to LAURA). Ask him to unfold the paper.

Fosco (overhearing her). Exactly as I thought!

Laura (to SIR PERCIVAL). The paper is folded, Sir Percival. I suppose you will allow me to see what it contains?

Sir P. It contains nothing but lawyer's gibberish. You wouldn't understand it if I was to show it to you.

Laura. I might try to understand it.

Sir P. Mere waste of time! (Collins Play, 1871)

At the beginning of this exchange Percival has folded the paper to hide what is written on it. This shows a physical action which demonstrates Percival's deviant behaviour. "He holds out the deed, so folded as only to show the blank space left for the signature" (Collins Play, 1871). This is a typical move that a con artist tries to do when they believe the victim is easily manipulated. This was probably because of her gender. Percival knew that not only

Laura but women in general had very few legal rights and therefore tried to exploit this. Percival was engaged to Laura but not married but that in the eyes of the law this did not really matter as engagements gave men almost the same rights as marriage did over their partner. Cheryl McDonnell comments: "In the eyes of the law in the Victorian age, a woman's property was legally considered her husband's upon their entering into marriage, whether that property was acquired before or after the wedding. According to famous social reformer Caroline Norton in her letter to Queen Victoria, 'A married woman in England has no legal existence: her being is absorbed in that of her husband'. A woman could not even get rid of her property after an engagement before entering into marriage without is being considered 'legal fraud'" (McDonnell, 2018: 30). Therefore, Percival deploys a direct approach with Laura because he knows the law is on his side. Percival does not try to sway Laura in his favour but deploys a bold, frontal approach. He believes that his position as the fiancé gives him every right to demand anything from Laura as the law during this period was in favour of the male gender. Yet he miscalculates the strong effect Marian has on Laura and their friendship which counteracts Percival's forceful behaviour. Therefore, he is the face of the crime and not the brains behind the fraud. Fosco takes a more tactful approach which not only gains him trust with Laura but with Marian as well. Fosco deploys a more serpentine and tactical method when trying to manipulate Laura within this scene. Marian tells Laura to ask Percival to unfold the paper "*Mar. (to LAURA). Ask him to unfold the paper*" (Collins Play, 1871). Immediately after, Fosco supports Marian's suggestion when he comments "*Fosco (overhearing her). Exactly as I thought!*" (Collins Play, 1871). Fosco here is not only showing Laura he is supporting her but Marian as well. Fosco is manipulating both women in this scene. He knows that the aggressive

approach will not work with Laura and Marian because they will have a 'pack' mentality when together. They cannot be aggressively manipulated. Therefore, Fosco adapts himself to the situation to play the long game with these two women which is to gain their confidence and then take Laura's money. This is very similar to the representation in the original novel. Fosco remains the same with his scheming ways and treacherous attitude both in the novel and the stage adaptation. It is clear that Collins wanted to keep Fosco like this as it highlights a societal abuse in this period. As the case studies later in this research will show, many romance frauds were committed in reality too. Collins uses Fosco to illuminate to the audience as well as the reader that fraud was an issue that needed to be addressed by the law. Fraud was being committed to women by men they trusted and who had gained their confidence. Fosco is just a small example of a man who hatches a plan with a friend to defraud a woman just like, as we will see in the next chapter, Compeyson and Robert in *Great Expectations*.

Throughout this scene Percival also tries to belittle Laura and challenges her intelligence. He attempts to use a common tactic that fraudsters use to disarm their victims, suggesting he knows everything in legal terms, and Laura would not: "It contains nothing but lawyer's gibberish. You wouldn't understand it if I was to show it to you" (Collins Play, 1871). Percival is using a tactic here which Carter explores when she argues that fraudsters use "lots of technical terms" so "the fraudster can explain to the victim it places them in a position where they are reliant on the fraudster to teach them" (Carter, 2021). Percival is using this tactic to get Laura to sign the legal document. When he is challenged about the document, he attempts to demean Laura and suggests that even if someone with his intelligence

explained it to her, she still would not understand. The issue Percival runs into here is the fact Laura is not on her own and he has not put enough time in with his victim for that tactic to work. That is why it is so interesting that Fosco steps in on the side of Laura. He has realised that Laura is not the complicit victim that she was expected to be, so he engages in a crueller and more elaborate fraud than he initially intended and one that she does not see coming.

Further on in this exchange we see a change of strategy from Percival. He changes from using classic manipulative techniques to a more aggressive approach:

Mar. (to LAURA). Sign nothing, unless you have read it first.

Sir P. (violently). Come into the house and sign.

(He attempts to seize LAURA'S arm. MARIAN draws [45] her back out of his reach, and stands between them. FOSCO beckons to his wife.)

Fosco. Eleanor! (MADAME FOSCO approaches.) You have not spoken yet. Let us see if your interference will bring Percival to his senses.

(Collins Play, 1871)

In this extract we see the directions for physical violence in the stage directions for the actors: "He attempts to seize Laura's arm" (Collins Play, 1871). Collins is directing the actors to be very physical on stage as the use of the word 'seize' has connotations of a more aggressive action than just grabbing her arm. This suggests that Collins wanted to present

clearly in his stage adaptations the different lengths Percival was willing to go to commit the act of fraud. This confrontational and aggressive behaviour from Percival illuminates the issues around women and domestic violence during this period. Barnhill comments on Morris that “Because the law was heavily weighted in favour of husbands, Victorian women had an obligation to tolerate any abuse they received from their husbands and comply with close family efforts to conceal it”. It was not until 1853 that spousal abuse was made illegal, and during this first half of the century, “husbands were legally entitled to use violence and physical restraint to keep their wives obedient (Quoted in Barnhill, 2005: 107). Percival quickly turns to physical violence when language and visceral responses do not work and thus emulates what a lot of men did during this period in terms of physical abuse. There is a further physical intervention by Percival: *“(She turns her back on him, and goes out by the drawingroom. SIR PERCIVAL attempts to stop her. FOSCO seizes him by the arm, and calls to MARIAN, who is about to follow LAURA into the house.)”* (Collins Play, 1871). “He attempts to stop her” which is a stage direction from Collins. He does not go into detail on how he would like the actor to ‘stop her’ but this allows the actor to take liberties when delivering their performance. It is, however, clear that Collins wanted Percival to take a more aggressive approach in this scene. At the end of this exchange Fosco attempts to be the face of reason and projects the image that he is on the women’s side by stating: “Fosco. Eleanor! (MADAME FOSCO approaches.) You have not spoken yet. Let us see if your interference will bring Percival to his senses” (Collins play, 1871). In this quick comment Fosco achieves several things: the first is that he is suggesting that Percival is not making sense therefore patronising Percival and his actions, the second is he is bringing Marian into the conversation which implies he is on her side and that he values her opinion. Carter suggests that fraudsters “turn their victims against their sources of support” (Carter, 2021).

Percival tries to do this, but Fosco does not. In fact, Fosco uses Laura's sources of support against her by getting them to trust him and attempting to present himself as honourable in the eyes of her friend and companion.

At the end of this scene Fosco exposes who he really is. He played his part as the kind friend who is on the women's side but once they leave the real Fosco is revealed to the audience:

(A pause. The two men look at each other. SIR PERCIVAL gives way. FOSCO smiles, releases him, [46] and points to the study. SIR PERCIVAL withdraws, and is seen to lock the paper up in a cabinet in the study. He remains in the room waiting. FOSCO turns to MARIAN with a bow of the deepest respect.) (Collins Play, 1871).

In this last section Collins has Fosco show his authority just by stage directions. He first smiles like his third-party fraud plan is working. This is followed by him pointing Percival to the direction he wants. He is dominating Percival. By dictating his movements within this scene, as well as showing to the audience that he is not innocent through his smile when the women leave, the audience perceive a devious character. It is interesting to note that Collins is, in fact, presenting Fosco in this third-party role in his romance fraud by allowing his stage directions to imply to the audience what his true intentions are, while they remain hidden from Laura and Marian.

The consequence of third-party fraud

This second section examines the consequences the third-party fraud has not only on the victim Laura but on those around her. The acceleration of the crime and the complex deception by Fosco and the creeping normality within this novel is examined here. Carter defines this: “Creeping normality” also known as “Death by a thousand cuts” - “This is the way major changes can be accepted as a normal situation if it happens slowly enough” (Carter, 2021). These “major changes” that occur towards the end of the novel will be scrutinised along with the magnitude they have within the novel, play and for the characters. Within what I call the ‘acceleration’ part of the novel we see more devious and indictable crimes being committed and we see the two fraudster protagonists go beyond the smaller crime of romance fraud. Both Percival and Fosco develop into different people to keep the crime alive and to bury a secret which leads them to commit further crimes to cover up their original offence. These further crimes include kidnap, identity theft and the destroying of legal documents.

Getting into the Asylum

The Woman in White is a novel about identity, how identities are stolen and how women, in particular, become interchangeable. The novel explores the proof of identity, the switching of identity as well as the loss of identity. Collins does this through his character Laura. In the novel, Laura is taken to the asylum under false pretences. Her identity is switched with Anne

Catherick and it is Anne who dies is buried under Laura's name. Laura is given drugs to sedate and disorient her. "The theft of Laura Fairlie's identity by Count Fosco and Sir Percival Glyde, is comprehensive, touching every part of her existence: as Hartright defines Laura's situation, she is 'socially, morally, legally – dead'" (Baker & Nemesvari, 2023: 264).

How Fosco and Percival get Laura into the asylum is vague and undetailed. Wise comments on the lack of input from Collins about the asylum:

For a book that has the misuse of the lunacy certification and asylum admissions system at the heart of its plot, *The Woman in White* is in fact pretty vague about the mad-house involved – and the staff who run it. The asylum is placed somewhere to the north of London and is a small private concern. The keeper himself is not an accomplice and is guilty of nothing more than taking in a patient who has been certified by two seemingly bona fide doctors. The asylum and lunatics/lunacy are not coloured-in by Collins because the real site of horror in the novel is the domestic home. The proprietor is a decent enough chap, and the asylum is presented as not a bad place in itself. But Collins didn't need to make the asylum in itself horrific; the threat, or danger, that the institution represents is that this is where a person is stripped of personal freedom, civic rights and, in Laura's case, legal identity." (Wise, 2014)

Fosco intoxicates Laura with a substance, dresses her in Anne Catherick's clothes and is presented as Anne to the asylum by Fosco. Fosco takes over the main role for the admission into the asylum. He now becomes the front man of the third-party fraud, a position which he has avoided throughout most of the novel. He has to act to keep his fraudulent and

criminal behaviour a secret and alive, therefore, he has to adopt a lead role. Fosco uses his deceptive nature and charm to get Laura to travel with him to London to see her sister. He takes her to a house where she is talked to and observed by foreign people. It can be assumed that these people were examining her mental capacity for Fosco and with his track record, it would not be unreasonable to assume that these figures were employed by him.

This scene is described by Collins:

The moment he appeared she asked anxiously how long the meeting between her sister and herself was to be still delayed. At first, he returned an evasive answer, but on being pressed, he acknowledged, with great apparent reluctance, that Miss Halcombe was by no means so well as he had hitherto represented her to be. His tone and manner, in making this reply, so alarmed Lady Glyde, or rather so painfully increased the uneasiness which she had felt in the company of the two strangers, that a sudden faintness overcame her, and she was obliged to ask for a glass of water. The Count called from the door for water, and for a bottle of smelling-salts. Both were brought in by the foreign-looking man with the beard. The water, when Lady Glyde attempted to drink it, had so strange a taste that it increased her faintness, and she hastily took the bottle of salts from Count Fosco, and smelt at it. Her head became giddy on the instant. The Count caught the bottle as it dropped out of her hand, and the last impression of which she was conscious was that he held it to her nostrils again. (Collins, 2012: 475)

Collins describes Fosco as being “evasive” in this section. This has always seemed to be his speciality. He is trying to control Laura with the assertion that she can see her sister, but she has to wait. He is using emotional extortion here as he knows Laura wants to see her sister but obviously, she is not there, therefore, has to present her as tired or unwell to stall Laura. Once these efforts start to fail Fosco gives Laura some water that tastes strange and some smelling salts which he then makes her smell when she is on the floor becoming unconscious. Consequently, he succeeds in drugging Laura. This is a major change in terms of Fosco’s actions from the beginning of the novel. He was always the brains behind the crimes but never the front man. He used his language to manipulate those around him but let Percival be the face of the crime. However, Fosco needs to place Laura in an asylum and is therefore compelled to change his tactics to adapt to the situation. Fosco becomes a more physically active character by taking Laura to London and then drugging her and then placing her in an asylum. These are significant actions from a character who was quite static during most of the novel. It is interesting that Collins forces his ‘third-party’ character into a more active and operational role towards the end of the novel. It seems that Collins wants to expose the third-party of the criminal duo. Collins illuminates the issues of third-party fraud not only in this section but in the entire novel and unmask the true reality this fictional story presents during the Victorian period.

The use of Asylums and Cases

The use of asylums during this period was more of a punishment rather than a place of medicine. People were put into asylums if they did not conform to what society pressured

them to be. The wrongful use of asylums brought into place in 1774 the Act for the Regulation of Private Madhouses. The act stated that: "Under an Act for regulating Madhouses, 1774 (14 Geo.III, cap.49), Justices of the Peace were empowered to grant annual licences at Quarter Sessions to keepers of private houses for the reception of lunatics. Such licensed houses were also to be inspected by two visiting justices and a physician, the reports of the visitors to be entered in registers maintained at the house and by the clerk to the visitors." (The National Archives, 1774).

A specific case during this period which illuminates the abuse of the use of asylums was the case of Rosina Bulwer Lytton and her husband Edward Bulwer Lytton in 1858. Both Rosina and Edward were accomplished writers. Edward, who was also a politician, was separated from his wife and "had his wife (from whom he was legally separated but could not gain a divorce) locked up in a lunatic asylum after she had publicly denounced his miserly treatment of her to his Hertfordshire electorate in the summer of 1858. Certainly, this was an unprecedented act for a Victorian lady - but an insane one?" (Blain, 1990: 211). This case highlights the clear misuse of asylums. In this case the asylum was used as a chastisement for a woman who did not conform. Collins's novel was coterminous with the Bulwer Lytton case which occurred a year before the novel's publication. Bulwer-Lytton was part of Collins's literary circle and even Collins's friend, Dickens, tried to abuse the use of asylums. In 1858 Charles separated from his wife Catherine as Dickens was having an affair with the actress Ellen Ternan. Dickens was a father of ten children with Catherine and supposedly blamed her for having all these children. It is asserted to punish her for this and to move her out the way for his new lover, he tried to have her committed to an asylum. D. E. Latané, explains the case: "Dickens apparently only made inquiries, perhaps in a

“gaslighting” sort of way. John Bowen has argued that newly discovered letters of Catherine Dickens’s friend Edward Dutton Cook cement the claim that in 1858 Dickens made an attempt to have his wife declared mentally unsound. Bowen surmises that the case did not go forward because the man Dickens consulted, Dr Thomas Harrington Tuke, would not agree. It is perhaps more likely that the implied threat of the asylum was a lever to steer Catherine to sign the settlement (late June of 1858), and that no actual attempt was made” (Latane 2019). Dickens used the threat of an asylum and tried but failed to get a doctor to support his claims. However, in Collins’s novel the doctors who admit Laura / Anne are not so reasonable and are influenced by the power of Fosco and Percival.

If Miss Halcombe’s or Mr. Gilmore’s recollection of the document did not confirm that view, or if they wished for any additional particulars about the Asylum (the address of which he mentioned, as well as the names and addresses of the two doctors on whose certificates the patient was admitted), he was ready to answer any question and to clear up any uncertainty. He had done his duty to the unhappy young woman, by instructing his solicitor to spare no expense in tracing her, and in restoring her once more to medical care, and he was now only anxious to do his duty towards Miss Fairlie and towards her family, in the same plain, straightforward way. (Collins, 2012: 140)

The passage illuminates that two doctors approved the admission into the asylum and that the view of the family members on an individual was greatly taken into account. Therefore, the novel highlights that asylums were places in which family members could lock their relatives up, maybe even places of corruption. Again, the Dickens’s case occurred shortly

before the publication of Collins's novel. These actual cases and their misappropriation of asylums are unmistakably used within the story.

Breaking Out and Proof of Identity

Laura is admitted into the asylum under the identity of Anne and the real Anne is buried under the name of Laura. Fosco needed Laura to disappear, therefore he exchanges her for Anne. The way he does this is clever because after he drugs Laura she is taken to the asylum:

She had no impressions of the faintest kind to communicate—no idea whether one day, or more than one day, had passed—until she came to herself suddenly in a strange place, surrounded by women who were all unknown to her. This was the Asylum. Here she first heard herself called by Anne Catherick's name, and here, as a last remarkable circumstance in the story of the conspiracy, her own eyes informed her that she had Anne Catherick's clothes on. The nurse, on the first night in the Asylum, had shown her the marks on each article of her underclothing as it was taken off, and had said, not at all irritably or unkindly, "Look at your own name on your own clothes, and don't worry us all any more about being Lady Glyde. She's dead and buried, and you're alive and hearty. Do look at your clothes now! There it is, in good marking ink, and there you will find it on all your old things, which we have kept in the house—Anne Catherick, as plain as print!" And there it was, when Miss Halcombe examined the linen her sister wore, on the night of their arrival at Limmeridge House. (Collins, 2012: 476)

The fact Fosco dressed Laura in Anne's clothes not only made those who ran the clinic believe it was Anne, but it also starts to convince Laura as well. The proof of identity here is literally the name written in the clothing Laura is wearing. The nurse who is taking care of Laura only needs to see the naming in the clothing to believe that the woman in front of her is Anne. "Look at your own name on your own clothes, and don't worry us all any more about being Lady Glyde. She's dead and buried, and you're alive and hearty. Do look at your clothes now! There it is, in good marking ink" (Collins, 2012: 476). No birth certificate is needed, no other form of proof of identity is used at all. Fosco manipulates the lack of tracing of identification during this time and swaps Laura's clothing for Anne and that is all the proof he needs. Collins commented that the novel was concerned with identity: "The central idea of *The Woman in White* is the idea of a conspiracy in private life, in which circumstances are so handled as to rob a woman of her identity by confounding her with another woman, sufficiently like her in personal appearance to answer the wicked purpose. The destruction of her identity represents a first division of the story; and the recovery of her identity marks a second division" (Collins, 2017:12). The research conducted here breaks down the novel into two parts, just as Collins interpreted his novel as a work of two parts. This research in this section examines third-party fraud and the consequences of the fraud. However, like Collins asserts, the uses and misuse of identity flow throughout as Laura is stripped of her identity by the third-party fraud and is given a new identity as a consequence of the fraud.

Marian has to bribe a nurse to get her friend out of the asylum. This could be for several reasons: proof of identity during this period was difficult, asylums were strict when it came

to women or some asylums here corrupt. Laura is released from the asylum in a similar manner to how she was admitted. It took criminal means to get her in there, therefore it takes criminal means to get her out of a situation where the law is stacked against her. There was no way that Laura could prove her identity and Fosco is so convincing that she even doubts herself.

[Marian] obtained permission to speak alone with the patient, on condition that they both remained well within the nurse's view. There was no time for questions—there was only time for Miss Halcombe to impress on the unhappy lady the necessity of controlling herself, and to assure her of immediate help and rescue if she did so. The prospect of escaping from the Asylum by obedience to her sister's directions was sufficient to quiet Lady Glyde, and to make her understand what was required of her. Miss Halcombe next returned to the nurse, placed all the gold she then had in her pocket (three sovereigns) in the nurse's hands, and asked when and where she could speak to her alone. (Collins, 2012: 469)

Marian bribes the nurse with gold, and this is just an illumination of the key issue not only within this novel but in society. The law was not always clear and transparent which made crimes like third-party fraud easy to commit and go unpunished. Collins is highlighting that money had a stronger standing than the law. F.M.L Thompson supports this view: “The social controllers may propose what they wish, and if they command the necessary resources of money” (Thompson, 1981: 193). Thompson is confirming that social standing and money spoke more in society, and this is why crimes such as identity theft, false deaths

and third-part fraud were possible. In *The Woman in White* the romance is the means to attain the finance. The finance is the ultimate goal.

Baker and Nemesvari conclude the legal issue within the novel nicely:

The nineteenth century witnessed widespread legal reform and an unprecedented expansion of bureaucracy, so it is unsurprising that novelists of the period engaged so extensively and transformatively with the law in their fictions. The creation of a unified police force, the rise of forensic science in the detection of crime, extensive public interest in criminal trials and the nature of evidence, and the rise of the legal professional all contributed to new literary emphasis on the role of the law. Wilkie Collins was foremost among the writers who negotiated the contemporary legal world. Collins trained as a lawyer, studying at Lincoln's Inn beginning in May 1846, but never practised after being called to the Bar in November 1851. This legal training nevertheless inflected his fiction, not only at the level of narrative and plot, but more fundamentally in its ideological, philosophical, and polemical aspects. As Catherine Peters claims in her 1991 biography of Collins, 'the intricacies and inconsistencies of the law interested him and 'he could have made a good lawyer'. In a practical sense, his legal background must have been invaluable in the habits of attention to detail and an ordered mind required for structuring his complicated plots. (Baker & Nemesvari, 2023: 262)

As Baker and Nemesvari note, Collins's legal training was invaluable to his writing. Collins was so in touch with the law and ahead of his time that he was able to manipulate and highlight the law's weak spots. *The Woman in White* demonstrates the operation of

romance fraud, a century and a half before the crime was defined. He also provided a model for the novels which followed: *Great Expectations* and *Lady Audley's Secret*, in which women become victims of male abandonment and deceit.

Chapter Two

Trapped in Fraud:

Great Expectations and *Lady Audley's Secret*

Great Expectations and *Lady Audley's Secret* were published within a year of each other, in 1861 and 1862 respectively, yet take different approaches with their female protagonists. Both are influenced by the novel that came before: *The Woman in White*. Like *The Woman in White*, both texts engage with issues of fraud from 'romance fraud', bigamy and the use of false identities. Not only is this thesis in chronological order to show the progression of fraud but also because of the influence Collins had on Dickens and Braddon by drawing attention to the crimes of fraud perpetrated against women. In particular, Collins had a friendly mentor relationship with Dickens. They wrote several letters to each other, and in one, Dickens describes the advice he got from a fellow-writer, Bulwer Lytton:

As yet, I have hardly got into the enjoyment of thorough laziness. Bulwer was so very anxious that I should alter the end of *Great Expectations*—the extreme end, I mean, after Bidly and Joe are done with—and stated his reasons so well that I have resumed and taken another turn at it. Upon the whole, I think it is for the better. You shall see the changes when we meet" (Collins ed.Hutton 1861).

This letter shows the fruitful connections between authors as they comment on each other's work. Dickens imbibed Collins's earlier fiction, even dressing his character in white.

Great Expectations and *Lady Audley's Secret*, like their predecessor, *The Woman in White* react to the crimes of fraud and deal with it primarily in terms of its impact on the private sphere. Both Miss Havisham and Lady Audley are initially victims of romance fraud, but they respond to their 'defraudment' in different ways. Miss Havisham becomes a victim of financial fraud linked to romance fraud. It can be argued that it was not the financial fraud which derailed her but rather the romance fraud used against her by Compeyson to steal her money. His description illuminates that his aim was financial:

But I heard my father mention that he was a showy-man, and the kind of man for the purpose. But that he was not to be, without ignorance or prejudice, mistaken for a gentleman, my father most strongly asseverates; because it is a principle of his that no man who was not a true gentleman at heart, ever was, since the world began, a true gentleman in manner. (Dickens, 2000: 147)

Compeyson may wear the right clothes and say the right things, but he was and would always be a criminal, a money-grabber who commits romance fraud for financial gain.

This chapter argues that the crime committed against Miss Havisham constitutes romance fraud. Miss Havisham is the primary focus here as she is the exemplary victim of romance fraud and perfectly demonstrates the application of contemporary criminological theories on romance fraud, underpinned by a feminist recovery of Miss Havisham. The chapter then reads Miss Havisham, to borrow from Victorian theatre and Hamilton's 1938 play, in a new 'gas' light. Of lesser consideration is the fraud conducted against Magwitch, Pip and Estella.

While the ‘first generation’ victims – Miss Havisham and Magwitch – are duped by Compeyson, Miss Havisham, as a woman trapped by society’s expectations and laws, is the classic victim of romance fraud. Critics have tended to see her as a theatrical character (in a non-positive sense), as Jones observes: “She is at first glance so completely a figure of the theater (as the movie demonstrated) that many readers find her preposterous ... Moreover, she outrages probability. The notion that a jilted woman could live for years in a couple of rooms heated by a grate, the windows closed, a rotting wedding cake decaying into garbage on the table, violates even fictional credibility” (Jones 1954: 333-334). Jones sees her as a character of the “imagination”. This analysis, by contrast, brings her to life, seeing her as a woman who has deceived and violated. Using Carter’s work, it takes Miss Havisham into the twenty-first century as victim of romance fraud.

The link between finance and romance fraud is crucial, but Dickens focuses more on the romance fraud and its impact, demonstrating its negative impression on Miss Havisham and those who surround her. It is a fraud of the private sphere as Miss Havisham is duped into a potential marriage which will never take place as the fraudster has no intention of fulfilling his marital contract. While money is the motive of the initial crime, it is not the monetary fraud which determines the subsequent life of Miss Havisham, but the romantic duplicity, which determines her relationships with her adopted daughter, Estella, and Pip. As Claire O’Callaghan points out, “Miss Havisham had been cruelly overthrown by a professional conman, the villainous Mr Compeyson, who had conspired with her half-brother, Arthur, to defraud her of her inheritance, before then abandoning her on their wedding day” and “traumatised by the brutality and manipulation she had suffered, Miss Havisham turned to misandry” (O’Callaghan, 2020: 84). Lady Audley has also a good reason to hate men, as she

was abandoned by her husband, but Braddon has her female protagonist respond very differently to Dickens's. Lady Audley is the criminal and, unlike Miss Havisham who is completely innocent when the crime is committed against her, Lady Audley is the one committing the fraudulent crimes. She is initially abandoned by her husband, but unlike Miss Havisham, who stays in her room surrounded by her decayed wedding feast, Lady Audley refuses to stagnate. She fakes her own death as Helen Talboys, resurrects herself as Lucy Graham, commits bigamy by remarrying Sir Michael Audley, abandons her child and even progresses from what could be described as a petty crime of fraud to attempted murder. The narrator comments on Lady Audley and her crimes:

She was no longer innocent, and the pleasure we take in art and loveliness being an innocent pleasure had passed out of her reach. Six or seven years before, she would have been happy in the possession of this little Aladdin's palace; but she had wandered out of the circle of careless pleasure-seeking creatures, she had strayed too far away into a desolate labyrinth of guilt and treachery, terror and crime, and all the treasures that had been collected for her could have given her no pleasure.

(Braddon, 1997: 234)

Miss Havisham is the ultimate victim of fraud, and her reaction is one of self-deprivation, withdrawal and decay whereas Lady Audley responds to being abandoned more actively. She uses the crime, the crime of fraud, and uses it to her advantage. She does not dwell on being abandoned by her husband and, despite the limitations imposed by her gender and social position, moves on with her life - although her serious crimes and offences inevitably lead to her downfall.

This first section of this chapter examines the effects of fraud within these novels, commencing with an exploration of objects and material possessions and how these are reflected and what role they play in the respective novels. Possessions and notions of status are significant in both texts: *Great Expectations* focuses on the wedding dress, the wedding cake and Satis House, analysing the cultural significance and status around these objects and how they become implicated in fraud. It is Miss Havisham's wealth which makes her initially attractive, her wealth is her downfall, and her decayed hopes of romance are reflected in the decayed objects which surround her. Camilla Nelson argues that Miss Havisham is a "product of a nineteenth-century capitalist society that constructed women as irrational and unstable creatures, and kept them legally, economically, and socially powerless" (Nelson, 2020: 225). The second section of this chapter considers the abandonment of Lucy Graham (Lady Audley) and the consequences of this abandonment which involves her pursuit of security and status which ultimately leads to crime (fraud and murder) and her inevitable downfall. Objects are a focus of this section as Lady Audley has a wedding dress and old trinkets which form her identity but also pull her back to who she really is and, although more active in her reaction to her plight, also, she ends her life in an asylum, just as Miss Havisham burns to death in Satis House, the place of her wealth, defraudment and psychological imprisonment.

The concluding section of this chapter observes the two novels together, assessing the two different responses the novels take to the crimes of romance and finance fraud. Lady Audley has to engage and perpetuate fraud to get 'unstuck' from her situation of abandonment, whereas Miss Havisham lets the crime of fraud consume her and she uses Estella to enact

her revenge on men. This closing section compares both texts and their reactions to fraud and speculates the reasoning these two authors took two very distinctive and different approaches in the same period of time.

“She perfectly idolized him”: Miss Havisham and ‘romance fraud’

Miss Havisham’s abandonment on her wedding day results in her becoming hostile and a recluse. The result of this betrayal by Compeyson leaves her in a state of being ‘stuck’ within that moment. She remains in the house with the clocks all stopped. She only wears the wedding dress from that day and leaves the food and wedding cake to decay and rot around her. We see Miss Havisham’s state through the eyes of a child witness:

I took note of the surrounding objects in detail and saw that her watch had stopped at twenty minutes to nine, and that a clock in the room had stopped at twenty minutes to nine. “Look at me,” said Miss Havisham. “You are not afraid of a woman who has never seen the sun since you were born?” (Dickens, 2000: 46)

The clocks are all stopped at ‘twenty minutes to nine’ which was the time her future life ended. It was at this moment that she received the letter from Compeyson which triggered her new life, alone and abandoned. Therefore, this moment triggers the state of being trapped. Miss Havisham’s life is dictated by the fraud committed against her. It affects her life from the instance of the fraud being revealed to her death. The fraud committed by Compeyson was long and cruel. Compeyson and Arthur conspired together to steal the

money and property Miss Havisham inherited from her father. Herbert recounts the story of the betrayal and committal of romance and finance fraud to Pip:

There appeared upon the scene – say at the races, or the public balls, or anywhere else you like, a certain man, who made love to Miss Havisham. I never saw him (for this happened five-and-twenty years ago, before you and I were, Handel Well! This man pursued Miss Havisham closely and professed to be devoted to her. I believe she had not shown much susceptibility up to that time; but all the susceptibility she possessed certainly came out then, and she passionately loved him. (Dickens, 2000: 147)

This description of the betrayal Miss Havisham experienced mirrors what is now described as 'romance fraud': Compeyson "made love" to her and she became "susceptible"; this was her first romance and she put her trust into a charismatic fraudster. Alone, rich and looking for a companion, Miss Havisham, additionally duped by her half-brother, was a victim, vulnerable to a criminal wanting to take advantage. This ultimate betrayal and the disgusting use of manipulation leads to financial fraud. However, it also has another effect: it makes Miss Havisham a spectacle. Here we are presented with the romance fraud as Miss Havisham herself is the victim of romance fraud. However, we are not presented in the same way with the financial fraud. It is mentioned but is never the main issue focus of the story. Although finance fraud and romance fraud always seem to have a link, Dickens prioritises or showcases the romance fraud within his novel. The paragraph below outlines the financial aspects of the crime:

He practised on her affection in that systematic way, that he got great sums of money from her, and he induced her to buy her brother out of a share in the brewery (which had been weakly left him by his father) at an immense price, on the plea that when he was her husband he must hold and manage it all. Your guardian was not at that time in Miss Havisham's counsels, and she was too haughty and too much in love to be advised by any one. Her relations were poor and scheming, with the exception of my father; he was poor enough, but not time-serving or jealous. The only independent one among them, he warned her that she was doing too much for this man, and was placing herself too unreservedly in his power. She took the first opportunity of angrily ordering my father out of the house, in his presence, and my father has never seen her since."

I thought of her having said, "Matthew will come and see me at last when I am laid dead upon that table;" and I asked Herbert whether his father was so inveterate against her?

"It's not that," said he, "but she charged him, in the presence of her intended husband, with being disappointed in the hope of fawning upon her for his own advancement, and, if he were to go to her now, it would look true—even to him—and even to her. To return to the man and make an end of him. The marriage day was fixed, the wedding dresses were bought, the wedding tour was planned out, the wedding guests were invited. The day came, but not the bridegroom. He wrote her a letter—" (Dickens, 2000: 147 -148)

Like contemporary fraudsters, “he practised on her affection in a systematic way” and inserted himself into her life, manipulated and controlled her to believe that he loved her. He persuaded Miss Havisham to buy Arthur’s share of the brewery that he inherited. The romance fraud aspect is how Compeyson seduces Miss Havisham to fall in love with him with no intention of ever marrying her or pursuing a relationship as he had an ulterior motive. This is quite a modern way of defrauding a victim out of their money and the tactics that Compeyson used are described in a booklet written by Elizabeth Carter for Thames Valley Police: “Requests for money are disguised as an ‘opportunity’ or a ‘good investment’ which distracts from the reality of it being a request for the victim’s money” (Carter, 2023: 13). This is just one of the tactics used to defraud Miss Havisham, but it is one that has become prevalent in the twenty-first century and particularly dominant in online culture. Indeed, the warning of Herbert’s father has a contemporary resonance: “he warned her that she was doing too much for this man and was placing herself too unreservedly in his power”. One of tricks of romance fraudsters is isolating the victim from friends and family. Compeyson, the shadowy figure in the novel, is described by critics as the incarnation of evil:

The great central villainy is that of Compeyson, who is, abstractly speaking, one of the most loathsome inventions in all of Dickens ... we seldom or never see him directly, so that he remains a vague conception, an ominous image, a man with a scar on his face and an evil personality compounded of cowardice, duplicity, and a mean revenge. We do not, for example, see Compeyson during the fight in the marshes for, though we are puzzled about the relation between the two convicts, our attention is centered upon Magwitch. Again, when Magwitch returns, Compeyson remains a remote, if powerful, influence for evil, one which operates from the rim of the story inward. But we do not see him as a three-

dimensional person even when he is killed. In the second place, though the backbone of the story is in one sense the story of Compeyson, the backbone is well concealed; or, to change the figure for the better, Compeyson is held at arm's length, is revealed only in snatches and at random moments, the relative scarcity of which makes them acceptable to the reader. The novel is bounded by Compeyson's villainy.

Philip Allingham notes:

A more sinister and destructive figure is "the gentleman-as criminal, Compeyson," the whited sepulcher of civilized society. His method of inflicting pain is subtle deception rather than brute violence ... It is he who is responsible for much of the story's suffering, for the betrayal and death of Magwitch, and for the swindling of Arthur and seduction of Miss Havisham (Allingham 1992: 465).

As Jones notes, Compeyson's villainy extends beyond Miss Havisham in his deception of Magwitch. Ultimately, as Allingham notes,

Dickens's principal deceivers (with the exception of Jaggers) are punished by fate. Magwitch and Miss Havisham, like Pip and Estella, achieve greater self-knowledge in return for their suffering. After he has learned from Pip of his daughter, Magwitch dies of wounds sustained in his attack on Compeyson. Clad in the outward and visible sign of her rejection of humanity, her tinder-dry wedding dress, Miss Havisham catches fire, and then, dying, confesses that she has wronged both Pip and Estella (Allingham 1992: 466).

While Compeyson engages in a range of deceits, the focus of this analysis is on the figure of the female. Magwitch, although a convict, has more autonomy and he achieves forgiveness through the third party of Pip, providing the money to educate him. Although he does not reveal who he is to Pip, he still provides him with opportunity, but like Collins's novel he acts through a third party to achieve his goal. In addition, he is not a static character who remains trapped in his situation unlike Miss Havisham who is trapped by the original fraud. Some of this can be attributed to women's status in the nineteenth century.

Great Expectations is set before the Married Women's Property Act of 1870 which gave women limited control of their property and earnings. The 1882 Act enabled them to have additional control over their property. In the decades before 1870, on her marriage all of Miss Havisham's property would be her husband's. Compeyson even manipulates this legal fact by assuring her that "plea that when he was her husband he must hold and manage it all." (Dickens, 2000: 147). Thus, illuminating the issues around women's legal vulnerabilities.

The ending of the courtship with a letter emphasises that this is a combination of romance and finance fraud. Compeyson did not meet Miss Havisham. He did not have the courage to end the fake relationship to her face. The financial fraud is the manipulation of Miss Havisham to use her money to buy Arthur's shares in the brewery. Herbert illuminates the pivotal moment:

"Which she received," I struck in, "when she was dressing for her marriage? At twenty minutes to nine?"

“At the hour and minute,” said Herbert, nodding, “at which she afterwards stopped all the clocks. What was in it, further than that it most heartlessly broke the marriage off, I can’t tell you, because I don’t know. When she recovered from a bad illness that she had, she laid the whole place waste, as you have seen it, and she has never since looked upon the light of day.” (Dickens, 2000: 148)

The section describes how the clocks were stopped at that moment and how she has never since emerged from Satis House. All of this is the unpacking of the romance fraud on Miss Havisham’s psyche. The financial fraud, which is Compeyson’s aim, is secondary to the psychological impact romance fraud has on women. That it is the ultimate betrayal and that to Miss Havisham the finance fraud is almost irrelevant, demonstrates the effect that the romantic betrayal had on her. The romance fraud was committed to obtain Miss Havisham’s money, but then ironically what Compeyson was after was not what hurt Miss Havisham the most. As David Holbrook points out, “Miss Havisham has been blighted emotionally just at the moment of sexual flowering, and her bodily life in an ancient gown symbolizes psychic paralysis” (Holbrook, 1993: 133). It was the way he obtained the money that broke her heart and shattered her psychologically. The story is partial, pieced together by Herbert from accounts he has heard, but what is learned by him is that fraud is perpetrated in conjunction with Miss Havisham’s half-brother:

‘Is that all the story?’ I asked, after considering it.

‘All I know of it; and indeed I only know so much, through piecing it out for myself; for my father always avoids it, and, even when Miss Havisham invited me to go there, told me no more of it than it was absolutely requisite I should understand.

But I have forgotten one thing. It has been supposed that the man to whom she gave her misplaced confidence, acted throughout in concert with her half-brother; that it was a conspiracy between them; and that they shared the profits.’ (Dickens, 2000: 148)

When Pip questions why Compeyson did not marry her to secure her entire fortune, Herbert surmises: “‘He may have been married already, and her cruel mortification may have been part of her half-brother’s scheme,’ said Herbert. ‘Mind! I don’t know that’” (Dickens, 2000: 148). The suggestion here is of potential bigamy, although this is not substantiated. What is clear is that Miss Havisham is the victim of a romance fraud perpetrated by conman, in conjunction with her half-brother, resulting in her romantic and financial defraudment and alienation from her friends.

‘What became of the two men?’ I asked, after again considering the subject.

‘They fell into deeper shame and degradation—if there can be deeper—and ruin.’

(Dickens, 2000: 148)

Herbert’s moral code defines the treatment of Miss Havisham as the deepest form of “shame” and “degradation”.

The legal ramifications of Miss Havisham’s jilting and abandonment are neglected by Dickens. During this period engagements were legally binding, and an action could be taken in British law against the breaking of an engagement until 1970: “the common law action for breach of promise of marriage, available in England from the mid seventeenth century to

the late twentieth century” could “be used to recover pecuniary damages from a faithless lover for the breach of an engagement” (Lettmaier, 2010: 1). Heather Nelson details that jilting broke a contract: “Those engagements were legal contracts throughout the century, so if women became uncertain in their engagements, they usually stayed engaged until marrying. Revoking consent resulted in “jilt” labels and actions for breach of promise of marriage for financial damages. However, law and literature did not reconcile on broken engagements, with novelists slightly supporting female jilting but disallowing male plaintiffs of actions for breach of promise” (Nelson, 2005: 27). Therefore, the fact Dickens does not punish Compeyson legally suggests his stance veered toward the inequalities of the female’s gender within the law. While Dickens does not punish Compeyson in law he has him drown towards the end of the novel. This is Dickens as executioner for the crimes Compeyson commits against Miss Havisham. This is a form of moral revenge or what I describe in the introduction as ‘societal law’ in that society has judged. Holmes, as we will see, operates in this way to judge crimes and pronounce punishments when there is no recourse in ‘official law’.

***Great Expectations* and Objects**

Lyn Pykett observes that the “Victorians were fascinated with objects and things - but recent scholarship has proved equally fascinated with this Victorian obsession” (Pykett, 2003: 347). In *Great Expectations* objects have various meanings, inferences and symbolism. Rather than represent their usual and true meaning, the effects and consequences of fraud are signified through the objects. The cake and dress, for instance, should denote happiness but instead, they show the decay, both physical and psychological, of Miss Havisham. The

dress is like a prison and the cake like her soul – in a state of perpetual rot. Satis House is epicentre of Miss Havisham’s wealth, both her home and the site of the brewery, and, associated with former wealth and affluence, its disintegration is now apparent. It is diminishing around Miss Havisham, becoming the site of her romantic and financial defraudment and imprisonment. Pip describes his first encounter with the mansion:

Within a quarter of an hour we came to Miss Havisham’s house, which was of old brick, and dismal, and had a great many iron bars to it. Some of the windows had been walked up; walled up; of those that remained, all the lower were rustily barred. There was a court-yard in front, and that was barred; so we had to wait, after ringing the bell, until someone should come to open it. (Dickens, 2000: 44)

This illuminates the connection between the house in which Miss Havisham and Estella live and the criminality Compeyson committed against her. The house is no longer what it was, just like Miss Havisham. The day the fraud was committed the house like Miss Havisham remained in that moment. It is broken, just like her and surrounded by a “great many iron bars” (Dickens, 2000: 44). These signify prison bars that Miss Havisham has placed on her own life as the home is now her prison. The house mirrors the houses of early Gothic where women are imprisoned and, in particular, the chamber of the dead Marchioness in Ann Radcliffe’s *The Mysteries of Udolpho*, a story which is also about the abuse, deceit and defraudment of women. When the heroine, Emily St Aubert, enters the death chamber of the Marchioness she finds a number of objects in black – gloves, slippers, a veil – and “as she surveys these objects, she describes the tomb-like room in which time has stood still for

twenty years” (Simmons, 1997: 11). James R. Simmons argues that Radcliffe’s description of the Marchioness’s room is similar to Pip’s description of Miss Havisham’s room, but Dickens (who had read Radcliffe’s novel) adapts the chamber of Marchioness’s murder for his own purposes:

Dickens sets up an interesting contrast of opposites here, as in the Marchioness’s room we have the black apparel of death – veils, gloves, shoes and dresses, while in Satis House, the very same articles of clothing are all white, representative of the bride’s wedding-day trousseau. The contrast of opposites extends beyond this, however, as the Marchioness’s death and funeral are represented as a beginning of life after death – she is believed to haunt the room - while for Miss Havisham her intended wedding day is clearly the beginning of death after life, as she is dead to the world for all practical purposes, and she thereafter unquestionably haunts her chambers. (Simmons, 1997: 12)

Simmons further argues that while Radcliffe’s description is simply “a description of a room tainted by death”, Dickens’s description and use of the Miss Havisham’s room has greater significance in the context of the novel: “Dickens’s depiction is ... a look at expectations lost and expectations thwarted ... as Dickens has taken a simple depiction, and enlarged it into something that describes not only a room, but serves as a representative thematic element for the novel as a whole” (Simmons, 1997: 12).

Satis House is just like the decaying wedding dress. Miss Havisham has locked herself away because of the effects of the romance and finance fraud against her. It has broken her trust

due to the emotional damage she incurred. Locking herself away is similar to locking a 'hysterical' woman away in this period. Women who went against the norm were normally classified and put under the appellation of 'hysterical'. Linda Raphael comments on the hysterical and mad Miss Havisham:

Miss Havisham's choice – if we can call it a choice finally – to live reclusively in the inner space of Satis House, enduring in a fetid atmosphere which threatens also to engulf young Estella, repeats the fate of many Victorian women. (Raphael, 1989: 402)

As Gilbert and Gubar argue, "The rise of the Victorian madwoman was one of history's self-fulfilling prophecies. In a society that not only perceived women as childlike, irrational, and sexually unstable but also rendered them legally powerless and economically marginal, it is not surprising that they should have formed the greater part of the residual categories of deviance from which doctors drew a lucrative practice and asylums much of their population" (Gilbert and Gubar, 1979: 402).

Raphael questions whether Miss Havisham has a choice or if she is, as Gilbert and Gubar assert, the victim of an abusive social system that rendered women "childlike, irrational, and sexually unstable" where the endpoint is incarceration. Madness is the consequence of the fraud against Miss Havisham. Therefore, by locking herself away in her home demonstrates that this woman is no longer 'normal' but a mad woman, the home which is her prison. She is entrapped within the fraud and betrayal and she is a casualty too. Miss Havisham does not get 'put away' like a mad woman, she has put herself away in Satis House. Lady Audley,

by contrast, is institutionalized. The contrast here is that Miss Havisham does not move beyond the confines of her house as she remains in stasis, Lady Audley, by contrast, is active and travels beyond her social place and transgresses gender and the law. This ending for Lady Audley subscribes to the period's treatment of deviant women. However, Miss Havisham dies due to her wedding dress catching fire; a more severe way of punishing Miss Havisham than a mental institution.

The Wedding Dress

Miss Havisham's wedding dress is a key object within the novel, the bridal gown which she never removed since she was abandoned and a victim of fraud. Dickens's choice of white is significant as wedding garments were not traditionally white at the time of Miss Havisham's intended marriage. Summer Brennan observes that Queen Victoria set the 'trend' of the white wedding dress when she married Prince Albert in 1840. Brennan suggests that "Before that, although brides did wear white when they could afford it, even the wealthiest and most royal among them also wore gold, or blue, or, if they were not rich or royal, whatever colour their best dress happened to be" (Brennan, 2017). Dickens's use of white is purposeful: white has connotations of purity and innocence. Thus, it can be argued that in fact Dickens deliberately did this for two reasons. Firstly, to show Miss Havisham as an innocent victim, with her white wedding dress denoting innocence and purity. This underscores Compeyson's manipulation and deception, making his crimes against her more brutal. The romance fraud committed against Miss Havisham is exacerbated by the purity the white dress represents. The second reason is to highlight the deterioration of the white

dress and the woman inside it. The dress itself is a visual representation of the decaying woman within it. Pip describes the dress and Miss Havisham:

Whether I should have made out this object so soon if there had been no fine lady sitting at it, I cannot say. In an armchair, with an elbow resting on the table and her head leaning on that hand, sat the strangest lady I have ever seen, or shall ever see. She was dressed in rich materials,—satins, and lace, and silks,—all of white. Her shoes were white. And she had a long white veil dependent from her hair, and she had bridal flowers in her hair, but her hair was white. Some bright jewels sparkled on her neck and on her hands, and some other jewels lay sparkling on the table. Dresses, less splendid than the dress she wore, and half-packed trunks, were scattered about. She had not quite finished dressing, for she had but one shoe on,—the other was on the table near her hand,—her veil was but half arranged, her watch and chain were not put on, and some lace for her bosom lay with those trinkets, and with her handkerchief, and gloves, and some flowers, and a Prayer-Book all confusedly heaped about the looking-glass. (Dickens, 2000: 46)

This first part of Pip's description highlights the items, objects, jewels, lace and clothes which Miss Havisham possesses. These show a woman who lives a life of luxury; Miss Havisham is wealthy, and her treasure is strewn all over the room. She is all in white. The whiteness of her attire and the colourful jewels suggest an innocent and 'easy victim'. She was a woman on her own with a fortune, therefore she was worth defrauding. While Arthur and Compeyson take advantage of Miss Havisham's affluence and innocence then manipulate her to access

her funds, she is susceptible to victimhood by her extravagance and lavish clothing. This was the catalyst for the defraudment. Consequently, to hurt his sister Arthur commits romance fraud 'by proxy' and blatantly commits financial fraud against her. Compeyson is a middleman between Arthur and Miss Havisham. In this triangle of fraud, which is quasi-incestuous, Compeyson plays the seducer. Arthur cannot seduce his own sister, so he gets someone else to do it instead.

This section also describes a specific moment in time. Miss Havisham is getting ready for her wedding day. She is nearly ready, but not fully. The exact time Miss Havisham becomes 'stuck' was "twenty minutes to nine" (Dickens, 2000: 46). During this period "weddings had to take place between 8am and noon" (Probert, 2019). Therefore, Miss Havisham is in the window where the wedding was soon going to take place. This is a precise moment which Dickens captures. Miss Havisham was not quite finished getting dressed as her gloves, watch, necklace and flowers are all scattered about the room. It can be asserted that Dickens chose this exact time to cause the ultimate disappointment for Miss Havisham. It causes the woman to doubt herself and potentially ask questions such as if she had got dressed quicker or if she had set an earlier time would she have been married? This specific moment in time potentially causes Miss Havisham to doubt herself. This moment is simultaneously captured and taken away. It is suspended between a moment of possibility and joy and impossibility and loss.

The second part of Pip's description registers an important change in how he views the room and its items:

It was not in the first few moments that I saw all these things, though I saw more of them in the first moments than might be supposed. But I saw that everything within my view which ought to be white, had been white long ago, and had lost its lustre and was faded and yellow. I saw that the bride within the bridal dress had withered like the dress, and like the flowers, and had no brightness left but the brightness of her sunken eyes. I saw that the dress had been put upon the rounded figure of a young woman, and that the figure upon which it now hung loose had shrunk to skin and bone. Once, I had been taken to see some ghastly waxwork at the Fair, representing I know not what impossible personage lying in state. Once, I had been taken to one of our old marsh churches to see a skeleton in the ashes of a rich dress that had been dug out of a vault under the church pavement. Now, waxwork and skeleton seemed to have dark eyes that moved and looked at me. I should have cried out, if I could.

(Dickens, 2000: 46)

This paragraph is very different to the preceding one as luxury gives way to Gothic description. It shows the state of Miss Havisham currently lives in and the decaying of her and her surroundings. This is a very powerful contrast between the lavish lifestyle and then the decomposing of Satis house and its occupant. The once white dress is now yellow, the once beautiful bride now “skin and bone”. This description by Pip explains the physical and emotional effects the act of fraud had on Miss Havisham. Pip's description of the decayed dress, likened to an exhumed skeleton, is compounded by his representation of Miss Havisham as “withered”, “sunken” and “ghastly”. Miss Havisham is stuck within this dress. The dress that once represented a woman on the happiest day of her life, a beautiful and pure woman, now represents a woman imprisoned within the dress, a figure dug up from a

vault. The dress is a constant reminder of the fraud, crime and damage. Whilst in the dress Miss Havisham cannot stop her anger and disdain towards men and life itself, Miss Havisham lets the actions of Compeyson define her life and by doing this she cannot move on from that moment in her life. Therefore, the physical wedding dress loses its beauty and what it represents and becomes a prison for Miss Havisham. Locked within the deception she remains the victim of romance fraud. Regis and Wynne support the argument as they comment: "Miss Havisham's wedding dress distorts all of the cultural meanings surrounding the bride, especially those linked to notions of hope, fertility, and renewal" (Regis and Wynne, 2012: 37). Regis and Wynne assert a similar point that the wedding dress is significant that it no longer represents what a traditional wedding dress should. However, Regis and Wynne suggest that "Dickens's imaginary linked clothing and death, where the clothes are depicted at times more active, more "alive" than their human owners" (Regis & Wynne, 2012: 40). What they suggest is that the dress is not a representation of death, but the moment Miss Havisham becomes a victim of romance and finance fraud. It now is a poison entrapping Miss Havisham. She lives in a state of suspended animation, wreaking revenge on men through little children. The impact of fraud turns inwards toward herself and the family.

Miss Havisham is always immobile, always sitting. She is not a physically active character. She asserts her influence by manipulation; she controls and manipulates from her home. Comparing Miss Havisham to Lady Audley underlines their physical differences. Lady Audley is a mobile and dominating character. She moves about the country changing her identity. She even pushes George Talboys down a well. Lady Audley describes her crime to Robert Audley underlining her intention to kill: "When you say I killed George Talboys, you say the

truth” (Braddon 1997: 274). While Lady Audley wreaks revenge through attempted murder and arson, Miss Havisham uses Estella to commit her deviant acts. She is what can be described as a ‘puppet master’. She controls those around her by assertion, manipulation, and language. Miss Havisham has no remorse for her actions as she sees herself as the ultimate victim. It is only near the end of her life that Miss Havisham reflects on the effects of her own crimes against others. She does not need to be physical; she can commit similar offences as Lady Audley by not lifting a finger. Miss Havisham does not need to move but the question is can she move? Miss Havisham is trapped, and her movements have become self-restricting and self-limiting. Both victims (Miss Havisham and Lady Audley) respond differently to the betrayal conducted against them, but their different approaches end in similar, if not in the same, ways.

The Wedding Cake

The wedding cake in *Great Expectations* is a grotesque parody of a wedding cake – rotting and infested. Miss Havisham lives with her wedding cake in a state of suspended festivity. A cake that was once magnificent and celebratory has changed in meaning in this chamber and is so changed from its original form that Pip cannot identify what it is: “What do you think that is?” she asked me, again pointing with her stick; “that, where those cobwebs are?” “I can’t guess what it is, ma’am.” “It’s a great cake. A bride-cake. Mine!” (Dickens, 2000: 69). The cake now is covered in cobwebs and is decaying around Miss Havisham. It is a constant reminder of the day she was betrayed and alongside the wedding dress and other wedding paraphernalia, keeping her in that moment.

Dickens describes the wedding cake as a 'Bride-cake'. Throughout history the cake served at a wedding has had various forms and names. Traditional in the seventeenth century they were referred to as 'Bride-Pies' followed by the development of the bride-cake. "The name Bride cakes emphasized that the bride was the focal point of the wedding. Many other objects also were given the prefix of bride, such as the bride bed, bridegroom and bridesmaid. By the late nineteenth century, wedding cakes became popular, and the use of the bride pie disappeared" (Maisie Fantaisie).

The fact that Dickens refers to the cake as a bride-cake emphasises the role of Miss Havisham within the wedding on that day. The bride-cake was made for her, the dress was made for her, and the day was supposed to be about her and union with Compeyson. The committal of fraud took that away. Her cake could never be eaten by the guests, her dress never taken down the aisle and her love never announced within the church. All of these items and objects are left open, unused and unresolved for Miss Havisham. She is unclear as to why and how the actions have been taken against her. Thus, she remains in that moment, that moment of suspended optimism, for the wedding day she desired, but never has.

The history of the wedding cake, its significance and symbolism are important in the context of the novel. Even before the Middle Ages, a cake was always used to celebrate at a wedding. Even going back to ancient Rome, the wedding cake was a form of bread. This was a symbol of fortune and wealth for the bride and groom. The white wedding cake did not become popular until the Victorian era. "A pure white colour was much sought after, as white icing on a wedding cake symbolizes purity and virginal attributes – a notion first put forward in Victorian times. Before then most bride cakes were white for a more practical reason. Because the ingredients for the bride cake were expensive, especially the sugar for the icing,

white icing meant that only the finest refined sugar had been used. Thus, a pure white cake was status symbol, a display of the family wealth” (Wilson, 2005: 70). Bringing this history back to *Great Expectations*, the cake itself could be considered as representing the femininity of Miss Havisham. Like Wilson states, a white wedding cake symbolises celebration, purity and virginal attributes. These are attributes Miss Havisham loses within the novel. A rotten bride-cake is like a rotten soul. The cake itself and its connotations remind the reader in conjunction with the character of Miss Havisham of the fact that she is no longer ‘pure’ and ‘innocent’ like the white cake should represent but a scorned woman who has developed a dark side. She exposes children – Estella and Pip – to this experience of decay which foregrounds the danger she represents to them. This can only be described as a form of child abuse. Miss Havisham exposes Estella and Pip to the decaying wedding, the crumbling house and her withering soul. This is not something children of their age should be exposed to. It can be asserted that Miss Havisham not only wants to control and project her hatred upon Estella but the entire younger generation too. Miss Havisham seems to be trying to influence the younger characters within this novel and implant her victimisation within them.

The cake is normally cut by the bride and only in recent years by the groom as well. This has many meanings behind it. The most common that it is a symbol of the bride losing her virginity. However, another meaning behind the cake cutting of the bride and groom is that this is the first act they partake in together after being married. Therefore, the cake in Dickens’s novel becomes quite significant from this perspective. The cake is never cut, the marriage never happens, and Miss Havisham is left a victim. This is contrary to what should happen on a wedding day. The fact the cake is never cut further symbolises how Miss Havisham remains within the day she was deceived. Just as the dress is never taken down the

aisle, the cake is never cut. If the cake cutting represents the first actions of a newly married couple, it also signals for Miss Havisham that many further actions would never occur. The wedding objects around Miss Havisham rather than signify what a wedding should be now entrap her within the darkness of that day. She cannot get rid of them because the fraudulent acts committed against her damage her too much. This causes her to retreat into that moment of happiness when she was just about to get married. Therefore, she is imprisoned within the moments of happiness and betrayal, forever watching the disintegration of that moment and possible future.

Ripples of Fraud in *Great Expectations*

In this section the 'Ripple Effect' is going to be examined. This is described in the *Oxford Dictionary* as "a situation in which an event or action has an effect on something, which then has an effect on something else" (Oxford Dictionary, 2021). The ripple effect of Miss Havisham's defraudment spreads across the novel. As John Mullan observes, "there is no getting away from crime" in this novel (Mullan, 2017). Miss Havisham, a victim of a moral crime, also compounds the crimes committed against her and perpetuates a cycle of manipulation, abuse and misery. Miss Havisham's adopted daughter Estella is another victim of the fraud committed by Compeyson as she bears the brunt of Miss Havisham's actions. This is illuminated as Miss Havisham trains Estella to be as cold and as brutal as her when it comes to men. She wants Estella to lure men and then break their hearts (just like Compeyson did to her). She does this by making her beautiful and lavishing her with jewellery and clothes. Pip describes one of her dresses as "Handsome" (Dickens, 2000: 68). Estella makes a comment which indicates her nature towards men: "Moths and all sorts of

ugly creatures,” replied Estella with a glance towards him, “hover about a lighted candle. Can the candle help it?” (Dickens, 2000: 255). Here Estella demonstrates what her role is, what she has been trained for. Her beauty is inviting but like moths to a flame when suitors get too close, she will burn them because of their gender. This hatred of men indoctrinated into Estella stems from the original crime of romance fraud against Miss Havisham. Therefore, this has a ripple effect on everyone (not just Estella) around Miss Havisham. By lavishing her wealth upon Estella for the manipulation of men Miss Havisham provides Estella with all the weapons she needs to destroy the opposite gender. This is illuminated when Pip describes Estella after not seeing her for years. “The lady whom I had never seen before, lifted up her eyes and looks archly at me, and then I saw that the eyes were Estella’s eyes. But she was so much changed, was so much more beautiful, so much more womanly, in all things winning admiration had made such wonderful advance, that I seemed to have made none” (Dickens, 2000: 192). Here Pip is highlighting the changes Miss Havisham has made to Estella to create what can only be described as a ‘New and improved’ Miss Havisham or Miss Havisham 2.0, if you will. She moulds Estella and gives her all the trappings of wealth and beauty but denies her emotional or physical love. Maya Rao asserts that Estella is: “Described through gestures and little physical detail, Estella has no individualized physical presence in the novel. Pip tells the reader that she is beautiful but does not describe her, and the reader knows Estella only through her hand motions or shining eyes” (Rao, 1996). Estella is not an individual or distinct in any way. Moulded by Miss Havisham she has been under the influence of Miss Havisham’s revenge, beliefs and opinions which inevitably shape and prejudice her. Therefore, Estella is not an individual but the consequence, or an object, of the fraud committed against Miss Havisham. Estella is an object made in Miss Havisham’s chamber. In her own analysis of her situation, she describes

the darkness of the room, both literally and metaphorically. She has been shaped and trapped in this dark chamber of Miss Havisham's physical space and psyche.

Pip is also affected by this ripple effect, as he is infatuated with Estella. This is what Miss Havisham desires. Pip does not see himself worthy of Estella and his undoing is bound up with this sense of his lack of worth. As the adopted daughter of Miss Havisham Estella has a high social standing while Pip comes from the forge. Pip does manage to climb the social ladder, aided by a secret sponsor, whom he mistakenly believes for a time is Miss Havisham. When he achieves stability and security at the novel's end, he again encounters Estella, who has been damaged by marriage and has no capacity for love. Estella states: "I have not bestowed my tenderness anywhere. I have never had such thing" (Dickens, 2000: 195). Romance is blighted for Estella and its roots lie in the original romance fraud perpetrated on Miss Havisham. The actions taken against her impact on the relationship between Pip and Estella. Miss Havisham is stuck in that moment of utter heartbreak, and she drags Estella there with her. Her actions, although they can be understood in the context of her own person and suffering, affect everyone around her. The oppressed becomes the oppressor, the victim of crime, the fraudster, the person fooled by love, fools others. The catalyst for this generational destruction is the original romance fraud.

Within this context it is important to understand the end of the novel in which Estella and Pip meet at Satis House. Firstly, they meet in reconciliation of their past together. The house which played such an important part in their stories is burnt down and they are free of its entrapment. However, the prolonged trauma which happened in that house remains locked within both the characters. This trauma continues in Estella's life through her abusive

marriage. Arguably, she was drawn to that marriage as a result of Miss Havisham's breakdown and behaviour towards her. Unfortunately, the ending to this novel is not a happy one as the present is tainted by what has happened in Satis House. The romance fraud has affected even the younger generations and its consequences have lasting effects not only on their financial and physical state but also their psyches. This novel highlights the ripple effect that romance and finance fraud can have not only on the victim but also those around them. Dickens delves into the emotional side of romance fraud and how the victim (Miss Havisham) can also create other victims (Pip, Estella). Dickens seemed aware of generational trauma before the concept became understood in the twentieth century. He is unique in this thesis as *Great Expectations* is the only novel which examines the generational impact of fraud. Although the ending to this story is not a contented one, the symbolic house we see through the novel is no longer there, signifying the spiritual release of Miss Havisham and the younger generation. The novel concludes with a suggestion of a new start not just for Pip and Estella but for Satis House as well: "There was no house now, no brewery, no building whatever left, but the wall of the old garden. The cleared space had been enclosed with a rough fence, and looking over it, I saw that some of the old ivy had struck root anew and was growing green on low quiet mounds of ruin." (Dickens, 2000: 398). The complete property is gone, but the plants are starting to grow, symbolic of a rebirth of the house and of those who were shaped by it. Romance and financial fraud have finally ended.

Great Expectations and *The Woman in White* were published five years apart and Dickens is influenced by the earlier text. Both authors can be seen as representing third-party fraud and the manipulation of weaker minded individuals. Furthermore, Miss Havisham mirrors aspects of Fosco. Like Miss Havisham, Fosco is a static character who allows others to do his

bidding, only playing a minor part within the crime of fraud against Laura. Miss Havisham takes up a similar role by luring Pip into her home and into a relationship Estella. Like Percival, Estella again does the bidding of another character. Miss Havisham is the brain behind the operation, but Estella is the face. Groomed by Miss Havisham she is indoctrinated with Miss Havisham's thought and beliefs: "She hung upon Estella's beauty, hung upon her words, hung upon her gestures, and sat mubling her own trembling fingers while she looked at her, as though she were devouring the beautiful creature she had reared" (Dickens, 2000: 249). Therefore, it is not unreasonable to suggest that Estella was an unwilling participant within Miss Havisham's master plan. In this sense Estella parallels Percival. Both participate within a scheme to either harm or unlawfully 'con' another person. However, Percival although dominated by Fosco, is a man with his own thoughts and integrity. Fosco comments: "I say what other people only think; and when all the rest of the world is in a conspiracy to accept the mask for the true face, mine is the rash hand that tears off the plump pasteboard, and shows the bare bones beneath" (Collins, 2012: 260). Fosco is not only a manipulator, he presents himself as an individual who 'tears' the mask off others. However, Fosco betrays both his savage behaviour and his underlying principles. With Fosco and Percival, Collins created the classic dominant and submissive criminal duo. Stefanie Sevick comments that "we see the influence of Count Fosco driving the event of the narrative. His powerful persuasion over the characters coerces them into acting differently" (Sevick 2010). He has the power to stop at any time but is motivated by the financial reward. Though Estella as a person has her own mind, she has been inculcated by Miss Havisham from a young age. All she knows is Miss Havisham and her beliefs, therefore, she is a disinclined partaker. It is interesting to note that both Collins and Dickens examine third party fraud and demonstrate how 'weaker' minded people act on others' behaviours.

Lady (Fr)Audley

Braddon explores the crime of fraud and the effect it has on women. She uses her female protagonist to illuminate the inequality of women regarding the law during this period and novel follows the journey of a woman who can break the law to balance the scales. Natalie Schroeder argues that *Lady Audley's Secret* represents "Victorian women's resistance to socially prescribed social roles" and this and other "sensation novels indirectly voiced women's ambitions for individuality and power" (Schroeder, 1988: 87). While the crimes committed by Lady Audley can be argued as justified within this novel, they ultimately lead to her downfall and incarceration. Lady Audley is first a victim of abandonment which consequently leaves her in stagnation. Therefore, to move herself out of this situation she fakes her own death, changes her identity, and remarries. By doing this she commits the crimes of bigamy, as well as attempted murder and arson to hide her fraudulent crimes. This section examines the implications of Lady Audley's actions on her and on those around her.

In her 'original' life Lady Audley, whose real name is Helen, is married to George Talboys. She is the classic Victorian woman, a mother and housewife, an 'angel in the home'. The first sighting of fraud which leads to a chain of subsequent fraudulent events is the abandonment of Helen by Talboys. Talboys is disowned by his father and with the money that came with their relationship he leaves Helen and their son to emigrate to Australia. Talboys justifies his actions:

We lived splendidly in Italy as long as the two thousand pounds from my service in the cavalry held out. When it finally ran low, we had to return and board with her drunken old father. He fleeced us of the few pounds we had left. Worst, I could not find a job despite all my efforts. She finally broke down, blaming me for all of it. I'll admit I went into a rage. I fled to Australia to find the gold all the world said was there. I left my Helen asleep with our baby in her arms and a note explaining.

(Braddon 1997 online)

Although commenting on his actions, Talboys does not take responsibility for them or for the economic support of his wife and child. It suggests that abandonment of the wife was acceptable if he can justify it. We later find out that this does not work the same way for Helen. She does not elicit the same sympathy and compassion as Talboys does. Olive Anderson comments: "In mid-nineteenth-century England a missing husband was often assumed to have 'gone abroad' or 'gone to Australia' and not surprisingly, since gross emigration averaged more than four persons in each thousand of England's inhabitants in the early 1850's and the boom was above all in sailings to Australia" (Anderson, 1997: 104). Braddon is tapping into this social phenomenon in her 1862 novel. Anderson infers that men were using this to get out of their marriages and leave their wives behind to start a new life abroad. It left abandoned women in stasis as divorce was not a viable option in the mid nineteenth century. Not for women. Critics Layton and Landow comment; "Only three hundred or so marriages, predominantly those of aristocrats, were dissolved between 1700 and 1857. More divorces might have been granted had women been able to petition to have their marriages dissolved, but they could not, and the reasons why they could not do much to explain the reasons divorce was permitted at all — and why it required wealthy,

powerful male petitioners” (Layton & Landow, 2018). Maia McAleavey argues that the 1857 Matrimonial Causes Act “immediately preceded the explosion of bigamy novels in the early 1860s” as this act made divorce a more “realistic possibility” for the middle classes (McAleavey, 2015: 6). The novel opens in 1857, a significant watershed moment for social change, as Helen Talboys (under the name of Lucy Graham) contracts a bigamous marriage with Sir Michael Audley. The date is significant in terms of the shift in divorce law. For Albert Venn Dicey, a law scholar writing in 1917, the 1857 act “did away with the iniquity of a law which theoretically prohibited divorce, but in reality, conceded to the rich a right denied to the poor” (Skelly, 1996: 38). Helen’s circumstances prior to the novel’s opening demonstrate the baseline Helen had to work from to move on from her life of abandonment and poverty. Helen was a woman trapped within a situation which she did not choose or want; she was trapped as George’s wife until he either came back, died, or divorced her. In marrying Sir Michael, she chooses to take the law into her own hands at a seminal moment in divorce law history.

Before this, however, Helen needs a new life, and to do this, she needs a new identity. This is the first fraudulent crime committed by Helen which generates a ‘domino effect’ of other fraudulent crimes. Helen Talboys is a victim in the first instance and later becomes a perpetrator of fraud. As Fiona Peters argues, Braddon, ‘exposes the unfairness of a society that seemingly forced women into becoming fraudulent in their actions and even in their natures, playing at being the “angel in the house” while their underlying, barred or disallowed desires led them into actions deemed evil, such as deceit, bigamy, and murder’ (Peters, 1996: 198). Braddon may also have been working out through Lady Audley her own “essentially bigamous relationship” with the publisher John Maxwell (Fahnestock, 1981: 55).

Braddon lived with and had five children with Maxwell, while his wife, whom he was unable to divorce due to the law prohibiting divorce on the grounds of insanity, was in an asylum. Robert Wolff observes that “The eldest of her own five children was born while she was still writing *Lady Audley’s Secret* and *Aurora Floyd*, ‘my pair of bigamy novels’ as she once called them in a letter to Bulwer. A specialist in literary bigamy, she was herself involved in a liaison with a married man” (Wolff, 1979: 108).

Braddon’s private life could be described as “sensational as the fiction for which she became famous and in defiance of conventional morality and the codes of propriety governing middle-class female conduct” (Beller, 2012: 5). It can be argued that Braddon modelled her literary works on her own life and personal experiences. Her romantic relationships were so controversial that they could be written on a page. Her relationship with Maxwell lasted until his death in 1895 and could only legalize her union with Maxwell after his wife’s death in 1874” (Beller, 2012: 5). It would be naive to not notice the slippage between Braddon’s real life and her fictional writings. Although Braddon did not commit bigamy, her union, like Collins’s unconventional unions, would be deemed as morally wrong in Victorian society. Both channel these unconventional relationships into their fictions, exposing the range of relationships hiding in plain sight. While Collins and Braddon succeeded in navigating unconventional relationships with their success as novelists, the lives of their characters show the vulnerabilities of those who live outside the law or who flout it.

The abandonment of Helen to poverty is the catalyst for the rest of the novel and the crimes that occur within it. This initial action provokes a reaction from Helen which can now be justified but is not socially acceptable. The first reaction to her situation and moral crime

Helen commits was the abandonment of her child. She leaves her child with her father. If there had been no one to care for the child and the child's parent could not be identified, they would be taken by the parish. All the crimes that follow such as the changing of identity, bigamy and even murderous attempts all stem back to the desertion of Helen Talboys, a woman who probably would have never committed such offences but was left in a situation by a man that left her no choice to move on with her life, except to take the law into her own hands.

Changing Names

The character we know as Helen Talboys in the beginning of the novel changes her name to Lucy Graham. She abandons her old life and starts a new one. "No more dependence, no more drudgery, no more humiliations,' she said:' every trace of the old life melted away – every clue to identity buried and forgotten- except these, except these'" (Braddon, 1997: 12). The law around identity was vague and unreliable during this period, making it easy for someone to just walk away from their old life and start a new one. In this way Lucy Graham takes agency, unlike Anne Catherick and Laura Glyde who are made interchangeable by men. The Fraud Act was not introduced until 2006 and crimes of identity fraud and identity theft were neglected in law. Braddon's female protagonist changes her identity several times throughout the novel, as well as her class position. Changing her name and contracting marriage to wealthier men, enables her social mobility. By contrast, Laura is committed to an asylum and Anne to a grave.

Lucy Graham comes from nowhere into Sir Michael Audley's life. She was not created until Helen decided to create her and she is successful in her new persona. Legal identifications were not required for jobs and prenuptials. This woman who was created by Helen was only real in person and not on paper. However, she deals with this by forged references:

No one knew anything of her, except that she came in answer to an advertisement which Mr. Dawson, the surgeon, had inserted in *The Times*. She came from London; and the only reference she gave was to a lady at a school at Brompton, where she had once been a teacher. But this reference was so satisfactory that none other was needed, and Miss Lucy Graham was received by the surgeon as the instructress of his daughters. Her accomplishments were so brilliant and numerous, that it seemed strange that she should have answered an advertisement offering such very moderate terms of remuneration as those named by Mr. Dawson; but Miss Graham seemed perfectly well satisfied with her situation, and she taught the girls to play sonatas by Beethoven, and to paint from nature after Creswick, and walked through a dull, out-of-the-way village to the humble little church, three times every Sunday, as contentedly as if she had no higher aspiration in the world than to do so all the rest of her life. (Braddon, 1997: 6)

Lucy Graham had a reference on paper which could have been easily forged. This was all that was required to convince an employer of her previous work and her identity.

“Fraudulent recommendation letters were often used by women who hoped to rise socially” (Tarr, 2022: 191). In addition, Lucy has the accomplishments of an educated middle-class woman: she teaches sonatas and art. Her identity is inscribed in her “brilliant” and

“numerous” “accomplishments.” Nothing else is needed. Lucy Graham emulates a middle-class identity, and she plays on the identity gap within the law to pursue her new life. This new persona is necessary due to her abandonment by her husband. Every crime committed, every wrongdoing and every offence returns to that moment of abandonment. Like *Great Expectations* everything is created from a singular moment, a singular betrayal and a singular action – Helen Talboys is asleep with her baby in her arms when her husband abandons her and destroys her life. Talboys leaves a note to explain, just as Compeyson sends a letter to Miss Havisham. Miss Havisham is defrauded romantically and financially which then leaves her ‘stuck’ within that moment of vulnerability just as she is preparing for her wedding; Helen Talboys is abandoned by her husband George in a moment of vulnerability. Neither betrayer faces his victim; they abscond.

While changing identity is possible for Helen, Braddon shows how one can change their identity but cannot change one’s inner self. She illuminates this through the portrait of Helen/Lucy/Lady Audley:

No one but a pre-Raphaelite would have painted, hair by hair, those feathery masses of ringlets with every glimmer gold, and every shadow of pale brown. No one but a pre-Raphaelite would have exaggerated every attribute of that delicate face as to give a lurid lightness to the blonde complexion, and a strange, sinister light to the deep blue eyes. No one but a pre-Raphaelite could have given to that pretty pouting mouth the hard and almost wicked look it had in the portrait” (Braddon, 1997: 57)

A name can be changed, an age can be changed but the person you are can be altered but never fully changed. Lady Audley is depicted as beautiful but what lies underneath that gorgeous exterior is indicated as frightening. Her darkness which she assumed when she was abandoned is coming through in this painting of her. She cannot change that. Lady Audley's fraudulent crime of changing her identity cannot be concealed fully as her dark soul and anger with her past will always be inside her. Therefore, she can skirt the law and change her exterior, but her interior (her soul and nature) will always be her downfall.

Harrison, Fatima and Ofek discuss the centrality of the portrait:

The portrait has a central role in the ambiguous conclusion of the novel. While shutting Lady Audley herself out of society, and by the same token, out of the world of self-production and self-redefinition in which the lady excels, Braddon's last description of the deserted, defeated patriarchal mansion dwells on that portrait. Braddon seems to imply that, on a metaliterary level, even in the absence of the transgressive heroine, the author's redefinition of female representation has mobilized a new aesthetic and social discourse, which will not end with the punishment of Lady Audley, or with the book itself. The portrait is still there, albeit hidden by a curtain, waiting to be looked at and discussed. (Harrison, Fatima & Ofek, 2006: 110)

The portrait both reveals her nature but also continues haunt the novel. Both Miss Havisham and Lady Audley are haunting characters and characters haunted by the past. The reactions to the deceit of Miss Havisham and Lady Audley are very similar. Neither of these

women can get over their treacheries. They are embittered and in both cases this not only affects themselves and their happiness but those around them too.

Bigamy

Lady Audley's commits bigamy, marrying Sir Michael without a dissolution of her previous marriage. Bigamy was commonplace in society and in the sensation novel, and it was relatively easy to commit the offence of bigamy. This was due to several things: divorce was expensive, and both spouses had to agree to the separation. Tracking and legal documentation were not advanced and, a person could move to another city, town or country and provide false information and it was usually taken at face value. "It was easier just to move to a different part of the country and start again" (Brown, 2021). Writing about the American context, Timothy Gilfoyle argues that in addition to short courtships and quick marriages "court records reveal that both parties took few social precautions before marriage. Investigations into a suitor's history were minimal" (Gilfoyle, 2009: 148).

Braddon engages with issues from divorce law and has her female protagonist explore not only how bigamy was easily committed but the consequences of it as well. Cox outlines the issues of divorce when he comments, "Divorce laws have made it much easier for couples to legally separate, and cohabitation outside marriage is much more common than in pre-World War II England and Wales. However, this was not always the case; before men and women could divorce on equal terms and without blame being apportioned; bigamy was seen as one way in which men or less, usually women, could evade an unhappy and sometimes dangerous marriage and begin afresh" (Cox, 2012: 2). What Cox suggests is that

bigamy was almost socially acceptable, particularly for men. Men and women could leave their marriages and start a new life even though this was a criminal offence. Helen presents herself as the unmarried Lucy Graham and as such dodges marital law and the requirement to divorce her husband to marry again. However, the law does catch up with her in the end. Lady Audley pinpoints her motives of the crime:

Mr George Talboys was a cornet in a dragon regiment. He was the only son of a rich country gentleman. He fell in love with me, and married me three months after my seventeenth birthday. I think I loved him as much as it was in my power to love anybody; not more than I have loved you, Sir Michael; not so much; for when you married me you elevated me to a position that he could have never have given me".
(Braddon, 1997: 279)

Lady Audley admits that her marriage to Sir Michael was for the pursuit of wealth and stature. She did not want to repeat her marriage with George whom she married him for love, and he ended up abandoning her. Her second marriage was economic rather than romantic.

It is interesting to note that the crime committed against Miss Havisham is the very crime Lady Audley commits against Sir Michael. Compeyson defrauded Miss Havisham by romancing her (romance fraud) to obtain her wealth. Similarly, Helen Talboy/ Lucy Graham romances and marries Sir Michael for the wealth and stature he can provide her. However, the crime committed by Helen Talboy / Lucy Graham goes beyond the crimes committed by Compeyson against Miss Havisham. She not only commits romance fraud by willingly

entering a bigamous marriage unknown to her second husband, and further commits financial fraud because everything she obtains in their bigamous and loveless marriage was given to her because Sir Michael believed she loved him. Therefore, Lady Audley commits both types of fraud on Sir Michael. However, the law ultimately 'traps' her and it is the law that leaves her in a state of being imprisoned within her marriage. While Talboys is exonerated, Lady Audley is punished. This highlights how the law was not servicing the circumstances of women and was too far behind in enabling viable divorces. What Braddon is expressing is a proto-feminist outlook on the law.

Faking Death

Helen fakes her death, committing pseudocide. As registers of birth, marriage and death were confined to parishes, it was relatively easy to begin anew. Helen fakes her own death by using the authority of a newspaper: *The Times*. That it is an authoritative source is revealed through Talboys' reaction when he sees his wife's alleged death notice:

I cannot tell how long he sat blankly staring at one paragraph among the list of deaths, before his dazed brain took in its full meaning; but after considerable pause he pushed the newspaper over to Robert Audley, and with a face that had changed from its dark bronze to a sickly, chalky grayish white, and with an awful calmness in his manner, he pointed with his finger to a line which ran thus: "On the 24th inst., at Ventnor, Isle of Wight, Helen Talboys, aged 22. (Braddon, 1997: 31)

By having her death published in *The Times* Helen Talboys/ Lucy Graham created a façade. This façade is created by a woman to service her perpetration of fraud unlike *The Woman in White* in which the manipulation of death (the supposed death of Laura Glyde) is orchestrated by men. Helen / Lucy follows the publication of the death notice by providing further evidence in Ventnor as her death is confirmed by the landlady of the house where she was staying. Talboys is directed to her newly made grave. He finds his father-in-law and his son dressed in black and “the confirmation of this great grief of his life. His wife was dead.” (Braddon, 1997: 36). His grief, however, it must be noted does not extend to concern for his son. While providing for his economic care, he abandons him immediately, leaving him with wife’s father, paralleling his first abandonment of him as an infant and of his mother.

Helen’s fraud is elaborate and the faking of the evidence of her death is easily staged. Talboys in this initial moment believes that his wife has died whilst he was abroad to the extent that he has her tombstone inscribed with loving words. The irony here is that he abandoned “beloved wife” and his “sorrowing” are the result of his own actions:

Sacred to the Memory of Helen,

THE BELOVED WIFE OF GEORGE TALBOYS,

Who departed this life August 24th, 18—, aged 22,

Deeply regretted by her sorrowing Husband. (Braddon, 1997: 35)

No death certificate is produced. The evidence, though seemingly compelling, is fakeable. There is a body in the grave, but it is not that of Talboys' wife but rather that of a working-class girl. Lady Audley exchanges bodies as easily as she changes identity. Further Lady Audley is not revealed as the criminal through legal documents and tracing but rather through features someone could not change such as handwriting, appearance, belongings and personality. She is ultimately unfortunate that Talboys is the friend of Robert Audley, her second husband's nephew.

This crime of fraud came under the name of 'Larceny' until 1968. The Larceny Act 1968 did not define the crime of fraud (fraud did not actually get a definition until 2006).

Nevertheless, fraudulent crimes did fall under the umbrella of larceny. However, this law focused more on blackmail, theft and monetary fraud rather than pseudocide. This novel was published in 1862 which was in the peak of what can be described as a fraudulent era; where crimes such as bigamy were much debated but not often prosecuted. Consequently, it is unsurprising that Braddon incorporated such issues of the undefined crime of fraud and the lack of scrutinising of fraudulent crimes within her novel. Lady Audley is the beacon of fraudulent crimes, shining a light over the ease of the committal of these crimes as well as the lack of criminal punishment.

This is a very different approach to certain fraudulent crimes when compared to *Great Expectations*. Dickens's novel focuses more on the reaction to a fraudulent crime committed against a woman. Braddon takes a more proto-feminist approach and allows her protagonist to branch out into the world of crime. Braddon has her character have a more active,

physical role with the law and the issues the law had during this time. The law is at the forefront of this novel, represented in the barrister Robert Audley, who pieces together Lady Audley's actual identity through clues she leaves behind. This contrasts with Dickens who has Miss Havisham almost obliterated by the fraudulent crime perpetrated against her. He avoids exploring the depth of this fraudulent crime by setting it in the past to focus on the reaction to and impact of the crime. Dickens has his female protagonist oppressed by fraud whereas Braddon uplifts her character's stature: she acquires status by using fraud to her advantage.

The Notion of Space

Personal space within *Lady Audley's Secret* is highly significant. Robert Audley invades the privacy of Lady Audley and commits a crime to reveal Lady Audley's identity and crimes. Robert breaks into Lady Audley's personal space – her boudoir – to find incriminating evidence. This is a form of trespass and trespass was a criminal offence. Modern concepts of property rights did not emerge fully formed in the early sixteenth century. Instead, there was a gradual solidification of property rights and law across the early modern centuries. As a result, these kinds of disputes, occupations and trespasses went on throughout the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries and beyond (McDonagh and Griffin, 2015). McDonagh and Griffin explore the law before and during this period, emphasizing how the law had not fully evolved. Robert Audley potentially knew this as barrister and uses the law to his advantage to find the incriminating evidence he needs to convict and condemn Lady Audley.

"Because, if you don't mind crawling upon your hands and knees, you can see my lady's apartments, for that passage communicates with her dressing-room. She doesn't know of it herself, I believe. How astonished she'd be if some black-visored burglar, with a dark-lantern, were to rise through the floor some night as she sat before her looking-glass, having her hair dressed for a party!" "Shall we try the secret passage, George?" asked Mr. Audley.

"Yes, if you wish it." (Braddon, 1997: 55)

This section is underlining that Robert Audley and Talboys are trespassing into the space of Lady Audley reinforced in Audley's description of them as burglars. They are fully aware of their actions within this section. "Trespass is a concept of the civil law. A person enters a building or part of a building as a trespasser if it is in the possession of another and he enters without the right by law or permission to do so" (Jones, Card & Cross, 1988: 326). Although Alicia gives them passage into Lady Audley's personal space, she did not have the authority to do this, as it is not her place to do so and it is not her property. Alicia is merely aiding and abetting the crime which itself is a criminal offence. Aiding and abetting is described as: "The assistance or encouragement of the perpetrator", in this case Robert and George (Jones, Card & Cross, 1988: 591). Alicia not only gives them access but tells them how to get in without anyone knowing and how to escape as well. This is a clear case of aiding and abetting.

Braddon's focus on the secret passage is significant. The adjective 'secret' infers that Lady Audley does not know about this passage and that others could access her personal space. Therefore, Robert Audley is not only accessing her private space but knowingly does this

through deceptive means. This is a crime of breaking and entering and trespassing. However, this is largely overlooked and overshadowed by the crimes Lady Audley commits. Lady Audley's crimes are the focus points, thus highlighting the separation of the law between the masculine and the feminine. Braddon is illuminating the hypocrisy of the law and society's perception of the gender hierarchy. While Lady Audley's crimes are highlighted and examined in detail, Robert Audley's crime is overlooked. Clearly, this is a case of 'the end justifying the means'. Therefore, his trespassing and invasion of space is vindicated because this allows him to reveal the truth about Lady Audley, despite the violation of Lady Audley's space. She has committed fraud and criminal offences, yet this does not negate the laws everyone should abide by. Audley is hypocritical in his justification that to commit a crime for the outcome of justice is fine. Lady Audley could argue the same. She was abandoned and therefore had to commit a crime to move on with her life and stage manage her new life after her abandonment. Lady Audley must commit crimes to get away from who she was, but bigamy was rarely prosecuted in the nineteenth century. Robert Audley commits crime to prove who she is and expose her identity as a bigamist. Yet his actions are defensible, underlining the differences in masculine and feminine law. The written law is interpreted and bent in favour of the male gender. The point is reminiscent of the Helen Stoner's stepfather in the Sherlock Holmes story 'The Adventure of the Speckled Band' (1892) when Grimesby Roylott threatens Holmes in Baker Street by bending the fire's poker and telling Holmes not to interfere in his home. When he leaves Holmes straightens the poker which is representative of his protection of vulnerable women. Not all women had a Holmes on their side to defend them from domestic abuse and neglect. Women in Victorian fiction generally had to stick the law, however weighted that law was against them, and any overstepping would consequently lead to punishment and reprimand.

Lynette Felber observes that the invasion of Lady Audley's space is a metaphor of the power men had over women and it could even symbolise sexual assault. "Robert Audley and George Talboys enter a 'secret passage' to gain access to Lady Audley's boudoir, where her unfinished portrait is displayed on an easel." She further quotes Elizabeth Langland: "Lady Audley's private spaces are curiously vulnerable to penetration. The novel's verbal representation of the decadent Pre-Raphaelite painting of a 'beautiful fiend' hovers between description of feminine beauty and moral judgement" (Felber, 2007: 473). Lady Audley is identified and presented as fiend, as femme fatale. The invasion of Lady Audley's space is not only a violation of her home but potentially as a woman as well. Felber illuminates how the men's actions can be interpreted as them taking away power from a woman and that invading her privacy and her space is akin to physically assaulting her. By entering her personal space without permission, they are taking her security, solitude and privacy away from her, prefiguring her future incarceration. Robert Wolff argues:

Robert Audley's prolonged duel with his beautiful stepaunt retains its suspense and excitement. The two labels, pasted one above the other on a bonnet box, that first reveal Lady Audley's change of name from Helen Talboys to Lucy Graham; the letter in Helen Talboys' hand that is identical to Lady Audley's hand, proving that they are the same person; the interviews with the landlady of a run-down seaside boarding house or with the school mistress down on her luck – each damning episode that contributes to the growing case against Lady Audley whets one's interest and, incidentally, provides a vignette of England in the late fifties. (Wolff, 1979: 5)

Space is constructed differently in *Great Expectations*. Miss Havisham invites Pip into her space (her home): “Miss Havisham sent for me, Sir” (Dickens, 2000: 68). Miss Havisham’s space is locked in a specific time and occasion. She seemingly relishes inviting those around her into her own private areas. She invites people into her home because she is a static and immobile figure and people must come to her. Her home and her space become place of solitude, memorialization, and strange security for her, whereas Lady Audley’s space is a place of secrets, evidence and mysteries. Lady Audley’s space is a capsule for her crimes and wrongdoings whereas Miss Havisham’s space is a time capsule. Rather than hide secrets and mysteries Miss Havisham’s space is a presentation of the crimes committed against her. These two female protagonists use their spaces in very different ways. Lady Audley’s is a place of secrecy whereas Miss Havisham’s is a place testifying to a criminal aftermath.

Another interpretation could be that Miss Havisham uses her space to tutor Estella and to mould her into her puppet. Her crumbling home, her deteriorating wedding cake and her weakening self provide the ultimate place to mould a young impressionable girl into a vindictive, heartless man-hater. Estella even describes herself as heartless: “I have not bestowed my tenderness anywhere. I have never had any such thing” (Dickens, 2000: 195). Estella is suggesting here that she may have had been given everything a person could physically want but she has been abused and refused emotional nurture and sustenance. Miss Havisham’s space is a constant reminder of what a man (Compeyson) did to her and a continuous aide-memoire to Estella that it could happen to her if she lets men into her life. By contrast, Lady Audley’s space is not a place in which she spends a lot of time, but it holds everything, from her past to her future. It is a significant location within the novel because

without the infiltration of this space she would potentially never have been exposed. Like Miss Havisham, Lady Audley invests her entire life into her space. Miss Havisham does this by never leaving her space, but Lady Audley does the same by keeping her old and new life within her space too. The consequences of this are fatal to both of these women in different ways.

Madness

Ultimately, Lady Audley's crimes are judged as insane. Towards the end of the novel, when Robert Audley reveals Lady Audley's true identity and her crimes, she describes herself as being "MAD":

The woman rose suddenly and stood before him erect and resolute, with her hair dashed away from her face and her eyes glittering. "Bring Sir Michael!" she cried; "bring him here, and I will confess anything—everything. What do I care? God knows I have struggled hard enough against you, and fought the battle patiently enough; but you have conquered, Mr. Robert Audley. It is a great triumph, is it not—a wonderful victory? You have used your cool, calculating, frigid, luminous intellect to a noble purpose. You have conquered—a MAD WOMAN!" "A mad woman!" cried Mr. Audley. "Yes, a mad woman. When you say that I killed George Talboys, you say the truth. When you say that I murdered him treacherously and foully, you lie. I killed him because I AM MAD! because my intellect is a little way upon the wrong side of that narrow boundary-line between sanity and insanity; because, when George Talboys goaded me, as you have

goaded me, and reproached me, and threatened me, my mind, never properly balanced, utterly lost its balance, and *I was mad!*" (Braddon, 1997: 274)

The self-designation of madness is curious. Braddon works vigorously throughout the novel to make her female character a strong woman who was escaping her past to then reduce her to the level of madness. Yet Lady Audley's speech is too convincing and lucid to be the thoughts of a madwoman. Her thoughts and actions are logical throughout, from elaborately faking her death, starting a new life, hiding evidence, attempting to kill those who stood in her way and who might expose her. These are logical actions from a rational character who finds herself trapped in a situation she cannot otherwise escape from. Each move she makes in the novel is for her own purpose and her own agenda. It does not mirror her confession of an irrational mad woman. Yet her comment, "God knows I have struggled hard enough against you, and fought the battle patiently enough" (Braddon, 1997: 274), is suggestive. Susan Rutherford notes that "in fact Lady Audley did know what she was doing. Her fierce and logical defence of her crimes arguably undermines the subsequent diagnosis of the character as insane" (Rutherford, 1992: 164). Matthew Rubery comments in relation to sensation fiction: "The gripping plots of these novels involved scandalous events including murder, adultery, bigamy, fraud, madness, and sexual deviance often perpetrated by seemingly moral and upright individuals in familiar domestic settings" (Rubery, 2017). Braddon invests nearly all of these crimes in Lady Audley. The final one is a designation of madness. She did have full *compos mentis* to 'fight' against Robert and hide her crimes and identity. She knew she was in a 'battle' which suggests she was fully aware of her actions. Therefore, the question needs to be asked is why Braddon gives her female protagonist such a bizarre outcome at the end of the novel? The assertion here is that Braddon realised it was

easier for Lady Audley to be 'mad' than face the legal consequences of her actions, that it was better to be incarcerated in a mental institute or asylum than being hanged for her crimes. Braddon made Lady Audley's confession her final manipulation of the law. To avoid the death penalty for attempted murder, arson, fraud, bigamy and her other crimes, being locked within asylum was better than losing her life. The last person to be executed in England for attempted murder was Martin Doyle. Doyle, who had attempted to murder his wife, was hanged in Chester Prison on 26 August 1861. Lady Audley's declaration of madness was her final manoeuvring around the law to avoid the punishment which could take away her life, she used the law to take the punishment that would just restrict her life and freedoms. The gap between what lawyers designate as punishable and what medical authorities deem as punishable is exploited by Lady Audley. In *A History of Criminal Law in England*, the barrister James Fitzjames Stephens notes that legal and medical authorities disagreed on the culpability of the insane:

The different legal authorities upon the subject have been right in holding that the mere existence of madness ought not to be an excuse for crime, unless it produces in fact one or the other of certain consequences. I also think that the principle which they have laid down will be found, when properly understood and applied, to cover every case which ought to be covered by it. But the terms in which it is expressed are too narrow when taken in their most obvious and literal sense, and when the circumstances under which the principle was laid down are forgotten. Medical men, on the other hand, have contended in substance that every person who suffered in any degree under a disease of which the nature is most obscure, whilst the symptoms vary infinitely, should be free in all cases from legal punishment. The

subject is one of the greatest difficulty, and it is most imperfectly understood by medical men as well as by lawyers. (Stephens, 1883: 125-6)

Miss Havisham, however, could be described as 'mad'. She is a woman who presents with key indications of mental health issues. Such examples include her withdrawal from society, her isolation from family and friends and her constant presence within her wedding day. Pip observes that Miss Havisham moves between reality and history: "At length, not coming out of her distraught state by degrees, but in an instant" (Dickens, 2000: 72). All of these are signs of either a mental breakdown or mental health issues. Unlike Lady Audley, Miss Havisham's signs of mental illness seem to be real. However, Miss Havisham's madness originates from a crime committed against her. The financial fraud alone potentially would have not caused the issues faced by Miss Havisham. However, the combination of romance and finance fraud causes her mind to snap and remain in a state of self-destruction. Akiko Takei supports this assertion with his comments: "Miss Havisham never forgets her traumatic life event. In her disillusion she is vengeful and manipulative, far from passively collapsing into grief as a victim. Her role in Pip's life is to puzzle and control him" (Takei, 2002: 4). Takei supports the analysis that Miss Havisham's behaviour throughout the novel is in direct relation to her victimisation. Her brother and Compeyson's actions result in her mental deterioration. The combination of romance and finance fraud is the amalgamation that pushes this figure into insanity. Therefore, she is not just a victim of fraud emotionally and financially but psychologically as well. Madness, in one way or another, is attributed to both of these women. Braddon has her female protagonist declare her madness and Dickens has Miss Havisham present with clear indications of mental collapse.

Cassandra Cross examines the impact of romance fraud in the twenty-first century: “While this research cannot ascertain the full extent of fear of crime for victims of romance fraud, this qualitative data does paint a sobering picture as to just how much impact fear of crime can have in this context. It is clear from this analysis that fear of subsequent victimization is a significant problem for some victims of romance fraud. In some cases, this worry has quite acute affects on people’s mental state, their health, their sense of security, and even their freedoms” (Cross, 2022: 751). Although Cross’s work is exploring the impact of romance fraud from a current perspective, her assertions can be used when examining novels such as *Great Expectations* and *Lady Audley’s Secret*. This is because their mental health is clearly affected by the crime of romance fraud. Miss Havisham is a prime example of these consequences, as she becomes isolated, ill and entrapped. What Cross is seeing and examining in the twenty-first century can be traced back to Dickens’s iconic victim of romance fraud.

Miss Havisham experiences fraud as a victim and then tries to perpetrate a form of fraud on the children who come into her care. Her ultimate punishment for the latter is being burned. She perpetuates her own victimization and the wedding dress she entraps herself in is what ultimately brings her down. Pip describes how he tried to save her:

I had a double-caped great-coat on, and over my arm another thick coat. That I got them off, closed with her, threw her down, and got them over her; that I dragged the great cloth from the table for the same purpose, and with it dragged down the heap of rottenness in the midst, and all the ugly things that sheltered there; that we were on the ground struggling like desperate enemies, and that the closer I covered her,

the more wildly she shrieked and tried to free herself; that this occurred I knew through the result, but not through anything I felt, or thought, or knew I did. I knew nothing until I knew that we were on the floor by the great table, and that patches of tinder yet alight were floating in the smoky air, which, a moment ago, had been her faded bridal dress. (Dickens, 2000: 330)

The wedding dress she never got to walk down the aisle in because of the actions of her brother and Compeyson is the reason she dies. The fraud is bound up with her death and her path to casualty and death. The fire, though destructive, can also be seen as liberating. She had entrapped herself within the moment of abandonment and within her wedding dress. The fire finally burns the dress, freeing her until she can move towards death having finally confessed to Pip. Significantly, it is Pip who tries to protect Miss Havisham. A man tries to save her. This is the gender she tries to punish and admonish. Pip, a young male and a victim of Miss Havisham's machinations against men, proves to Miss Havisham through his attempted rescue of her that not all men are like the fraudulent brother and fiancé.

Both women take different approaches to being victims of fraud and abandonment but they both end up in similar places. Miss Havisham imprisons herself within her home and her wedding dress because of the romance and finance fraud alongside the abandonment committed against her. Similarly, Lady Audley is imprisoned in an asylum at the end of the novel because of her fraudulent actions. Lady Audley makes decisions in her life "based on circumstances over which she feels she has no control. These circumstances are born out of her status as a nineteenth century woman with few options besides those offered her by men" (Cornes, 2008: 13). It is instructive to note that it did not matter which route the

female protagonist took as they both end up in the same place and in the same position. In both novels both women become the ultimate victims of the original fraud committed against them.

It is interesting to note the comments made by Clayton Tarr when examining fraud in *Lady Audley's Secret*. Tarr asserts that the Audley family commit fraud themselves when dealing with Lucy at the end of the novel. By incarcerating Lucy in an asylum, they are burying her in the same manner as Fosco and Glyde bury and incarcerate Anne and Laura. This burial is necessary to maintain the family's respectability. It is the law around mental health that they use or misuse to achieve their ends:

The Audleys' live burial of Lucy under the name Madame Taylor is treated as a practical recourse to preserve the honorific dignity of their family name. This discrepancy demonstrates that the homeostasis of Victorian society relies on the endurance of symbolic class distinctions. Pamela K. Gilbert argues that *Lady Audley's Secret* provides a clear working example of how interests, issues, and themes gendered female are subordinated and sacrificed in order to maintain a classed and gendered hierarchy". Whereas Lucy is punished for climbing the social ladder through fraudulent identity, the Audley's are rewarded for deploying assumed names to maintain their respectability. (Tarr, 2022: 75)

Although Tarr looks at this from a gender imbalance perspective, the point being made here illuminates the hypocrisy in this novel. The novel starts with a fraudulent act and ends with one too. The Audley family are frauds themselves. By hiding Lady Audley, they are trying to

hide her crimes, her identity, and her connection to them which is an act of fraud. The family try to maintain their societal status and to do this commit fraud themselves. It seems hypocritical that a lower-class woman is punished for committing similar crimes to achieve the same goal of social status, but because this family has societal prominence it is acceptable to commit the same crime she did. Braddon starts this novel with fraud and ends it with a fraudulent act which brings us round in a fraudulent circle. Both *Great Expectations* and *Lady Audley's Secret* expose the issues around the law and put a spotlight on both finance fraud and romance fraud. However, the novels do end differently. Dickens *Great Expectation* ends with a dark tone but with a silver lining that the darkness was lifting from Pip and Estella. However, Braddon's *Lady Audley's Secret* returns us to the starting point: the novel starts with fraud and ends with fraud.

Chapter Three

Real-Life Bigamy: Hull, East Riding and Beyond

Lady Audley's Secret is a bigamy story, written by a novelist connected with East Yorkshire.

This chapter unearths bigamy cases from the region to 'give voice' to its victims and to

underline the relationship between fictional cases and real-life crimes. Bigamy is

complicated in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, both as a social phenomenon

and as a literary representation. The Offences Against the Person Act, 1861 states:

"Whosoever, being married, shall marry any other person during the life of the former

husband or wife, whether the second marriage shall have taken place in England or Ireland

or elsewhere, shall be guilty of felony, and being convicted thereof shall be liable... to be

kept in penal servitude for any term not exceeding seven years" (legislation.gov.uk).

Certainly, the complexities of marriage laws and divorce impacted on the prevalence of

bigamy. This chapter explores several bigamy cases centred on the city of Hull and Yorkshire

areas which reveal both commonalities between fictional accounts and real-life cases as

well as the complexities and social and 'situational' opportunities to commit bigamy. Hull,

for instance, is a port town and some of the cases examined here occur during wartime. In

addition, the cases reveal that bigamy is often only one among several crimes committed by

bigamists. The original research in this chapter – the case studies – is framed by two cases,

the Yelverton Case, a notorious case from the 1860s, which had a profound effect on

generating interest in the bigamy sensation novel in that decade. The second case, the

Toddington Landlady, involves a woman who bigamously marries twice. The latter case

starts at the turn of the twentieth century, reaches a critical point in the war years and is

not resolved until after the Second World War. These two cases are used to demonstrate some common features in cases involving bigamy and were chosen because they cover the date ranges of the fictional texts explored in this thesis.

Critical Overview

Divorce law in the United Kingdom was very slow with regards to progression. James Hammerton argues that “Nineteenth-century divorce law in England is often presented as a paradigm of Victorian conservatism in social and political attitudes: slow to change, limited in application, and reflecting rigid inequities of class and gender, it illustrates the less progressive dimension of the Victorian reforming impulse” (Hammerton, 1990: 271). Before 1857 divorces were overseen by the Ecclesiastical Court of Arches. Divorces were possible for those with a great amount of wealth, such as Lord Lowborough in Anne Brontë’s *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall* (1848) who divorces his wife when he discovers her adultery. Helen Huntingdon, who has no such avenue open to her, even though Lowborough’s wife committed adultery with her husband, points out to Lowborough that as a man (and one with a title) he is freer to act than she is. A divorcing couple pre 1857 either had to get an annulment or a Private Bill which was an Act of Parliament. The main reason the law was so far behind was due to religion. In the eyes of God when a man and woman married it was for forever, so divorces were not really a viable option for many. A couple just had to separate and not remarry. It was not until 1857 when this changed, and the Matrimonial Act 1857 came into effect. This act made divorces more accessible to the public and divorces were now a civil court matter. However, the issue for Hammerton centres on the 1857 law on divorce: “Under ecclesiastical jurisdiction before 1857, it provided no more than

separation from bed and board (divorce a mensa et thoro), and prohibited remarriage of either party – absolute divorce (a vinculo matrimonii) being restricted to the minority wealthy enough to finance a private act of Parliament” (Hammerton, 1990: 271). Although public campaigns such as the Divorce Law Reform Movement at the end of the century fought for divorce reform, the law on divorce did not change again until 1923 when the Private Members Bill came into force. This bill made it easier for women to access to divorces if their spouse had committed adultery. Arthur Conan Doyle became President of the Divorce Law Reform movement in 1909, a position he held up until 1922. Stephen Cretney notes that the “the Divorce Law Reform Union’s declared objective was precise, specific, and moderate: it was to press for the appointment of a Royal Commission to investigate the working of the law and the options for reform. Over the years, this eminently respectable body played a major role in eventually achieving reform of the divorce process” (Cretney 2005). In Doyle’s many letters to the press on divorce law reform, Doyle presents his position on how the marriage laws of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries discriminated, in particular, against women. He notes that “thousands and tens of thousands” are trapped in “hopeless lifelong misery” requiring freedom from “the embraces of drunkards, from the bondage to cruel men, from the iron which fetterlocks them to the felon or the hopeless maniac” (‘Preface,’ *Divorce and Morality* Kerr, 1912: 7). He continues: “the cause for divorce should be same between the sexes. At present a woman can be divorced for fidelity alone, while a man must be guilty of cruelty or desertion as well. Infidelity should be sufficient cause for divorce in either sex” (11).

In a period in which divorce was largely unobtainable, co-habitation became an alternative. Ginger Frost asserts that much of society accepted the crime of bigamy. If the bigamist had

good reasoning behind their separation from their partner, then it was acceptable, if their partner knew about it as well (Frost, 1997: 287). Jolly points out that “Capp and Turner both identified many overlapping reasons for bigamy: from the innocent marrying in good faith; the naïve or casual; those misled by the law’s complex requirements; those moving on from a failed relationship, to the small category of deceitful, sometimes serial, bigamists” (Jolly, 2016: 53).

The complexities of bigamy and the difficult situations individuals found themselves in are demonstrated in the cases in this chapter. While bigamy in the sensation novel has been well documented by literary critics (Fahnestock, 1981; Frost, 1997; Mangham, 2009; McAleavey, 2015) it is useful to point out that the sensation novelists looked for their material from the “causes celebres of the day,” as Jeanne Fahnestock points out: “The bigamy convention in particular owes its popularity not only to the force of popular models but also to a contemporary scandal and trial, to public outrage over the confused state of the marriage laws, and finally to its unique ability to satisfy the novel reader's desire to sin and be forgiven vicariously” (Fahnestock, 1981: 48).

It is useful in this context to look at two real-life bigamy cases, one from the mid nineteenth century which was a “cause celebre” and one which commences in the early twentieth century. The first involves the upper classes and was documented in the press while the second is a newly uncovered case involving a female innkeeper.

Starting in Hull: The Yelverton Case

The Yelverton case is a key case when examining the crime of bigamy and it has a Hull connection. Indeed, it is in Hull that the legal case starts. The female victim in the case spent time in Hull and a Hull industrialist brought the case to the public's attention on behalf of the wronged party. When the case came to trial in 1861 in Dublin's Court of Common Pleas it was "nominally" an "action brought by John Thelwall, an ironmaster of Hull, against the Honourable William Charles Yelverton, a captain of the Royal Artillery and a brevet-major in the Army. Thelwell had provided board and lodgings to Mrs Maria Theresa Yelverton to the value of £260 and was "suing her husband for repayment" (Crow, 1966: 13). The case was just a pretext for what was a larger matter: Major Yelverton denied that he was married to Mrs Yelverton (Crow, 1966: 13). The Yelverton case is important beyond the Hull connection in that as *cause celebre* it drew popular and literary attention to the crime of bigamy, the position of the victim – a woman – in the crime and demonstrated how a woman harnessed the power of the public and invoked the law in making her claims known. Maria Theresa Yelverton challenged her predicament and, as such, her case underlines the work undertaken in this thesis on women who are trapped (Miss Havisham) or refuse to remain trapped (Lady Audley) by the positions they find themselves in through romance fraud and the inadequacies of the law.

The Yelverton case starts in 1852. At this time Maria Theresa Longworth met William Yelverton and started a romantic relationship. They met on a ferry trip, and it was not until 1855 when they would meet again. In 1857 they both were in Edinburgh and declared their love for each other: "They had acknowledged and declared each other to be husband and

wife” (French 2018). Maria Theresa and William had two ceremonies for their marriage due to their different religions: a Church of England ceremony and a Roman Catholic one. The marriage was legal according to Scottish law (Erickson and McCarthy, 1971: 276). For over a year the couple lived harmoniously and travelled together. A specific trip which they took together later became key in Maria Theresa’s bigamy case. The couple visited Doune Castle and in the visitor book they both signed as Mr & Mrs Yelverton. They had a further Roman Catholic ceremony in Ireland conducted by a Father Mooney on 15 August 1857 (French 2018). In December 1857 Maria Theresa went to her friends in Hull where her husband visited her (Erickson and McCarthy, 1971: 277). In 1858 the relationship took a turn for the worse, she had a miscarriage and William left his post. In this same year William remarried a woman named Emily without any legal divorce from Maria Theresa. In 1859 Maria Theresa made the accusation that William had committed the crime of bigamy. She took her case to the courts and made a ‘declator of marriage’ (French, 2018). William denied all accusations and claimed Maria Theresa was the aggressor in the relationship. She went to stay with her friends the Thelwells in Hull after she discovered her husband’s bigamy and Thelwell entered the legal petition (Erickson and McCarthy, 1971: 279). The aim was to establish Yelverton as Maria Theresa’s husband. In 1861 the courts in Dublin agreed that she had a valid case, and it was then tried in the Scottish Courts. After a long trial in which the visitors’ book from Doune Castle was key as well as other evidence, Maria Theresa won the case.

William did not let the matter rest and appealed his conviction to the House of Lords. In this instance the case was overturned and William’s marriage to Maria Theresa was no longer recognised by the courts. This decision had a significant impact on the law of bigamy within the United Kingdom. Morvern French comments that “The Longworth-Yelverton affair left a

lasting legacy. It inspired J. R. O'Flanagan's novel *Gentle Blood* (1861) and Cyrus Redding's *A Wife and not a Wife* (1867). The case also set a legal precedent which led to the Marriage Causes and Marriage Law Amendment Act of 1870" (French, 2018).

The case of Yelverton is an example of how the legal system was unjust during this period as well as demonstrating how movement helped people to escape the consequences of their actions and, as we will see in the bigamy cases explored in this chapter, get away with crimes. The case travelled from Hull to Dublin to Edinburgh. It was seen to be a valid case in both Hull and Dublin, but the Scottish courts did not rule this case was unlawful. All of these countries come under the bracket of the 'United Kingdom'. Therefore, one would assume that all three of these locations would have come to the same conclusion about this bigamy case. The fact that they did not illuminates the inconsistency in the marriage law in the three territories of the United Kingdom and how potentially men had preferential treatment by the law during this time. Although James Whitehead M.P. and barrister at the Dublin trial joked that a man could have a different wife in all three countries – England, Ireland and Scotland – his point underlines the situation (Gill, 2004: 58)

When this case was taken up in Dublin it became a celebrity affair. Richard Altick notes:

The dry point of law was eclipsed by the dramatic testimony, the star witness being the vivacious, intelligent, 'ladylike' young woman who insisted on calling herself 'Mrs. Yelverton'" and "Newspapers even sacrificed their leading articles (editorials) and advertising space to provide maximum coverage, which was strongly biased in favor of the imprudent but victimized woman. When the jury decided that both the

Scotch and the Roman Catholic marriages were valid in law, 'the whole audience rose and cheered tumultuously, the ladies waving their handkerchiefs, the gentlemen their hats, and the barristers their wigs' (Altick, 1861: 8).

Maria Theresa was celebrated and commemorated in a Dublin street ballad which humiliates Yelverton and highlights his indiscretions. As a proto-feminist piece, the ballad provides her with a sense of personal victory which is a gender victory as well.

The ballad was written in celebration of Maria Theresa Yelverton winning her case in the Dublin courts. Although, on appeal the decision was changed when it was tried in Scotland, this ballad illuminates how extraordinary the original outcome was for this case not only from a legal perspective but also for women. The ballad calls out the deceit of Yelverton and celebrates justice for a woman who within this period should not have won this case simply because of her gender. The ballad states: "But his perjury was all in vain, as you may understand, / For she nobly gained the victory by the laws of Erin's land." The ballad is commenting that the lies and deceptions committed were quashed by Irish law and the ballad suggests relief for the public that the law was serving justice rather than being manipulated by the rich and powerful. "When the trial it was ended, the cheers would reach the sky, / To think she was victorious, each heart was filled with joy." This case brought a sense of liberation to Dublin audiences. The case was not confined to the courts but was being sung on the streets by ordinary people. A woman standing up and finally having the law on her side was quite extraordinary. This ballad confirms the public's joy at Mrs Yelverton's victory and the fall of a man who committed a bigamous crime for which he was being held accountable. That the Dublin women would make him pay for his bigamy

presents it as proto-feminist piece: “If our loyal Dublin females could catch him by surprise, / They’d make him curse and rue the day he ever had two wives.” This ballad suggests that the case was a landmark in the history of Irish law and a victory for women who were the vulnerable victims of bigamy.

Stern notes that the Yelverton case “influenced Mary Elizabeth Braddon, Wilkie Collins, and Thomas Hardy, as well as those novelists who basically transcribed the case (most notably Longworth herself). Fahnestock makes a similar argument, that “bigamy would have remained one of the stock of occasionally used conventions, along with infant swapping and the missing will, had not a real-life sensational case brought it from the ranks of the far-fetched and improbable to the pages of every newspaper in 1861. The notorious Yelverton case was the cause célèbre of the season” (Stern, 2008: 115). The interest of such well-established authors proves the significance of this case during this period as well as reflecting how the case impacted on their fictions.

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Grand Triumph of Mrs. Yelverton.

All you that wish to hear a joke, I hope you will attend,
Unto those simple verses that lately I have penn'd,
You've heard of Major Yelverton, that all the world disdain'd,
Although his birth was very high, his spirit it was mean.

CHORUS.

Long life to Mrs. Yelverton, that lady of renown,
She is the talk of Ireland, and the pride of Dublin town.

'Twas in the Four Courts the other day, when Yelverton was
there,

Before the judge and jury, audaciously did swear,
That she strove for to decoy him and ensnare him all his life,
For the sake of cursed riches he denied his virtuous wife.

But his perjury was all in vain, as you may understand,
For she nobly gained the victory by the laws of Erin's land,
For she had able counsellors for to defend her cause,
Her character was well proved, which gained her great applause!

Brave Whiteside made a noble speech, saying, Major it appears,
Two wives you've got in the army, the court it rang with cheers
You thought to stain this lady's fame, your marriage to deny,
There are no penal laws in force, those days they are gone by!

When the trial it was ended, the cheers would reach the sky,
To think she was victorious, each heart was filled with joy,
While Yelverton was in a rage, he began to stamp and swear,
He dashed his hat against the ground, and then he tore his hair!

The like of her before a court was never in our day,
She conquered this bold major, tho' he fought at the Crimea,
The gallant men of Dublin, as you all know right well,
They drew her in her carriage, all along to the hotel.

She nobly did address them, and this to them did say,
"I thank you for the kindness you have shown me this day,
The sweet city of Dublin, I always will adore,
I'll claim myself an Irish woman, now, and evermore."

Yelverton he may go home, and sorely rue his sad fate,
And repent for all he's guilty of, before it is too late,
If our loyal Dublin females could catch him by surprise,
They'd make him curse and rue the day he ever had two wives!

Now to conclude and finish, those verses I will end,
Long live the judge and jury, who this lady did befriend,
According to the Irish laws they brought the verdict home,
And they proved the marriage laws of the holy Church of Rome.

All you that wish to hear a joke, I hope you will attend,
Unto those simple verses that lately I have penn'd,
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each heart was filled with joy, While Yelverton
was in a rage, he began to stamp and swear,
He dashed his hat against the ground, and
them tore his hair.

The gallant men of Dublin, as you all know right
well, They drew her in her carriage, all along to
the hotel, Their shouts and cheers allong,
would really you delight, Saying, "Long live
Mrs. Yelverton," that female pure and
bright.

She nobly did address them, and this to them
did say, "I thank you for the kindness you have
shown me this day, The sweet city of Dublin, I
always will adore, I'll claim myself an Irish
woman, now, and evermore."

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Before the judge and jury, an' fact'usly did swear,
That she strove for to marry him and to spare him all his life,
For the sake of cursed riches he deny'd his virtuous wife.

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Sae conquer'd this bold major, tho' he fought at the Crimea,
The gallant men of Dublin, as you all know right well,
They drew her in her carriage, all along to the hotel.

She noble did address them, and this to them did say,
"I thank you for the kindness you have shown to this day,
The sweet city of Dublin I always will adore,
Ye claim a my self an Irishman, now, and evermore."

Yelverton he may go home, and secretly his hat take,
And repent for all his guilt, or at least it may be said,
If our loyal Dublin makes no objection to his wife,
They'd make him enter now the day he's married two wives.

Now to conclude and finish these verses I will end,
Long live the judge and jury, who this lady did defend,
According to the Irish laws they brought the verdict home,
And they prov'd the marriage lawful of the holy church of
Rome.

Figure 3: 'Grand Triumph of Mrs Yelverton', [Ballads Online \(ox.ac.uk\)](http://Ballads Online (ox.ac.uk))

The Toddington Landlady: “a woman apart”

The second case involves the case of Ellen (Helen) Nelson, known as the Toddington Landlady. This case is highlighted here as it comes towards the end period of the fictions studied in this thesis. Yelverton’s case is a mid-Victorian case, a *cause celebre* which influenced the writers in this thesis, Nelson’s case commences at the turn of the twentieth century and is resolved by the mid-century, the end point of the thesis’s fictions. It is also a case which has been recently ‘recovered’ through the discovery and publication of letters. As such, it ‘speaks to’ the later Hull cases of victims of bigamy whose voices have been hitherto lost. The Toddington Landlady both details a female bigamist who divorces and remarries and further reveals her thinking on her position through her personal correspondence to her lover during the First World War. The questions this case raises are also key to the law during this period.

The Toddington Landlady case started in 1899 in Toddington, Bedfordshire. That year, Ellen Nelsen (Helen) married Edward Randell. Only a year after in 1900 Edward Randell disappeared. It was rumoured he went to South Africa as the Second Anglo-Boer War (1899-1901) was taking place. This left Helen alone and pregnant and she gave birth to a child. The fact Edward Randell supposedly left the country would later have a great impact on Helen. Five years later in 1905 Helen married Bertie Benjamin. This was an illegal, bigamous marriage as Helen never divorced her first husband Edward. Bertie Benjamin did not have a long romance with Helen because in 1913 he left her and went to Canada. He returned in 1914 to join the army but was separated from Helen. The same year Helen met James

Franklin-Smith, known as Frank, and had an affair with him during the war. In 1918 Helen petitioned for a High Court Divorce from Bertie Benjamin (remembering she would be still legally married to her first husband Edward Randell). Helen put forward claims of domestic abuse, infidelity, and desertion against Bertie. The divorce was granted. One year later in 1919 Helen married James Franklin-Smith (again she was still married to her first husband Edward Randell). It was not until 1949 when Edward Randell died that Helen could remarry legally.

A question this case raises is why did Helen divorce Bertie and not Edward? The first assertion that can be made is that it was due to location. Many similar cases suggest that spouses could not get divorced because of the difficulties of locating their missing spouse. This will be demonstrated in the Agnes Sharp case and the Albert Cape case (below).

“Before 1914 divorce was rare; it was considered a scandal, confined by expense to the rich, and by legal restrictions requiring proof of adultery or violence to the truly desperate. In the first decade of the 20th century, there was just one divorce for every 450 marriages” (Thompson, Hawkins, Dar & Taylor, 2012: 3). This statistic shows how difficult it was to obtain a divorce. Therefore, not being able to locate a spouse would have made the proceedings more challenging, even more so for a woman.

Helen’s letters during the First World War to her lover, Frank, highlight the thoughts of woman trapped in an unhappy marriage to her ‘second’ husband, and reveal that she found evidence that Bertie was unfaithful as well:

Only two more whole days and Bertie will be gone, I shall be jolly pleased. I have been thinking, Frank, if later on when things have to be explained to him very plainly I do not think he will die of a broken heart. I have found out one or two little things since he has been home this time. He has been frightfully careful about his letters but two I have managed to read, one from a woman in Canada who signs herself 'Your own kind', the second letter from a woman at the Curragh, 'Some letter' this second one, I assure you she speaks of him as a great big beautiful man, and goes on to say that she wants him to come back so that she can creep right into his arms. I do not think if I had sufficient money I should find great difficulty in obtaining my divorce. The astonishing part of the whole thing to me is, that in [the] face of this he expects to come to me here etc., etc. and then when he finds he is not to come to my room he gets into a rage, but I quite believe it is a case of wounded vanity and that if I am no good to him from that point of view he has no further use for me, 'Thank God'. (Hart & Brown, 2019: 114)

This extract from Helen's letter is an example of the complexities of marriage and divorce. Helen clearly states that money is a key factor in why she has not yet divorced Bertie. The irony of this letter is that Helen is in fact committing a form of adultery (legally she is a bigamist) yet she is displeased that Bertie is committing adultery as well, justifying her affair with Frank by her indignation at Bertie's unfaithfulness. That fact she states that she is "no good for him" suggests that she interprets herself as object, or that Bertie sees her as an object. The surviving letters to Frank make no allusion to her bigamous state. It seems as if the bigamy is repressed and she is presenting herself as a woman in love with a man, the

recipient of these letters, but trapped in an unhappy 'marriage' to Bertie, who has lovers in Ireland and in Canada.

Helen has a confused identity and uses aliases and assumed names to avoid the consequences of her bigamous actions. In this way she mirrors her fiction namesake, Helen (Talboys) in *Lady Audley's Secret*. Her legal birth name was Ellen, she later went by the name Helen and then when writing to Frank signed off her letters with the name Nell. Three different names from one woman highlight issues of identity: "Ellen or Helen as she (and we) later called herself, Nelson's behaviour appears shocking on paper. Among other misdeeds, she appears to have been bigamously married, twice. Given her circumstances, however, her survival is a triumph of fortitude over betrayal" (Hart & Brown, 2019: 9). Hart and Brown suggest that even though Helen/Ellen had committed the crime of bigamy, there is some form of justification for her actions. At the same time, Ellen/Helen's confused identity cannot be overlooked. She does not seem to know who she truly is, as she writes to Frank: "Bertie is just coming in, he has been over to Hockliffe so darling I cannot write any more. Please please trust me sweetheart, as far as I am concerned he came here so he will go away and you know this, but there is one thing that you will never quite know and that is just how the whole thing affects me, I sometimes and often think I am a woman apart, somebody not quite like other women. I wonder if I am, if so why was I born like this? Because at times I am damned unhappy. Goodbye my husband-to-be," (Hart & Brown, 2019: 110). She does not know exactly who she is and what she wants from life – she is a "woman apart" and "not quite like other women." She has echoes of Lady Audley, exchanging identities and men, because she does not know who she really is and what she really wants.

The Hull and East Riding Bigamy Cases

Over the course of researching bigamy cases based in Kingston upon Hull and East Riding, I have found several local cases that illuminate the crimes and issues during this period. These local cases demonstrate how the crime of bigamy in literature was mirrored in real life. What they also reveal is that while the fictions sensationalize bigamy and render it thrilling, real-life bigamy was more mundane. While sensation fictions ultimately resolve with the triumph of good over evil (Laura over Fosco and Glyde; Pip and Estella over their crimes set in motion by Compeyson), victims of real-life bigamy experience ostracization and a diminished life. In line, however, with the fictions, the exploration of historical bigamy recorded in archives and newspapers discovers how bigamy was often one of several crimes committed by the perpetrator and the concealment of bigamy often led to other crimes. Bigamy was also a social crime in that women often committed bigamy after abandonment by their husbands. War-time conditions, as in the case of the Toddington landlady, were often responsible for initiating bigamy due to the possibility of disappearance, social flux and greater mobility for men.

The final tally of these case studies was ten. These ten case studies show a range of bigamist and fraudulent acts alongside other criminal offences. These cases include Agnes Sharp (1809 – 1823), Mary Ann Crossley (1828), Henry Coster Dennington (1840), Fredrick Holmes (1856), Joseph Gibson (1864), Edward Martindale (1867), Albert Cape (1890), Frederick Bailey Deeming (circa 1890), Henry Peter Jensen (1898) and John William McCartney (Harry MacDonald) (1915). These ten cases have been chosen because they all involve the crime of

bigamy which is key to this research and cover a period from the early nineteenth century to the First World War. These cases were local to the city of Kingston upon Hull and surrounding areas and were reported in the press and evidence of these cases and crimes could be uncovered. A brief overview of the supporting cases will be included but the two cases of Agnes Sharp and John William McCartney will be examined in depth.

Finding case studies for this chapter involved a long process of research and investigation. The first 'port of call' for this information was the Hull History Centre. Here I found a very rare and interesting book by Martin Craven. This book outlines the case of Agnes Sharp. On first consideration the case of Agnes Sharp is pertinent to this research but what made it more noteworthy is that it is based in my local area, Hedon. This was the first local case I discovered, and the Hull History Centre supplied the archival research for my other case studies. The Old Bailey website enabled the research as one click of the mouse generated a successful research enterprise. The Old Bailey website was instrumental in finding the cases used in this chapters. I could filter by dates, crimes and even location. This then gave me the names of the criminals for the case studies. After finding the names, I used local and national newspapers to discover in-depth detail of the specifics of the crimes, dates, and locations so that I then knew if the cases were relevant to the research or useful in aiding my overall argument. This was a long process but by using these websites and facilities I finally had the ten case studies I needed for this research. I traced convictions for bigamy and discovered, alongside bigamy, several common themes emerging in these 'bigamy stories' such as abandonment, domestic abuse, insanity or alleged insanity, issues of

finance, increased mobility due to the port location, inability to divorce and the use of multiple identities.

Case Studies (not including the two key cases)

The eight cases below support the observations in this chapter. A further two cases, as previously noted, will be looked at in more detail. These cases scatter across the Yorkshire area but many of them are based within Hull or have a connection with Hull.

Edward Martindale (1867)

Case Studies Overview

1Case	Date	Location	Crime	Keywords
Agnus Sharp	1809 - 1823	Hedon (Hull)	Bigamy	Abandonment/Stuck/War/Army
Edward Martin	1867	Hull	Bigamy	Husband-Bigamist/Father intervention
Fredrick Holmes	1856	Hull (2 nd marriage)	Bigamy	Domestic abuse/assault
Mary Ann Crossley	1828	Hull	Bigamy	Mad house/upper class/finance
Joseph Gibson	1846	Hull	Bigamy	Sea man/ports/mobility
Albert Cape	1890	Hull	Bigamy	Domestic abuse/unable to divorce
Henry Coster Dennington	1840	Hull	Bigamy	Policeman/London
Henry Peter Jensen	1898	Yorkshire	Bigamy	Smuggling/ports/maintenance
Fredrick Bailey Deeming	1889 - 1890	Australia South Africa Hull Beverley Rainhill (Merseyside)	Theft Fraud Alias Bigamy Forgery Murder	Travel – sea/alias/finance-fraud theft/abandonment
John William McCartney (Harry MacDonald)	1915	Wakefield Hull Pocklington	Bigamy Murder	Army/Domestic abuse/madness/alias

Figure 4: Case Studies Overview

Edward Martindale married Maria Dorset in Epsom in 1867. Maria's father was suspicious of Edward and investigated him. Maria's father challenged Edward about having another wife and a child in Yorkshire. Edward admitted he did but claimed it was not a real marriage because his first wife married under the name of "Jane Ann Ragley" (Old Bailey 1867) Old Bailey but her Christian name was "Jane". Maria's father offered Edward money to leave and paid for him to go to France. Edward did not take him up on this offer, so Dorset turned him into the police. Maria knew Edward was already married.

This case study highlights a bigamist husband who is confronted by another man, in this case the father of the victim. It is a male-dominated case which from the evidence provided demonstrates that Maria had very little to do with decision-making about her bigamous marriage. This case highlights sexism and patriarchy, operational in the fictions as well. Lady Audley's Secret is a case in point: Lady Audley's privacy, as we have seen is violated. She comes under the scrutiny of the barrister cum detective, Robert Audley, as the weight of patriarchy operates against her.

Fredrick Holmes (1856)

Fredrick Holmes was married Rachel Liffley in 1852 (June). He went to prison for unrelated crimes. There were issues about their separation and money whilst he was in prison.

Frederick married Charlotte Bacon in St. John's Church at Wenley near Harrow without a divorce from his first wife. The case of Fredrick Holmes has two key features: finance and bigamy. Frederick commits the crime of bigamy. The case also shows that financial assets were involved with his first wife. As this thesis demonstrates through its examination of

fictional cases, finance fraud can be conducted on its own but romance fraud always has an element of finance from the duping of Miss Havisham to the plotting against Laura Glyde.

Mary Ann Crossley (1828)

Mary Ann Rothwell married Richard Crossley in 1814 in Middlesex. Then in 1828 Mary remarried in Hackney to Henry Lee under the name Sarah Jane Smith. She asserted she was a widow. There was no divorce from Richard. Henry claimed he had never been given money from Mary (Sarah). Mary/Sarah was incarcerated in a 'mad house' by Henry. Mary then claimed her first husband was dead and was tried for forgery.

This is one of two female case studies covered in this research. The key issues are the assertion that a woman is 'mad' by committing the act of bigamy. It is worth noting that the other male case studies uncovered in this research do not suggest this about the opposite gender. Finances, similar to the Holmes' case, are also put forward as an issue.

Joseph Gibson (1864)

Joseph Gibson was arrested in Rotherbibte. He married Mary Walton in Hull Trinity Church in 1824. He is described as a "Seafaring man" (Old Bailey 1868). Joseph had a child with Mary and went to sea for one year and ten months. Upon his return he discovered that his wife was "far gone in the family way" (Old Bailey 1868). she was pregnant, but the child was not his). Joseph was a victim of adultery. Consequently, they separated but never divorced. Joseph remarried in 1838. He was charged with bigamy in 1846.

Joseph Gibson reacted to infidelity by committing the crime of bigamy. In this case he was potentially a victim as well, a victim of his wife's infidelity. Like other cases involving the army, Joseph was a sailor who travelled widely. This is a common trend in these cases and reflects the fictional case of Lady Audley's first husband who emigrates and, by doing so, abandons his wife and child to poverty.

Albert Cape (1890)

Albert Cape married Edith Ann at St Mary's Church in Kingston upon Hull. Albert went away. Edith started divorce proceedings but could not complete them because she did not hear from Albert for thirteen years. She was trapped in her marriage to him. However, Albert married Eliza Cooper in 1884 in Westminster. Eliza found out that he was already married and went with his first wife (Edith) to the police. Albert treated Eliza badly and got drunk all the time and removed her from his home.

The case of Albert Cape illuminates female issues about obtaining a divorce and how divorce law was unequal in the period, as the law continued to favour men. It has similarities with the Toddington Landlady whose first husband absconded to South Africa during the Second Anglo-Boer war. The case also substantiates the idea explored in the thesis's first chapter on *Great Expectations* and *Lady Audley's Secret* which argues that both Lady Audley and Miss Havisham are trapped by the actions of men. Domestic abuse is also presented within this case, as highlighted in the testimony of Albert's second 'wife.'

Henry Coster Dennington (1840)

Henry Coster married Hannah Carling in Hull Trinity Church. He said at the time that he was single. Hannah knew him from London. His occupation was a policeman. Henry was already married to Mary Robins in Norwich. In 1840 both wives went to the police to accuse him of his crimes.

The case study of Henry Coster Dennington is just a small case and only demonstrates the crime of bigamy. However, it does show that travelling around the country was an easy way to hide the crime of bigamy, particularly for male perpetrators.

Henry Peter Jensen (1898)

Henry Peter Jensen's first marriage was to Elizabeth Wrigglesworth in Yorkshire in 1830. He then remarried and his second marriage was to Adelaide Betts in 1889. Henry claimed he was a widower. He used an alias of Olsen. He had a criminal history of smuggling and due to this he lost his ship. Henry was married to Adelaide for nine years with no one finding out until he did not pay her maintenance. He deserted her three months after the marriage. He was found in Hull living with another woman.

This case, in particular, is significant in its use of aliases, bigamy and the port location which makes crimes easier to escape. Henry is presented as an adept conman committing an array of crimes. Again, tracking a person, the changing of names and identity was so easily done that it allowed criminals to evade detection for long periods of time.

Frederick Bailey Deeming (c. 1890 -1892)

Frederick Deeming was born in Birkenhead in 1852. His father was sent to an asylum. He travelled to Australia in his twenties. In 1881 Frederick married a Welsh woman (Marie James). He was only married a year before going to Australia. Frederick started to steal there and ended up in prison. He wrote to his wife and asked her to come across. Once out of prison he opened a shop which inevitably went out of business due to his fraudulent activities. Whilst on bail he ran away to South Africa. "He soon became well known among the other passengers; he was placed at the head of the table and was looked on as a person of some consequence, having in his possession cards bearing his name as managing director of the South African Gold Mining Company" (*Hull Daily Mail*, 1892). It is interesting to note that "cards bearing his name" were used as a form of identification and gave him social status. He carried on his life of crime in South Africa and eventually came to Hull in 1889. He created a new persona in Hull and claimed he was Australian, a millionaire and was related to a Member of Parliament. He consorted with the upper classes in high society. He created the alias of Lawson. "A well-dressed man with a love of fine clothes, who enjoyed staying in the best hotels, Lawson mixed largely with Hull and Beverley traders" (Goodman, 2005: 31). Whilst in Hull he met a woman, Nellie Matheson. They married in 1890 in St Mary's Church in Beverley. The local people started to get suspicious of him and he decided to do what he did best: abscond. He forged some references to obtain £285 worth of jewellery. Frederick told Nellie he had to go away on business. He told her if police visited that she should inform them they were not married. He had kept in touch with his first wife Marie. Marie went to see Nelly and they went to the police. Frederick tried to escape and got on a boat to South America. However, the police were already aware of him and were waiting at the next stop in Montevideo in Uruguay. He was finally brought back to England in 1890 on charges

of fraud. He stood trial in Hull in 1890 and was sentenced to nine months in prison at Hull's Hedon Road Jail. He was released in 1891. Upon his release he met a woman called Emily Mather. Little did she know that Frederick had murdered his first wife, Marie, and their children and buried them under his floor. In 1891 Frederick married Emily Mather. They moved to Australia. Frederick had multiple affairs. The new couple changed their names to Mr and Mrs Drogen. Frederick Deeming murdered Emily and buried her in the same manner as his first wife. Frederick then moved into hotels under eight different aliases. In 1892 he was convicted and hanged under the name of Williams. Bell, Bond, Clarke and Oldridge suggest that the Deeming's actions were escalated by the societal pressure on men in the Victorian period: "Deeming seems to have been a confidence trickster at heart, engaging and re-engaging with vulnerable women as if this aspect of his behaviour could not be controlled, but resorting to homicide only when he lost patience with them and could no longer tolerate the economic burden they (and their dependants) imposed upon him. (Bell, Bond, Clarke and Oldridge, 2019: 109-110). Deeming is a case of a man who wanted to rise socially or be perceived to have risen socially. When his 'wives' became a financial liability, he disposed of them. The Deeming story reveals the global interconnectedness of the Victorian world, reflected, as we will see in the Holmes stories, where crimes committed abroad come to England.

Frederick Bailey Deeming's case highlights several issues within the law as well as how criminals evaded capture during this time. Frederick commits bigamy, finance fraud, theft, murder and uses aliases. Again, travel is a key feature in the evading of suspicion and capture. This case emphasises the types of crimes people were committing and getting away with for so long because of the lack tracking people, identifying people, and the lack of

a stable and understandable criminal legal system. In the Sherlock Holmes story, 'The Boscombe Valley Mystery', a criminal from Australia finds a new and better life in England but his past comes to haunt him in the form of a blackmailer. When he murders the blackmailer, Holmes is brought in to investigate the mystery. He allows the murderer to go free, because he has, after his original crime, led a blame-free life and is on the verge of death himself. This is an example of Holmesian justice – a form of justice which has its own morality. The real-life Deeming, by contrast, continues on a path of crime. "It was well known to the Hull police that Lawson had several aliases, one of which was Deeming, that he always gave the impression he was extremely; wealthy, and that he had an important connection with the colonies" (*Hull Daily Mail* 1892). By cultivating a fabricated social status, Deeming attempted to elevate himself socially and position himself beyond the law.

Madness was a topic explored in *Lady Audley's Secret*. This was also used by Deeming to avoid the punishment for his crimes. Similar to Lady Audley, Deeming declared madness. However, "[t]his case terminated with a verdict of guilty, and the jury added a rider to the effect that the prisoner was not insane. Nor are we inclined to disagree either with the verdict or the rider. That the plea of 'Instinctive criminality' would be of any avail in protecting the prisoner from the punishment he so justly deserves no one could expect" (*Br Med J*, 1892: 974). When his defence lawyer could not convince the jury of Deeming's madness, Deeming was convicted and executed at Melbourne Jail on 13 May 1892. Similar to the fictional Lady Audley, it is difficult to argue a case for madness when Deeming was capable of creating new aliases to avoid prosecution, plan murder and undertake an assortment of other heinous crimes. It is interesting to point out that Lady Audley was considered mad when she committed or attempted similar crimes. Was this because she

was a woman? In any case, the Deeming story, with its array of crimes, parallels the crimes of the sensation novel of the 1860s.

Selection of the Key Cases

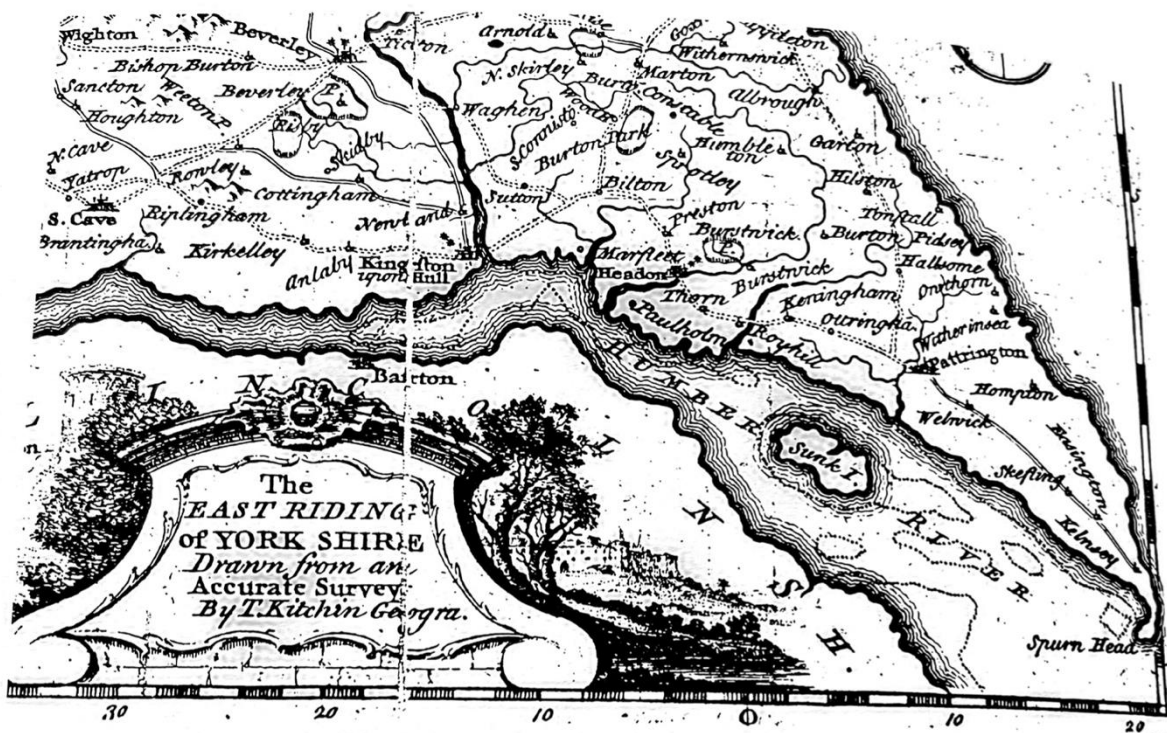
Agnes Sharp (1809 – 1823) and John William McCartney (Harry MacDonald) (1915) are key cases. The question that needs to be posed is why these two cases? Why out of all ten cases discovered these two are the main focal points of this chapter? There are many reasons for the selection of these two cases, one of which includes the dates of the cases themselves. The case of Agnes Sharp is between 1809 and 1823, the early part of the nineteenth century when Britain was, for many of these years, at war with France. The John McCartney case is in 1915, the beginning of the twentieth century, which coalesces in time with the later fictions studied in this thesis. The dates are imperative because they are a century apart but still share similar legal, fraudulent and bigamy issues. The gender of each bigamist was important during selection. The cases provide a gendered balance. Agnes Sharp is a female bigamist who was, like her fictional nineteenth-century contemporaries, trapped within a marital situation that she could not extricate herself from. John McCartney, by contrast, wanted a new life so left his old one behind and started afresh. The reason why bigamy was committed in these two cases is very different and as such they provide a contrast in terms of the 'gendered' possibilities of the perpetrators of bigamy. Both these cases occur during wartime. The Agnes Sharp case occurred during the Napoleonic Wars. The John McCartney case was based in World War I. Wars provide social disruption. Both cases illuminate the issues of the law and crime during these periods and their respective stories reflect the fictional stories in this thesis.

Agnes Sharp Case Outline

Agnes Sharp was born in the historical town of Hedon, situated in the East Riding of Yorkshire, five miles east of Hull city centre, and she was baptised there in 1776. Agnes became pregnant in 1800 by William Penn. She was not married to William or anyone at this time. William soon deserted Agnes, leaving with Sussex Fencibles, a British army regiment. By joining the army, he left Agnes behind with their child. It was not long after this in 1802 when Agnes met another man, Robert Horton. Again, she fell pregnant, and again found herself abandoned by her partner. Unfortunately, her son to Horton died. Just three years after this Agnes married a man called Paul Cook. She fell pregnant and had a son with Paul in 1806. Agnes's experienced a *deja vu* situation because in 1809 Paul joined the 76th Regiment of Foot. They did not get a divorce before he left as it would have been impossible at that time for a woman in her class. Due to Agnes and Paul not legally divorcing on his move to the British military, the Hedon Parish in 1809 decided that Agnes and her son were 'legally' classed as being settled in Friskney. This was because Paul Cook was still her husband, and his settlement was in Frinskey and as such that became Agnes's settlement. Agnes's daughter remained in Hedon because she was legally allowed to stay in Hedon. What seems to be the main reason the town of Hedon wanted to move Agnes on was because they no longer wanted to pay for Agnes and her children. Agnes did travel back to Hedon and tried to stay under cover. In 1815 Agnes was apprehended as a rogue and vagabond. She was again removed from the town of Hedon and sent back to her legal settlement. It is assumed that Agnes stayed in Frinskey for a few years, and it is also assumed that is where she met Daniel Young from Hedon. Agnes yet again returned to Hedon in 1818 with Daniel. Agnes and Daniel had every intention of getting married,

although Agnes still was still married to Paul Cook. Agnes had not seen Paul for over nine years but was legally married to him. Therefore, when Agnes and Daniel tried to get married in Hedon, she was questioned about her previous marriage, but Agnes lied and stated Paul had died. It was soon revealed that Paul was still alive, therefore the marriage between Agnes and Daniel in the town of Hedon was denied. Due to the inability to trace people and lack of accurate documentation, it was very easy to circumvent this. Agnes and Daniel moved to the city of Hull where they married in 1818. They then returned to Hedon married. Due to Agnes still being married to Paul Cook the town of Hedon did not acknowledge her new marriage to Daniel as she was still married to Paul.

Agnes yet again was removed from Hedon and sent back to Friskney with her child and she was also pregnant. Unfortunately, the baby died shortly after birth. In 1819 Agnes returned to Hedon. She was then sent back to Friskney. The town of Hedon just wanted to remove her so they did not have to pay for her and her children. Agnes returned to Hedon in 1821. Paul Cook died in 1823. Agnes and Daniel 'remarried' in December 1823 and this time it was legal. This marriage changed her settlement back to Hedon.



Map of part of the East Riding of Yorkshire
by Thomas Kitchin, 1749.

Figure 5: Map of Hedon from *A Very Troublesome Woman* “The case of Agnes Sharp of Hedon (1776-1849), p. 2.

Observations made about The Agnes Sharp Case

There are many observations that can be made about this case. A key theme running through Agnes’s case is the idea of being personally immobile whilst constantly in transit between Hedon, Friskney and Hull. She is confined by her marital situation and abandonment. Agnes could not marry again because her first husband abandoned her. The fact that Paul Cook left Agnes made her life so much harder. She could not get a divorce because she did not know where Cook was and the law on divorce had not evolved to accommodate a woman of her social class. She could not reside in the town of Hedon

because Paul Cook was not a resident there. She could not marry the man she seemingly wanted to marry because she could not get divorced. This is very similar to Lady Audley's plight. Lady Audley was abandoned by her husband and was left in a state of social and domestic immobility, until she manages to rise socially through marriage. Agnes Sharp's life was put on hold until Cook died. Her marriage to Cook destroyed her life and, even though he abandoned her, she became an outcast. Unlike Lady Audley, who elevates herself in social class and bigamously marries (briefly) into financial stability, there is no such recourse for Agnes Sharp. Her life, as recorded here by her wanderings from place to place, reveal her status as social outcast. While the fictions engage with these social issues, giving Lady Audley agency, the real-life demonstrates a woman with little agency.

War was a great excuse for men, in particular, to leave their lives and start afresh or evade "domestic strife" (Kent, 1990: 31). Keith Snell argues that enlisting in the army was seen as an "institutionally acceptable form" of desertion (1985: 362). Indeed, a recruitment poster during the Napoleonic Wars advertised war as a means to escape wives (Hurl-Eamon, 2014: 357). Although Jeninne Hurl-Eamon disputes that fleeing their domestic situations was a key reason to enlist, evidence presented from the Sharp case, demonstrates that the impact of her husband's enlistment had devastating consequences for Agnes. Many men enlisted and upon their return, did not go back to the lives they previously had. Men could move across the country and leave because of their roles in the military. However, this left women trapped in the position their husbands left them in. Agnes Sharp exemplifies this. Her first partner, William Penn, joined the Sussex Fencibles. Then Robert Horton left Agnes. Her husband, Paul Cook, joined the 76th Regiment of Foot. She was abandoned by three partners, two of whom joined the army. This is a key facet of this case study which is

reflected in the nineteenth-century novel, particularly in the sensation novel, and the case of Lady Audley's initial abandonment.

John William McCartney (Harry MacDonald) (1915) Outline

In 1899 John William McCartney married Bridget Wyles in Wakefield. He later left Bridget and started dating a woman called Charlotte Kent. John had a fruit business in Hull and this resulted in him and Charlotte moving to the city. In 1914 John and Charlotte married, although he never divorced his first wife Bridget. John tried to skirt the law with his second marriage by changing his name to Henry/ Harry Macdonald. Not long after his marriage the First World War started and McCartney enlisted, and he was stationed in Pocklington not too far from Hull. Charlotte moved to Pocklington to be near McCartney and she lived with Mr and Mrs Rodgers.

With McCartney based in a military camp he was away from Charlotte which made him jealous and possessive. He made accusations of infidelity which were unsubstantiated. This behaviour then led to aggression and consequently domestic abuse. A specific incident was when McCartney grabbed Charlotte by the throat. This became a regular occurrence. Charlotte was also violent to McCartney.

It has been suggested that Charlotte told Mrs Rodgers (the woman with whom she was living) that she feared McCartney and did not want to be left alone with him. Not long after this McCartney slit Charlotte's throat and she died. After McCartney committed this heinous crime, he tried to commit suicide. He was on trial in the York Assizes in 1915. McCartney's

defence was insanity. He was found guilty of murder and sentenced to death. McCartney tried to claim he was mad, but this was never verified.



SOLDIER FOUND GUILTY OF MURDER. PLEA OF TEMPORARY INSANITY DISREGARDED BY JURY.

At the Assize for the North and East Ridings of Yorkshire, which resumed York Castle this morning, before Mr. Justice Alkin, John William McCartney, alias Harry McDonald (40), soldier, was indicted for the wilful murder of Charlotte Kent, at Pocklington, on the 9th September last. Mr. Nield, K.C., and Mr. H. C. prosecuted, and Mr. Paley Scott defended. The prisoner pleaded not guilty. Mr. Nield said the prisoner, who was a member the (Reserve) Battalion the East Yorkshire Infantry, was employed from June up to the date of the murder in the kitchens at Ousethorpe Camp, near Pocklington. He went through the ceremony of marriage with the deceased woman in July, 1914, but he had married some years previously a woman at Wakefield. Arrangements were made for the woman to lodge with Mrs. Rodger, and the prisoner to spend the week-ends there so far his military duties permitted. Counsel then referred to the evident jealousy of the prisoner, and his suspicions of the woman had married—suspicions that were apparently quite unfounded. During the evening of Thursday, September 9, the prisoner visited the woman, and whilst she was near the kitchen table he cut her throat, and then drew a razor across his own. Mrs. Rodgers, in evidence, said that when she informed prisoner that could not stay that night he asked the woman, whom he kissed many times, to go away with him, but she refused. Superintendent Robson said that maternal uncle of prisoner hanged himself in 1886, and a paternal uncle died at Wakefield Asylum 1894. Dr. Angus described the wounds having been caused by "carving." Dr. Hewlett, medical officer of the gaol at Hull, said that though kept under constant observation from October 5, nothing wrong had been detected with the prisoner mentally. The prisoner, in evidence, denied that there had been considerable amount of unpleasantness between him and the woman. He had complained of her conduct with a soldier, and she had said she did not want him. He did not remember anything with regard to the last visit to Mrs. Rodgers' house, or his stay at the infirmary. Mr. Scott submitted that the prisoner was insane at the time the act. The jury, after retiring for few minutes, found the prisoner guilty, and sentence of death was pronounced by the Judge. The prisoner was led away from the dock sobbing, "Oh, no, I was mad when I did it."

Yorkshire Evening Post - Wednesday 24 November 1915

Image © Johnston Press plc. Image created courtesy of THE BRITISH LIBRARY BOARD
<https://www.britishnewspaperarchive.co.uk/viewer/bl/000273/19151124/138/0005>

Figure 6: 'Soldier found guilty of murder', British Library Newspapers

Observations made about the John William McCartney Case

The case of John William McCartney illuminates many social issues during this period.

Similar to the case of Agnes Sharp the army forces the male part of the partnership to leave and relocate. William moved to Pocklington, which is approximately twenty miles from Hull, a considerable distance in terms of travel at this period. The issue of relocating because of military duties is a common theme not only in the case studies but also reflected in nineteenth-century literature such as Elizabeth Gaskell's *Mary Barton* (1848) in which Esther, Mary's aunt, is abandoned, together with her child by her soldier lover due to military commitments. Her future is the streets after her child contracts a fever and dies. Her mission in the novel is to protect her niece from falling victim to another ruthless man.

Domestic abuse is a key issue within McCartney's case. It is suggested that McCartney was the abuser and his wife, Charlotte, was the victim. This indicates that gender roles and the hierarchy of gender was a major issue. Domestic abuse is prevalent today and both men and women can be victims, but it largely remains, as in previous eras, a crime against women.

The charity, Women's Aid notes: "Whilst both men and women may experience incidents of inter-personal violence and abuse, women are considerably more likely to experience repeated and severe forms of abuse, including sexual violence. They are also more likely to have experienced sustained physical, psychological or emotional abuse, or violence which results in injury or death" (Women's Aid, 2017). However, in the era being scrutinised in both local cases and literature men largely seemed to be the abusers and women the victims. Jina Moon argues that there were efforts to combat domestic violence in Victorian literature: "Victorians propagated through various cultural media anti-domestic violence

messages among all classes and age groups. Although newspapers frequently included divorce cases to augment their readership, they also incited people to blame violent husbands, and to condemn the use of violence as unmanly” and “Victorian activists endeavored to combat domestic violence among the illiterate by spreading ballads blaming abusers for battering their family members at home” (Moon, 2016: 7-8). Domestic violence finds expression in Anne Brontë’s *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall* in which a wife is forced to flee her marital home to shield her son from her abusive husband. Here, however, Helen Huntingdon, can rely on her wealthy brother for sanctuary, even though she has to live under a false identity as the law when the novel is set in the 1820s guaranteed the father’s rights over the children of the marriage. In a deviation from the fictional to the real-life, Helen finds happiness again after the death of her husband, but the real-life Charlotte is murdered. The John McCartney case demonstrates the operation of domestic violence as he dominates Charlotte so much that he ended up killing her because he thought that she was going to leave him for another man. Killing Charlotte was the ultimate act of dominance over her because if he could not have her no one else could have her.

Observations and Conclusions

The ability to travel was a key factor in the ability to commit bigamy. It can be located in many of these cases, and even moving just a city away allowed people to restart their lives and erase their pasts or attempt to erase their pasts. In these cases which were brought to trial both for bigamy and for other crimes, the past caught up with the perpetrators. The inability to locate and identify individuals and the movement brought about by factors such

as war led to the crimes of bigamy. Men could enlist in the military, then return and start another life. However, the women they left behind were rendered immobile in law and in their social situations and conditions. These 'static' women resemble Miss Havisham and Lady Audley, who are not victims of war-time abandonment but are victims of men who abandon them after they have defrauded them in Miss Havisham's case or leave them in the case of Helen Talboys/Lady Audley to seek fortune abroad. Another similarity with Lady Audley and Miss Havisham is the gendering of madness. Alice Crossley was perceived as mad while John William McCarthy's plea of "temporary insanity" was rejected. The medical officer testified: "Dr. Hewlett, medical officer of the gaol at Hull, said that though kept under constant observation from October 5, nothing wrong had been detected with the prisoner mentally." The newspaper account concludes with the prisoner, on pronouncement of the death sentence by the judge, declaring: "Oh, no! I was mad when I did it."

Women could not move on with their lives without a divorce, and divorce was not an option for women in the social class examined here. If their husbands enlisted, came back, and changed their identities there was no way they could lawfully separate from them unless they could prove death. The alternative was to find them and reunite. The army was an excuse for some men to abandon their wives and start again upon their return. We see from the Napoleonic Wars (Agnes Sharp) to the First World War (Toddington Landlady).

Another key finding from these case studies is that the crime of bigamy was not always an isolated crime. Several of the case studies demonstrate that bigamy was compounded by money fraud, domestic abuse, aggressive behaviour and even murder. We see this in the cases of Agnes Sharp (1809-1823), Fredrick Holmes (1856), Albert Cape (1890), Henry

Jensen (1898), the notorious Fredrick Deeming (1889) and John McCartney (1915). All of these are prime examples of additional crimes being committed either to enable the bigamy, or because of it.

Although Maria Yelverton was cheered in Dublin, as barristers threw the wigs in celebration of her court victory, the case eventually got overturned in Scotland. Nevertheless, the case was a milestone in fraudulent law history and in the development of the sensation novel in the 1860s. It demonstrated how the law was not the same in the three parts of the United Kingdom. Helen/Ellen, the Toddington Landlady, divorced her second husband, who was easy to locate, but her first husband was unlocatable due to war. In the end she sums up how some of these women must have felt at the time as outsiders. Much like Lady Audley she was left a victim of the law, as both fictional and actual women often were. This chapter's examination of real-life bigamy cases demonstrates how true crimes mirror those of fiction as crimes of fraud against individuals and gender injustice were a fact of life as well as of fiction.

Chapter Four

Arthur Conan Doyle, Sherlock Holmes and True Crime:

Part One

Crimes of Romance and Finance

Suits Me, the digital account card, notes in its section on protecting clients from romance fraud and on staying secure online (“When Romance turns to Finance: it’s a Scam”), that “Dating should be exciting and not about turning into Sherlock Holmes and becoming a detective.” At the same time, it alerts clients to some “red flags” such as fraudsters being reluctant to talk about themselves, presenting as “picture-perfect”, making “excuses not to meet up” or having a “valid reason for asking for money” (*Suits Me*, 2023). Meanwhile for “fraud awareness month” in March 2022 in Ontario, Canada, Detective Constable Derek Gray warned residents that scammers can fake identities online and urged his audience to “be their own Sherlock Holmes” (Wilkinson, 2022).

While Sherlock Holmes was technologically up to date (through his use of print media and telegraphy) he would not recognize the technologies of contemporary romance fraud, yet he would acknowledge its operation. His name, as the examples above demonstrate, is widely recognised and deployed by companies and law enforcers to remind people to be vigilant with regard to their personal security. Holmes is a figure who polices society and brings criminals to justice. Much of the Holmesian canon deals with fraudulent crimes – romance fraud and finance fraud – which still remain critically underexplored. Fraud is a

common crime which Holmes tackles among a varieties of wrongdoing. This chapter examines fraudulent crimes committed in Doyle's work, covering both romance fraud and finance fraud and, as we have discovered in earlier chapters, their interconnection. While romance fraud is commonly committed to achieve finance fraud, nonetheless, finance fraud can be committed solely on its own. Doyle explores both types of fraud and illuminates the societal problems these present as well as the moral issues. In some of Doyle's works the 'crimes' we see were not legal 'crimes' but are designated as moral crimes. Much like contemporary cases of fraud, the Sherlock Holmes stories often deal with the crimes of ordinary life:

We are so used to crime novels dealing with murder, it's a real surprise to many people to find that in the early Holmes stories murder is a rare crime. Stranger still, crime itself is relatively rare, especially in the first twelve stories which were reprinted in one volume as *The Adventures of Sherlock Holmes*. These established the fascination of the great detective ... Doyle was well aware of the lack of crime as such in the stories." (Knight, 1994: 370)

Doyle examines both moralistic crimes as well as legal crimes. The first section of this chapter will primarily examine romance fraud that occurs within the stories then followed by the stories of financial fraud, perpetrated against individuals, usually males. The stories will be read alongside the illustrations provided by Sidney Paget. Paget is largely remembered for illustrating the stories published by Doyle, in particular the Sherlock Holmes stories. Paget, who was trained at London's prestigious Royal Academy, first illustrated Holmes for *The Strand Magazine* between 1891 and 1892. He was originally only

commissioned to illustrate *The Adventures of Sherlock Holmes*. However, when Doyle decided to continue with the Holmes stories, he asked for Paget to continue as illustrator. In total, Paget illustrated thirty-seven Holmes stories and a Holmes novel; the relationship between author and illustrator only ended with Paget's early death in 1908. "Paget remained until his untimely death the chief illustrator of the Sherlock Holmes stories. He established the iconic image of Holmes, which was imitated by later illustrators. In gratitude for his contribution to the immortal fame of the Master Detective, Arthur Conan Doyle gave him a wedding gift – a silver cigarette case with an inscription "From Sherlock Holmes, 1893" (Diniejko, 2013). Paget's work helped form interpretations of the Holmes stories and enabled their transition to stage and screen as Karita Kuusisto points out: "In his illustrations, Paget quite often included objects and furniture that were not mentioned in the text, thus becoming a co-creator not only of the characters but also their surroundings" (Kuusisto, 2017: 27). Haycraft confirms that two solid external factors that have contributed to the unequalled fame of Holmes are the illustrations and the numerous stage and screen plays made from the stories (Haycraft, 1941: 96). It is interesting that the author requested Paget continue his work with him. One can only draw the conclusion that Doyle liked Paget's work and that the interpretations Paget took from his literature were sympathetic to Doyle's intentions.

The illustrator is one of the writer's first interpreters and, as Philip James notes, there is a "partnership between author and artist to which the artist contributes something which is a pictorial comment on the author's words or an interpretation of his meaning in another medium" (James, 1947: 7). Christopher Pittard informs us that Paget worked under the guidance of the *Strand's* art editor, William H. J. Boot: "The first stage of the process of

illustrating Doyle's stories was Boot's selection of scenes for illustration, following a first reading of the text for a sense of plot, and a second to identify key incidents. Paget himself may have helped in this selection of scenes and was certainly responsible for their captioning" (Pittard, 2019:143). Furthermore, "[w]hile Paget's images might be understood in and of themselves, they also encouraged readers to view them sequentially ... Paget's images ... established imagistic chains within, and between, stories" (Pittard, 2019: 246). As Kuusisto points out, "illustrations were such an important part of Victorian life" so it is important to analyse the meanings that were generated by them" (Kuusisto, 2017: 33) while commenting that one of Paget's skills was his ability to differentiate between characters (Kuusisto, 2017: 28). The chapter reveals how text and image work in tandem to uncover romance and finance fraud, and the fraud conducted within the supposed security of the family.

Detecting Fraud:

'A Case of Identity'

'A Case of Identity' was first published in *The Strand Magazine* in September 1891. It is a story replete with criminal offences, but the fraudster goes unpunished at the story's end, highlighting the necessity for a private (or as Holmes describes himself, a 'consulting') detective to police the crimes of private and family life which were either unpunishable or difficult to punish in a court of law. Doyle allows Holmes to uncover a morally distasteful case and presents the lack of consequences to the offender.

This case starts with a woman named Mary Sutherland, who is financially secure due to a trust fund set up by her father and by her own earnings as a typist. When Mary consults Holmes she has been recently engaged to Hosmer Angel until he suddenly goes missing. Mary hardly knows her fiancé and reveals that all correspondence from him before his disappearance, including his signature, was typed (there are echoes here of twenty-first century romance fraud). Hosmer fails to turn up for his marriage to her and at this point Mary, concerned about her fiancé's disappearance, calls on the detective. She reveals that she has approached Holmes because she has heard of his reputation in private matters: "I came to you, sir because I heard of you from Mrs Etherege, whose husband you found so easy when the police and everyone had given him up for dead" (Doyle, 2002: 83).

While Mary is perplexed by the sudden disappearance of her fiancé, this is not a perplexing case for Holmes as he quickly deduces that Hosmer was in fact Mary's stepfather (James Windibank) in disguise. Holmes deduces this from details provided by Mary: Hosmer's physical description, Hosmer only meeting Mary when her stepfather was out of the country and the typed letters. Windibank had everything to gain from Mary falling in love and then being abandoned because then Mary's money would stay in the family and not be shared with her husband. Prior to his 'disappearance' Hosmer makes Mary promise that if something should happen she would still wait for him and not marry anyone else.

Impersonation of someone else is a crime now, but in the Victorian period, it was not. This case is designated as a moral crime. Holmes is no longer the impartial and unprejudiced character that we know, he is no longer the voice of reason within this case. "Sherlock Holmes is the defender of social norms; he enters a case not when a law, but when a norm,

has been broken” (Menes, 1981: 103). The crime against Mary Sutherland is a social crime and it goes against Holmes’s own unwritten code of justice. Windibank’s active deception of his stepdaughter is a moral issue. Indeed, a stepfather deceiving and romancing his stepdaughter to retain access to her money can be seen as the pinnacle of romance fraud. Legally Windibank did not do anything wrong because he did not marry Mary and he did not take anything from her. It was simply a mission of maintaining the status quo and keep Mary and her money within his reach.

Stephen Knight comments:

There was plenty of real crime in late Victorian London, as you might expect, but Doyle didn’t introduce professional crime and criminals in these early stories. Nor did he at first present a fantastic master criminal reaching in to disturb ordinary life, not until he created Professor Moriarty to dispose Holmes at the end of his second dozen of stories. What then were the crimes, the problems in the early stories? Broadly speaking, they deal with disorders in the respectable bourgeois family. There are various threats to establish middle-class order, but they come from within the family and the class, not from enemy criminals. One major force is a selfish greed which cuts across normal family responsibility. In “A Case of Identity” and “The Copper Beeches” a father interferes with his daughter’s marriage prospects to keep her money. (Knight, 1994: 370 -371)

In 'A Case of Identity', there is no actual legal crime, but the corruption comes 'from within the family' (Knight, 1994: 370 -371). Demonstrating the workings of a Victorian family gone awry and the injustices and limitations of the law in protecting vulnerable family members.

Holmes self-presents as a figure of logic, observation, and deduction, as he explains to Doctor Watson in 'A Study in Scarlet', Holmes's first outing as a detective, "Yes ; I have a turn for observation and for deduction. The theories which I have expressed there, and which appear to you to be so chimerical, are really extremely practical – so practical that I depend upon them for my bread and cheese" (Doyle, 18: 29). However, in 'A Case of Identity' he becomes outraged by the case's moral crimes and almost reneges his logical and rational behaviour which can be seen when Holmes addresses Windibank: "The law cannot, as you say, touch you", said Holmes, unlocking and throwing open the door, "yet there never was a man who deserved punishment more"" (Doyle, 2002: 87). Holmes is stating that the moral crime committed is against the code of humanity that even though a law is not in place to punish such an act, a man who commits such a moral crime should be punished as if it were an actual crime. Therefore, it is interesting to note that in this instance Holmes threatens physical violence against Windibank as retribution for his behaviour. If Mary had a brother (which she does not), Holmes suggests that "He ought to lay a whip across your shoulders. By Jove!" (Doyle, 2002: 87). Holmes asserts that this act of dishonesty and fraudulence must enable some form of punishment. In this case, Holmes is willing to act as the substitute brother and the threat of physical violence further provides Holmes with an outlet for the injustice he has witnessed.

Holmes identifies Hosmer through his writing, or lack of hand-writing. In *Lady Audley's Secret* handwriting is a betrayer, as it identifies Lady Audley. However, in this case the lack of a handwritten letter alerts Holmes: "My suspicions were all confirmed by his peculiar action in typewriting his signature, which of course inferred that his handwriting was so familiar to her that she would recognize even the smallest sample of it. You see all these isolated facts, together with many minor ones, all pointed in the same direction." (Doyle, 2002: 87). Windibank tried to disguise all aspects of himself even down to his handwriting, however, ironically that is what betrayed him. As Barloon argues, "Holmes knows, or believes, that individuality cannot be entirely effaced, he focuses on illuminating those imprints or traces that link, or that suggest a connection between, the two men. In this case, the key link turns out to be a typewriter. When Holmes learns from Mary that Angel's letters to her were always typewritten and that even his signature was typewritten, Holmes rightly infers that Angel did not want his correspondent to see even the smallest sample of his handwriting." As Barloon continues, "A signature is too much a signature. Indeed, Holmes recognized decades before forensic scientists that each person is demonstrably unique and that the merest "trace elements" bear the imprint or index of his or her origin. On this point at least – on the given and inalterable nature of human identity" (Barloon, 2006: 39 - 40)

This case returns us to women's immobility, due to the actions of a male. Like Miss Havisham, Mary is trapped by a family member whom she thinks is her fiancé. She is engaged to Hosmer which at this time was regarded as a binding contract. Hosmer disappears which therefore leaves Mary in a position of being engaged and being abandoned. "If women developed concerns about their engagements, they were often encouraged to put them aside and go through with marriages rather than be deemed

coquetted or jilts” (Nelson, 2015: 6). Nelson points out that the societal consequences of leaving an engagement were far too dire for women, therefore remaining in such engagement was the only option. In Mary’s case it was an engagement to a man who had abandoned her. Not only did Hosmer have the societal pressures on his side to get Mary to commit to him forever, he also made her swear on the Bible: ““Mr Hosmer Angel came to the house again, and proposed that we should marry before father came back. He was in dreadful earnest, and made me swear, with my hands on the Testament, that whatever happened I would always be true to him. Mother said he was quite right to make me swear, and that it was a sign of his passion”” (Doyle, 2002: 84). Hosmer/James uses this to consolidate the relationship knowing that societal pressure as well as the binding agreement Mary made on the Bible would make it almost impossible for Mary not to wait for Hosmer to return.

The image below is a visual representation of Mary looking into a four-wheeler and her future husband-to-be Hosmer absent. Paget has taken this scene from the text and brought it to life, with the accompanying line: “There was no one there.” Paget chooses the abandonment of Mary which underscores her aloneness through image and accompanying caption. She is now trapped in that moment because her relationship status is unknown, therefore she cannot move on. Just like Miss Havisham in *Great Expectations*, Mary has been left before her wedding. She has now been deserted and is imprisoned within that moment. Miss Havisham retreats to her home and self-destructs. Contrastingly, Mary takes a different approach and visits Sherlock Holmes in the hope he can help her with the situation she is in. *Great Expectations* is set in early nineteenth century whereas ‘A Case of

Identity' is set in 1888. Its late-century setting reflects the greater mobility of women but, at the same time, Mary is static in this scene. Mary explains:

Hosmer came for us in a hansom, but as there were two of us [Mary and her mother], he put us both into it, and stepped himself into a four-wheeler, which happened to be the only other cab in the street. We got to the church first, and when the four-wheeler drove up we waited for him to step out, but he never did, and when the cabman got down from the box and looked, there was no one there!
(Doyle, 2002: 84)

This time difference certainly illuminates the slight change not only of women's status but of women's confidence in attaining help. Miss Havisham allows herself to succumb to the entrapment of society and men, whereas Mary obtains advice. Sherlock Holmes gives women hope. Many of the stories commence with a woman visiting him to ask for advice and help. Mary's motivation to move beyond her state is reflected in Watson's description of her when he first sees her on the pavement opposite Baker Street:

I saw that on the pavement opposite there stood a large woman with a heavy fur boa round her neck, and a large curling red feather in a broad-brimmed hat which was tilted in a coquettish Duchess-of-Devonshire fashion over her ear. From under this great panoply she peeped up in a nervous, hesitating fashion at our windows, while her body oscillated backwards and forwards, and her fingers fidgeted with her glove buttons. Suddenly, with a plunge, as of the swimmer who leaves the bank, she hurried across the road, and we heard the sharp clang of the bell (Doyle, 2002: 83).

Mary moves from indecision to decision. Yet her uncertainty remains in relation to her predicament:

'I have seen those symptoms before,' said Holmes, throwing his cigarette into the fire. Oscillation upon the pavement always means an *affaire du coeur*. She would like advice, but is not sure that the matter is not too delicate for communication. And yet even here we may discriminate. When a woman has been seriously wronged by a man she no longer oscillates, and the usual symptom is a broken bell wire. Here we may take it that there is a love matter, but that the maiden is not so much angry as perplexed, or grieved (Doyle, 2002: 83).

Holmes is a beacon of light for clients trapped in their circumstances. His moral sense of justice allows him to ascertain justice for those who may not have a voice in society. It is also worth noting that Mary is also tricked by her mother who is colluding with Angel/James. At the end of the story, Holmes does not tell Mary the truth as her betrayal by her family is total. Haycraft comments that Holmes is almost Doyle's alter-ego:

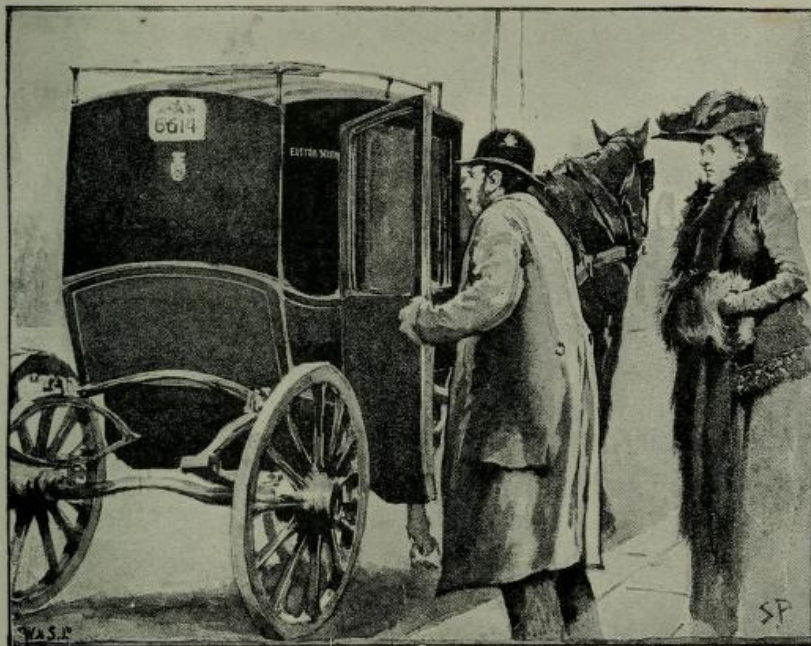
The real detective was Doyle himself. In appearance, with his beefy British frame and walrus moustache, he was much closer to Watson than Holmes. Ruggedness was his predominant characteristic. He had the Englishman's traditional fondness for sports of all kinds and an equally typical partisanship for the underdog. He was an unusual combination of the militant and the gentle, a dauntless fighter in any cause he

believed to be right, and an adversary to be feared; but in his heart, said his friends, there was no room for malice. (Haycraft, 1941: 87)

Holmes is a go-between for women and justice while his creator wanted to fight for the “underdog”, which in the case of many of the Holmes stories is a woman.

“Ha! that was unfortunate. Your wedding was arranged, then, for the Friday. Was it to be in church?”

“Yes, sir, but very quietly. It was to be at St. Saviour’s, near King’s-cross, and we were to have breakfast afterwards at the St. Pancras Hotel. Hosmer came for us in a hansom, but as there were two of us, he put us both into it, and stepped himself into a four-wheeler, which happened to be the only other cab in the street. We got to the church first, and when the four-wheeler drove up we waited for him to step out, but he never did, and when the cabman got down from the box and looked, there was no one there!



“THERE WAS NO ONE THERE.”

The cabman said he could not imagine what had become of him, for he had seen him get in with his own eyes. That was last Friday, Mr. Holmes, and I have never seen or heard anything since then to throw any light upon what became of him.”

“It seems to me that you have been very shamefully treated,” said Holmes.

“Oh no, sir! He was too good and kind to leave me so. Why, all the morning he was saying to me that, whatever happened, I was to be true; and that even if something quite unforeseen

Figure 7: Paget’s image as it appeared in *The Adventures of Sherlock Holmes*, published by George Newnes.

'The Solitary Cyclist' (1903)

'The Solitary Cyclist' depicts romance fraud with the intended outcome of financial fraud.

Holmes takes a case after a woman named Violet Smith consults him at Baker Street. She tells him about a man who follows her by bicycle on a country road between her place of work as a governess and the train. Violet is a governess to a man called Carruthers.

Unknown to Violet, Carruthers and his associate, Woodley, have arrived from South Africa with the intention of one or other of them marrying her as she is the heiress to a South African fortune accumulated by her uncle, Ralph. Carruthers proposes to Violet who rejects his advances as she is already in a relationship. Carruthers had fallen in love with Violet and regrets his connivance in the fraud but Woodley, his erstwhile companion, was determined to acquire her wealth through marriage. It is Carruthers in disguise who follows her by bicycle to protect her from Woodley as she travels to the train station at weekends.

However, despite Carruthers' intervention, Violet is abducted by Woodley who tries to force her to marry him in a ceremony in the woods near her place of work. Woodley employs a 'defrocked' vicar to perform the marriage. Holmes summarizes: "Well, well, two of you came over. His reverence is our own home-made article. You had known Ralph Smith in South Africa. You had reason to believe he would not live long. You found out that his niece would inherit his fortune. (Doyle, 2002: 228).

Carruthers and Woodley's initial plan for one of them to 'woo' and marry Violet is a form of romance fraud and when this does not work, Woodley uses coercion. Woodley believes that

the forced marriage is legal: “We had a licence for the marriage. I have it here in my pocket” (Doyle, 2002: 228). However, the Marriage Act 1836 states that:

And be it enacted, That after the said First Day of *March* the like Consent shall be required to any marriage in *England* solemnized by Licence as would have been required by Law to Marriages solemnized by Licence immediately before the passing of this Act; and every Person whose Consent to a Marriage is required by Law is hereby authorized to forbid the Issue of the Superintendent Registrar's Certificate, whether the Marriage is intended to be by Licence or without Licence. (Marriages Act in England 17 August 1836 6 & 7 Will. IV. c.85).

This act clearly states that consent must be given and with Woodley forcing marriage upon Violet, there was clearly no consent, and if there was, she would have been under duress. Woodley followed the law by obtaining a license, but no consent would have been given by Violet, therefore, making the marriage illegal and void. Holmes points this out: “Then you got it by trick. But, in any case, a forced marriage is no marriage, but it is a very serious felony, as you will discover before you have finished” (Doyle, 2002: 228). Holmes knows the law, and invokes it when it is required.

The romance fraud within this case is solely to commit financial fraud. The outcome Woodley wants is to gain access to Violet’s incoming inheritance from her uncle.

Set in 1895, only twenty-five years after the Married Women’s Property Act 1870, the first property act to address women’s property rights, makes the case contemporary with these issues. This act was quite vague with regards to the rights of women owning property.

However, women could in their own right control property up to £200. It does not state clearly what happened if the sum exceeded this amount. A later act in 1882 (Married Woman's Property Act) stipulated: "A married woman shall, in accordance with the provisions of this Act, be capable of acquiring, holding, and disposing by will or otherwise, of any real or personal property as her separate property" (Married Woman's Property Act 1882). Therefore, in theory and by the law, Violet, even though married, would have had control of her inheritance, not Woodley. However, Ben Griffin argues that even though this law was in place what went on behind closed doors was often beyond scrutiny. Women did not have domestic control which negated the role of a woman 'to make a happy home'. Griffin suggests:

The problem for the politicians was that there was no way of conceptualizing marital conflict within separate spheres ideology. Consider a typical extract from a marriage advice manual of the period, a book entitled *How to be happy though Married*, published in 1886: 'If the wife cannot make her home bright and happy, so that it should be the cleanest, sweetest, cheerfulest place that her husband can find refuge in - a retreat from the toils and troubles of the outer world - then God help the poor man, for he is virtually homeless!' There was no place in the Victorian home for disputes between husbands and wives if the home was to be the 'sweetest, cheerfulest place' that the husband could find refuge in. Within the terms of separate spheres ideology, this household harmony could only be achieved by the total subordination of women to their husbands. (Griffin, 2003: 63)

Griffins' comments underline the assertion that Holmes is suggesting that by marrying Violet and Woodley the law would have been against Woodley, yet he still believed Woodley would take Violet's inheritance. Woodley is a dangerous figure who deploys not only deceit but extreme violence in an attempt to achieve his goals. While the law may have given some financial rights, both societal obligations and domestic abuse could override women's protections in law, enabling husbands to retain financial power.

'The Solitary Cyclist' is a violent story. Carruthers' attempt to save Violet from Woodley results in him resorting to the use of a gun:

His revolver cracked, and I saw the blood spurt from the front of Woodley's waistcoat. He spun round with a scream and fell upon his back, his hideous red face turning suddenly to a dreadful mottled pallor. The old man, still clad in his surplice, burst into such a string of foul oaths as I have never heard, and pulled out a revolver of his own, but before he could raise it he was looking down the barrel of Holmes's weapon.

'Enough of this,' said my friend coldly. 'Drop that pistol! Watson, pick it up! Hold it to his head! Thank you. You, Carruthers, give me that revolver. We'll have no more violence. Come, hand it over!' (Doyle, 2002: 227-228).

There is a quick escalation in violence within this scene not only against Carruthers but against Violet. Violet was an innocent woman who was manipulated. Carruthers, though guilty of initially tricking Violet by giving her a job under false pretences, regretted his criminal activity because of his love for Violet. He did commit a serious offence and shot a

man but is it justified after what Woodley had done? Holmes intervenes with reason in contrast to how he behaves in 'A Case of Identity.' Here the law is clear in relation to the forced marriage: Violet is not married. By killing Woodley unnecessarily, Carruthers would be committing a crime which was unnecessary to protect her. Holmes calms the situation but still uses the threat of violence as he orders Watson to take the gun off Carruthers and "Hold it to his head" (Doyle, 2002: 228). There are two views one can take upon this, the first being that Holmes is being cautious, after all Carruthers has just shot Woodley and the second, which seems more fitting, is that Holmes is capable of using aggression when he deems it necessary. Watson has taken the gun off Carruthers and he is no longer a threat. So why is Holmes ordering Watson to hold a gun to his head? The only conclusion relates back to Holmes's moral code and law. Holmes still holds Carruthers accountable for his deception of Violet. Therefore, Carruthers has broken Holmes's personal code of conduct and must be punished.

'The Copper Beeches'

Doyle's fourteenth story in his Sherlock Holmes series was 'The Copper Beeches', published in 1892. This story illuminates similar issues to other stories in the Holmes series of a relative trying to force a female to sign over their inheritance. Daniel Stashower tells us how the story was conceived:

As he reported to his mother, he had now written five of the six new [Sherlock Holmes] stories and he planned to make the final adventure especially memorable. "I think of slaying Holmes in the sixth and winding him up for good and all," Conan Doyle announced. "He takes my mind from better things." Mary Doyle received this news with horror – "You won't!" she replied. "You can't! You mustn't" and he went on to suggest the idea that would not involve violence to the detective. Moved by his mother's pleas, Conan Doyle granted a stay of execution. Instead, he wrote "The Copper Beeches," and credited the Ma'am with providing a crucial plot point. (Stashower, 1999: 126)

While the story is not a 'romance fraud' in the strictest sense, romance is the catalyst which prompts the fraudster to act. It is a story of family fraud, where the father abuses his position of protector of his family to abuse and defraud his daughter. Violet Hunter, a governess, approaches Holmes after receiving strange requests from her future employer, Jephro Rucastle. Rucastle requires Violet to undertake strange tasks such as looking a certain way: she had to cut her hair and wear, at times, a blue dress. Violet accepts the post as she needs the work and the money offered to her is significantly higher than what a governess would normally receive. Violet maintains contact with Holmes and informs him that Rucastle's daughter has apparently left home. One of her duties is to sit for a period of time in a window clad in an electric blue dress. Through the use of a mirror Violet realises that there is a man outside the gates looking at her in the window. Holmes deduces that Violet was hired to be the doppelganger of Alice, Rucastle's supposedly absent daughter. The man watching her is Alice's fiancé. Holmes also works out that when Alice came of age, she was entitled to monies from her mother's will. Rucastle had tried to force Alice to sign

over this wealth which made her become ill. Alice is not, in fact, absent from the home, but locked in a room at the top of the house. In a manner which reflects *The Woman in White*, Rucastle deploys a substitute who looks identical to his daughter. His wife is complicit in this just as Fosco and Glyde conspire in the Laura-Anne substitution.

'The Copper Beeches' allows us to see the male-dominated law during the late Victorian era, and how women are still interchangeable. Rucastle tries to use the law against Alice by attempting to force her to sign legal papers as he knows that once she has married, he would not be entitled to her monies. This case underlines, like that of 'The Solitary Cyclist', how little power women had in the home. Although their rights to property were guaranteed by law, the law did not in practice exist in the home. This case, with its Gothically-named villain, is a throwback to the earlier Gothic tradition of female incarceration, a line which extends back to Ann Radcliffe's *The Mysteries of Udolpho* in which ownership of property and male coercion are key themes. In his own home Rucastle can exert pressure on his daughter and even imprison her to force her to sign over her wealth.

'She was never happy at home, Miss Alice wasn't, from the time that her father married again. She was slighted like, and had no say in anything; but it never really became bad for her until after she met Mr Fowler at a friend's house. As well as I could learn, Miss Alice had rights of her own by will, but she was so quiet and patient, she was, that she never said a word about them, but just left everything in Mr Rucastle's hands. He knew he was safe with her; but when there was a chance of a husband coming forward, who would ask for all that the law could give him, then

her father thought it time to put a stop on it. He wanted her to sign a paper so that whether she married or not, he could use her money. When she wouldn't do it, he kept on worrying her until she got brain fever, and for six weeks was at death's door. Then she got better at last, all worn to a shadow, and with her beautiful hair cut off; but that didn't make no change in her young man, and he stuck to her as true as man could be.' (Doyle, 2002: 142)

This passage outlines the issues not with the law at this time but what I define as 'Societal Law' or the expectations of society which overpowered the law. In theory women had control of their finances at this time but in practice they were still governed by patriarchal norms. The comment in this extract: "He knew he was safe with her; but when there was a chance of a husband coming forward, who would ask for all that the law could give him" (Doyle, 2002: 142) underlines that Alice's monies once married would go to her husband. Rucastle seems to be worried about Alice receiving her inheritance but suggests it is not she who will control it. Legally Alice should control this inheritance but the fact that Rucastle expects her future husband to do so says a lot about what men expected, despite the Married Woman's Property Acts. Yet the law states Alice should have control but does society (patriarchal society) still control women's property or deny them access to it? There is a paradox here: women have some legal control over their wealth but men have (im)moral and even physical control. It is in this space between the legal and the (im)moral that Holmes becomes important: Holmes and Watson become advisors to women from their Baker Street home/practice.

In all three stories, Paget, provides illustrations of these women (Mary, Violet and Violet) consulting Holmes and Watson in Baker Street, underlining how Paget emphasizes Holmes's role as protector of women. In the first, Paget captions his image: "Sherlock Holmes welcomed her" signalling Baker Street as a place of security; in the second which features Violet Hunter's consultation, the danger to Violet in taking up a peculiar governessing position is underlined by the caption: "Holmes shook his head gravely"; in the third Holmes's chivalry is emphasized: "My friend took the lady's ungloved hand."



Figure 8: Sherlock Holmes welcomed her. (Mary Sutherland consulting Holmes)



Figure 9: My friend took the lady's ungloved hand. (Violet Smith consulting Holmes)



Figure 10: Holmes shook his head gravely. (Violet Hunter consulting Holmes)

In all three of these images, we see Holmes come to the aid of the women. In each of these images it can be argued that Holmes seems to pity these women. In figure eight Holmes's hands are together and he is looking down on Mary Sutherland. He does not portray the

sharp sarcastic wit we see from him in the text. Similarly, in figure nine, Holmes is holding Violet Smith's hand, again offering comfort and security to a woman. Figure ten again illuminates the support Holmes is giving to women as he is seated next to his client with his hands drawn together. He is giving her his undivided attention. Paget represents the detective as considerate, deliberating the case as he puts his fingertips together (designated as the 'steeple' gesture). Paget's Holmes is entirely absorbed in the problems each of these women presents. Paget's representation is mimicked by the actor Jeremy Brett who brings Sherlock Holmes to life for the Granada TV productions.



Figure 11: Jeremy Brett and the 'steeple gesture' from 'The Problem of Thor Bridge' (1991)

All three of Paget's images are of women coming for help from Holmes because either the law or societal law is against them, even though they are victims. The law should be on their side but is not and thus these stories highlight the grey area within the law. Holmes works in

the grey and tries to ascertain justice for these women even though everything is against them. This returns to Holmes's moral code. He cannot leave these women in the situation they are in because of this code; therefore, he strives to get justice even when sometimes he has to do things we would not expect from Sherlock Holmes. Holmes is the answer to women's legal issues. If, as Pittard points out, "Paget's illustrations play a crucial role in the narratives' creation of meaning", then Paget's illustrations of Holmes and his clients' first meeting serves to underline Holmes's role in advising and protecting women (Pittard, 2019: 154). More mobile than Miss Havisham, as each of these women work for a living and have the ability to travel to Baker Street, they nonetheless find themselves in positions of either uncertainty or danger.

A non-fraudulent crime committed by Rucastle is the imprisonment of Alice. This is a classic case of what has been presented in many Victorian works, both fictional and true crime cases and in earlier chapters of this thesis of a further crime committed to achieve the end game of financial fraud. Holmes outlines the captivity:

"Excellent! We shall then look thoroughly into the affair. Of course, there is only one feasible explanation. You have been brought there to personate someone, and the real person is imprisoned in this chamber. That is obvious. As to who this prisoner is, I have no doubt that it is the daughter, Miss Alice Rucastle, if I remember right, who was said to have gone to America. You were chosen, doubtless, as resembling her in height, figure, and the colour of your hair." (Doyle, 2002: 141)

Rucastle imprisons and technically kidnaps his own daughter to keep his access to her money. The imprisonment is not the crime intended but is a necessity to achieve his ultimate goal of financial fraud. The story emphasizes the extremity of financial fraud. Although the law around this crime was ambiguous and lacking in detail, the planning required to undertake such a crime was immense from, in Rucastle's case, the search for a body double and the manipulation of the governess into wearing a blue dress and sit in a window. It is a 'long-con', taking time, effort and commitment, and in this way mirrors the Fosco-Glyde 'long-con'. Like the machinations of contemporary romance fraud, Doyle presents complex cases in which his detective is required to unravel a web of deceptions to decipher the crime and the criminal intention.

False identities make fraud possible in these Holmes stories. This is because identities were fragile during this period. People could shape themselves into whoever, or whatever they wanted to be. Identities were malleable. Violet is manipulated to cover Rucastle's fraud, thus illustrating that women's identities could be easily swapped by the male gender so they could carry out their criminal activities. Rucastle uses her to create a doppelganger to aid his criminal affairs. The Alice Rucastle / Violet Hunter swop is a version of the Ann Catherick / Laura Fairlie swop in *The Woman in White*. Women are exchangeable but Violet Hunter is more active than her predecessors in trying to solve the mystery in the wing of the house that Rucastle forbids her to enter. In this respect, the story has echoes of Bluebeard's chamber and of *Jane Eyre*, in which Bertha Mason is incarcerated in the attic for madness. In *The Woman in White* Laura is a passive victim of her circumstances; it is her half-sister Marian who is the active figure, eavesdropping on conversations between Glyde and Fosco and rescuing her sister with the aid of Walter Hartwright. The Laura-Marian-Walter triangle

operates in opposition to the Laura-Fosco-Glyde triangle, just as in 'The Copper Beeches', the triangle of Violet, Holmes and Watson, help release the incarcerated victim in the attic.

In the Holmes stories it is men who change their identities or the identities of others to commit fraud. The male gender seems to be using the fragile identity issues during this time and using them to their advantage to regain authority and power over the women. The period in which the Holmes stories are set (1880s and 1890s) coincided with a progression in women's rights and stance within the law and, although minor, it would have threatened male authority. Women's mobility in these stories, their ability to leave their homes to consult the detective in Baker Street, demonstrates their increased autonomy as well as the threat that their autonomy posed to their fathers and stepfathers intent on controlling the money of these women.

'The Disappearance of Lady Frances Carfax'

'The Disappearance of Lady Frances Carfax' echoes *The Woman in White* in that Lady Carfax almost dies after she is placed in a coffin. She is about to be buried alive and again there is a substitution of identity, as the body in the coffin is supposed to be that of an elderly nurse. It is Lady Carfax's mobility – she is travelling abroad – which makes her a victim to unscrupulous villains. Romance occupies a place in this story as her suitor is also in pursuit of her. The story commences when her housekeeper in England, Miss Dobney, gets worried when Lady Carfax has mysteriously disappeared and asks Holmes to find her. Watson is sent to Lausanne, the last place in which she was seen. Here a man had visited her and shortly afterwards she left. She was also tracked to Germany but so was the mysterious man. Lady Carfax and the people

she was staying in Germany with disappeared (Dr. Schlessinger and his wife). Watson's next location is Montpellier where he questions Lady Carfax's former chambermaid. Watson realises he is being followed by the mystery man and they end up fighting. Watson is rescued by a workman who is Holmes in disguise. Holmes is doing his own investigation to find the mystery man who turns out to be Lady Carfax's former partner, who is tracking her to propose marriage.

When back in London the story unravels, and Dr Schlessinger seems to be behind Lady Carfax's disappearance. His real name is Holy Peters, and he has several criminal offences to his name. His schemes always entailed picking lonely and rich women. The fraud centres on religion as he lures his victims through their religious beliefs. Holmes and Watson manage to track Holy Peters (Dr Schlessinger) and find out he has just ordered a coffin. In panic they rush to locate Peters, but the coffin is in use with his nanny. Holmes is shocked at his misjudgment and failure in the case. However, Holmes has an epiphany and rushes with Watson to the nanny's funeral. They force open the coffin and find Lady Carfax in the coffin, alive, but only just. The duping of Lady Carfax via her religious beliefs almost culminates in her being buried alive in a fake funeral under the name of another woman. Like Laura Glyde she is brought back to life in the social and legal sense.

The short story echoes *The Woman in White* and also reflects some key societal issues during this period. The first corroborates findings in the case studies on bigamy in the previous chapter: movement and travel. Dr Schlessinger (Holy Peters and Henry Peters) is

situated in another country. He is a missionary from South America, he has relocated to Germany and has committed offences in Australia. He has an extensive criminal record:

“It shows, my dear Watson, that we are dealing with an exceptionally astute and dangerous man. The Rev. Dr Shlessinger, missionary from South America, is none other than Holy Peters, one of the most unscrupulous rascals that Australia has ever evolved - and for a young country it has turned out some very finished types. His particular speciality is the beguiling of lonely ladies by playing upon their religious feelings, and his so-called wife, an Englishwoman named Fraser, is a worthy helpmate.” (Doyle, 2022: 405)

In describing Dr Schlesinger, Holmes reveals how he has a routine of manipulating and taking advantage of vulnerable women. He even uses another woman (his wife) to help with his con and to gain the trust of his prey. Travel and his frequent change of identity enables his crimes as there was no ‘inter-country agency’ that tracked crimes committed all over the world. Interpol was only founded in September 1923. The bigamy cases in the previous chapter demonstrate how movement from one city to another enabled crime, but Schlesinger is an international criminal, on a scale with the real-life murderer, Frederick Deeming, whose crimes, as noted in the previous chapter, were committed in Hull and Australia.

While Schlesinger assumes fake identities, so too does the detective in this story. Here he disguises himself as a working man, using it to both further his investigation and examine Watson’s work:

An hour afterwards Sherlock Holmes, in his usual garb and style, was seated in my private room at the hotel. His explanation of his sudden and opportune appearance was simplicity itself, for, finding that he could get away from London, he determined to head me off at the next obvious point of my travels. In the disguise of a working-man he had sat in the cabaret waiting for my appearance. 'And a singularly consistent investigation you have made, my dear Watson,' said he. 'I cannot at the moment recall any possible blunder which you have omitted. The total effect of your proceedings has been to give the alarm everywhere and yet to discover nothing. "Perhaps you would have done no better," I answered, bitterly. 'There is no "perhaps" about it. I have done better. Here is the Hon. Philip Green, who is a fellow-lodger with you in this hotel, and we may find in him the starting-point for a more successful investigation. 'A card had come up on a salver, and it was followed by the same bearded ruffian who had attacked me in the street. He started when he saw me. (Doyle, 2002: 404)

Sherlock's disguise is a little hypocritical as he has chastised others for doing the same thing in his earlier stories. The ends justify the means. Therefore, Holmes disguising himself is acceptable if he catches the culprit in the end. By dressing as someone else Holmes is presenting a false identity, he is not Sherlock Holmes but, in this case, a 'working-man'. It is understandable why Holmes goes to such lengths as he is the detective who works with the victims of legal and societal law. He is the figure who works with the vulnerable, therefore he should be allowed more flexibility in achieving justice for when he takes the cases he is already hampered by the limitations of the law. The only issue with this is that he has

double standards and has the outlook of 'do as I say not as I do'. This can be read as hypocritical as he is penalising those who are doing the same thing but for different reasons. Doyle presents Holmes as a figure of justice, but he must work in the shadows to achieve it.



Figure 12: The fellow gave a bellow of anger and sprang upon me like a tiger.

Published three years after the death of Paget, the story was illustrated by Alec Ball. The above figure is a visual representation of Holmes's disguise. The image shows Watson being attacked and Holmes, as a workingman, coming to his aid. The act of aggression towards Watson shows the relationship Holmes and Watson have. Holmes is willing to break his disguise and jeopardise his case to save Watson from the unknown assailant. This act highlights the sensitivity of Holmes, as he eschews his cold, analytical and systematic ways to save his companion. This image also shows Holmes's aggressive side evident in many of the stories. Holmes seems to take violent action when either all else fails or to protect

someone he sees as vulnerable to danger. Holmes is a 'Guardian Angel' who not only fights against injustices, but for those in danger as well.

Holmes may use one disguise, but Dr Schlessinger uses several aliases and identities to get away with his crimes. He uses the alias Dr Schlessinger in Germany and Henry Peters to pawn Lady Carfax's jewellery. He also uses the alias Holy Peters to dupe his victims. These are three names a single man uses and the only person to question that is Holmes. A physical description allows him to deduce that Schlessinger is the man pawning Lady Carfax's jewellery: "The nature of his tactics suggested his identity to me, and this physical peculiarity - he was badly bitten in a saloon-fight at Adelaide in '89 - confirmed my suspicion." (Doyle, 2002: 405). Holmes changes to hide his appearance, however, Schlessinger does not seem to change his appearance just his name and it is that which causes him to get caught. It is ironic that what Holmes does and what Schlessinger does not do is what, in fact, leads to the criminal's downfall. Holmes also suggests that Schlessinger's tactics and strategies to deceive and manipulate are also what causes Schlessinger to be brought to justice. He can change his name and identity, but he cannot change one unique physical characteristic. While training to be a doctor, Doyle was lectured by Dr Joseph Bell who taught him to read the signs of the body. Holmes uses marks on the bodies to identify the criminal. In the end, Lady Frances is protected by her former suitor, Philip Green, as Holmes enables the relationship through his detective work.

'The Speckled Band'

Similar to 'The Copper Beeches', 'The Speckled Band' is a story in which romance catalyses the crimes and it is also a crime perpetrated in the family. Again, it is about the interchangeability of women which reflects Collins's novel. It starts with a woman going to Holmes for help, in this case it is Helen Stoner. Helen visits the detective because her twin sister died under strange circumstances. Her sister was about to get married and suddenly died just after she spoke her last words of 'The Speckled Band'. In the days before her death Julia had been complaining of a strange noise during the night and thus this noise kept her from sleeping. Helen visits Holmes as she herself is about to get married and her step-father, Dr Roylott, insists she now sleep in her deceased sister's room. Holmes is concerned and goes to Helen's home. On his way he speaks to Watson and outlines the will of Dr Roylott's wife. It states he has full access to her daughters' monies until they become married. Holmes and Watson switch rooms with Helen so they end up secretly in Helen's late sister's room unknown to Dr Roylott. As they wait in the room they hear a hissing noise which turns out to be a snake. Holmes hits the snake which then retreats back to its owner and bites him. Its owner is Roylott who trained the snake to slip through a ventilator and attack anyone in the room and then by hearing a whistle to retreat. He devises this complex and cruel plan so he could keep his access to his stepdaughters' money.

The first interesting fact about this case concerns legality. It has become a common theme of a step-father or non-blood relative deceiving those who are supposed to be in their care. In this case Dr Roylott had to commit murder to sustain his lifestyle because a legal document dictated his future. Holmes outlines the will:

'I have seen the will of the deceased wife,' said he. 'To determine its exact meaning I have been obliged to work out the present prices of the investments with which it is concerned. The total income, which at the time of the wife's death was little short of £1,100, is now through the fall in agricultural prices not more than £750. Each daughter can claim an income of £250, in case of marriage. It is evident, therefore, that if both girls had married this beauty would have had a mere pittance, while even one of them would cripple him to a serious extent. My morning's work has not been wasted, since it has proved that he has the very strongest motives for standing in the way of anything of the sort.' (Doyle, 2002: 114)

Holmes is outlining the motive for the financial fraud. Similar to 'A Case of Identity', the stepfather does not want the daughter to marry and move on with her life. They want to control them and their money to keep the lifestyle they think they should have. In both stories neither of the men committing the financial fraud are related to their victims. They are family by marriage, but not by blood. Therefore, it can be assumed that they will cross that moral line because there is no genetic link. If the victims were their daughters, there might be a difference, but they are not, therefore there is not that ultimate trust and love. These men will cross the line and their moralistic values differ when money is on the line and the only one in their way is someone not blood-related to them. But, then Rucastle is also prepared to sacrifice (if not quite murder) his biological daughter. Roylott perpetrates murder and plans a second murder to preserve financial control. Murder is the secondary crime deployed in the interest of preserving his financial status, which is precarious. In

addition, he subjects Helen to emotional and physical abuse as demonstrated by the marks on her wrist and her terror at the possibility of being followed by him to Baker Street.

The irony of this story is that Roylott is killed by what can only be described as his weapon. He was using the snake to achieve his financial fraud and kills Helen's sister. He then attempts murder again to commit the financial fraud. The snake is symbolic of his motives: slippery, slimy and evil just like its owner. However, it can be suggested that the snake, when confronted by a man cowers away, just like the doctor. He is taking advantage of women - vulnerable women. These women, his stepdaughters, have already experienced loss through the death of their mother and father. He is 'gaslighting' them into thinking they are losing mental capacity. Helen herself begs Sherlock for help and even claims: "I shall go mad if it continues" (Doyle, 2002: 111) which demonstrates Roylott's gaslighting. Gaslighting has entered contemporary parlance, dating from a 1938 play, as noted in the introduction, and popularized through the later film, and it is as Jessamy Gleeson points out, "a relatively new term for a relatively old set of behaviours". She elaborates:

Gaslighting takes its name from the 1944 film Gaslight, starring Ingrid Bergman and Charles Boyer (itself based on the 1938 play *Gas Light*). In the film, Paula (Bergman) is deliberately and gradually manipulated by her husband, Gregory (Boyer), into believing she is insane. (Gleeson, 2018)

In 'The Speckled Band', like the play *Gaslight*, Roylott manipulates his victim by allowing her to become engaged but manipulating her into sleeping in her dead sister's bedroom so he can murder her too. His unpredictability, like Mannigham's in *Gaslight*, has a physical and

psychological impact. Holmes is the saviour of the endangered female. He is that beacon of light for the woman who has no legal right or anyone else to turn to.

“I have no one to turn to - none, save only one, who cares for me, and he, poor fellow, can be of little aid. I have heard of you, Mr. Holmes; I have heard of you from Mrs Farintosh, whom you helped in the hour of her sore need. It was from her that I had your address. Oh, sir, do you not think you could help me too, and at least throw a little light through the dense darkness which surrounds me?” (Doyle, 2002: 111).

Helen even uses the word “light” to describe what Holmes does. He puts a spotlight on the legal and social issues within society and thus tries to fight for justice for women who are held back by the law, societal law, and the male gender. It is clear in the story that the abusive Roylott has been shaped by his experiences in India. He already killed his Indian servant before he comes back to Britain. He is not punished for this crime in Empire and seeks to murder again in England. Cyndy Hendershot notes: “Doyle's ‘The Adventure of the Speckled Band’ ... explore[s] the threat of losing British masculine civilization through degeneration produced by the imperial Other” (Hendershot, 1996: 1). In this reading, his stay in India is blamed for his turning to violent crime, but equally, it is the fault of British governance in India that can be blamed as Roylott only receives what must be a short prison sentence for the murder of his Indian servant.



Figure 13: She raised her veil.

Has India changed him or merely enabled his predilection for degeneracy because he has not been controlled by the British law there? His 'zoo' of exotic creatures' distances him from the local community and the coroner does not see the marks of a snake as he would not expect to see them in England. Roylott also uses his professional knowledge and Holmes cautions how doctors are dangerous when they turn to crime.

Figure thirteen is another artistic representation of Holmes coming to the aid of a female victim. Here he listens to her worries as she lifts her veil over her face. Helen is unveiling her abuse, evident in her terrorized face and premature grey hair. What we see in this cycle of Paget images is the illustrator's focus on Holmes's initial interaction with his female clients. Paget continually draws the scenes of Holmes going to the aid of women as the illustrations highlight Holmes's significance in tackling what the law does not prevent or punish: abuse of women.



Figure 14: Holmes lashed furiously.

Figure fourteen again shows the aggressive side to Holmes's character. Violence is met with violence. We continually see in Conan Doyle's works that Holmes has this dark, violent side to him when justice has not been served. In this image Holmes is attacking the snake. The snake is at that point the killer. Thus, Holmes is taking the injustice of Helen out on the snake and the snake will take it out on his master in the adjoining room. By kneeling on the bed where one woman was killed and another's killing was planned, Holmes is occupying this space. He becomes in this instance the substitute victim, but he is not asleep and, indeed, he warns Watson not to fall asleep.

The story is generally read from the perspective of imperialism, but it is also a gendered narrative in that the snake can be seen to symbolise rape. As such, it can be read as a form of perverted romance. James Emmett quotes Joseph Kester that the "the phallic nature of the death instrument, snake, [...] indicates the intended crime is that of incestuous rape' but further observes that "the bruised imprint of her father's hand on Helen's wrist suggests

that the crime is as literal as symbolic, as actualized as intended.” He further draws on another critic: “Indeed, Pratt-Smith points out the ‘sexual as well as violent connotation’ in Holmes’s accusation that Helen has ‘been cruelly *used*,’ in order to demonstrate darker levels of Doyle’s story’ before arguing that the story is “even darker still.” (Emmet, 2020: 62-65)

‘The Speckled Band’ is “even darker still” due to the incestuous intentions Doyle brings to this story. We can read this as a nasty representation of romance fraud. Helen Stoner is not the biological daughter of Dr Grimesby Roylott; however, he is acting as her father. Being her stepfather gives him the same responsibilities as a father. If agreeing with the critics that the snake symbolises rape, then we are presented with an extreme act of perversion to commit financial fraud. This is one of the most severe acts of romance frauds we have seen within the Holmes stories. We go back to the question of whether Roylott would cross that line if Helen Stoner was his biological daughter? Therefore, that raises the question of what this says about the romance fraud? What Doyle has created here is a ‘perverted romance fraud’. He uses the snake as a symbol of sex to allow Roylott to attain Helen Stoner’s finances. If we look at this from this perspective Doyle demonstrates how Roylott is symbolically raping his stepdaughter to gain her money. That is an extreme way of perpetrating romance fraud which develops into financial fraud. ‘The Speckled Band’ demonstrates a level of violence which has not been shown in other Holmes stories. We see such development of violence between Doyle’s ‘A Case of Identity’ to ‘The Speckled Band’. All the cases that have been examined in this chapter speak to each other. There is a negative development throughout these stories as there is an increase in violence towards women to defraud them of their wealth, in stories in which romance, in one form or

another, is a factor. This raises the question as to whether the increase in violence can be attributed to men losing legal control over women, and thus moving to violence to acquire this power back. This freedom women gained allowed them to be more mobile. Unlike Miss Havisham the female characters in Doyle's works are not static but mobile as they have the freedom to come visit him. This suggests that the mobility of women is also a factor in the increase of violence towards them.

Finance

'The Red-Headed League'

The story was first published in the *Strand* in August 1891 and focuses on financial fraud, both public and private. Holmes's client, Jabez Wilson, is an elderly pawnbroker whose defining feature is red hair. A retiring figure, Wilson rarely leaves his shop, until his new assistant alerts him to a singular opportunity: membership of the Red Headed League. After the audition, Wilson duly gets the job which compels him to copy out the *Encyclopaedia* for four hours every day in a London office. Not long after Wilson takes up his post the Red-Headed League shuts down. Wilson loses his job without explanation and, suspecting something strange, visits Sherlock Holmes. After a quick investigation Holmes discovers that the Red-Headed League's job for Wilson was a ploy to take him away from his pawnbroker duties because Vincent Spaulding (John Clay) wanted to use Wilson's shop to dig a tunnel to the bank on the opposite side of the street to rob it.

The story involving Wilson is a case of what I describe as private fraud, as Wilson is defrauded within his own home and business. The first dimension of this is Vincent Spaulding's false representation of himself. His true name is John Clay. Holmes describes him to the bank manager, Merryweather:

John Clay, the murderer, thief, smasher, and forger. He's a young man, Mr. Merryweather, but he is at the head of his profession, and I would rather have my bracelets on him than on any criminal in London. He's a remarkable man, is young John Clay. His grandfather was a Royal Duke, and he himself has been to Eton and Oxford. His brain is as cunning as his fingers, and though we meet signs of him at every turn, we never know where to find the man himself." (Doyle, 2002: 81)

Nordon notes that Clay, "the aristocratic young criminal ... belongs rather to the type of 'gentleman cracksman' whose exploits were described by Conan Doyle's brother-in-law, William Hornung. (Nordon, 1966: 236). Vincent/John presents himself as someone else to manipulate and coerce Wilson. The false identity is self-preservation. If he uses a false identity, when he has committed his crimes, the person who committed them does not exist therefore, he can disappear. False representation is a significant feature of Doyle's works and he explores the impact this has on his clients: in 'A Case of Identity' a vulnerable young woman's present and future life is changed by a false identity. In 'The Red-Headed League', the victim is male. The story depicts Wilson as vulnerable, as Watson describes him as "a very stout, florid-faced, elderly gentleman, with fiery red hair" (Doyle, 2002: 76). His appearance also suggests he is financially unstable as he is described as "wear[ing] rather baggy grey shepherds' check trousers, a not over-clean black frock-coat, unbuttoned in the

front, and a drab waistcoat with a heavy brassy Albert chain, and a square pierced bit of metal dangling down as an ornament. A frayed top-hat, and a faded brown overcoat with a wrinkled velvet collar lay upon a chair beside him.” (Doyle, 2002: 77). His shop is located in a dilapidated square:

It was a pokey, little, shabby genteel place, where four lines of dingy two-storied brick houses looked out into a small railed-in enclosure, where a lawn of weedy grass and a few clumps of faded laurel bushes made a hard fight against a smoke-laden and uncongenial atmosphere. Three gilt balls and a brown board with 'JABEZ WILSON' in white letters, upon a corner house, announced the place where our red-headed client carried on his business. (Doyle, 2002: 80)

All this suggests that Wilson would benefit from extra income, making him a suitable target for manipulation. The ‘Red-Headed League’ and ‘A Case of Identity’ were written very closely together in the spring of 1891, shortly after ‘A Scandal in Bohemia’, which features disguised identities and in which a capable singer/actress is pursued by a king to recover a photograph which would reveal that they had an affair. Doyle’s attention to a male victim in ‘The Red-Headed League’ opens a new chapter within his writing in revealing male vulnerabilities. Many of his Holmesian stories focus on female victims of romance and financial fraud. In this instance Doyle is acknowledging that men can be vulnerable too, but they are generally victims in the Holmes stories of financial fraud. It is interesting to note that in this story Doyle does not use violence to remove Wilson in Vincent Spaulding’s plan. The job offer is contrived to remove Wilson temporarily from his premises. Doyle has previously demonstrated violence or other criminal activities to achieve the main criminal goal as in *The Sign of Four* which

features murder and theft. However, in this case it is very different. He takes a nonviolent approach. It could be argued Doyle does this because Wilson is easy to manipulate, therefore there is no need for violence against this “elderly gentleman” (Doyle, 2002: 76).

A further example of private fraud is when Vincent Spaulding lies to Wilson about the job opportunity he proposes. He entices Wilson under false pretences as the society does not really exist and is invented only to remove the retiring Wilson from his shop. Holmes suggests during the consultation with Wilson that his experience was a ‘front’ for something ‘graver’:

'I went home to Saxe-Coburg Square, and I took the advice of my assistant. But he could not help me in any way. He could only say that if I waited I should hear by post. But that was not quite good enough, Mr. Holmes. I did not wish to lose such a place without a struggle, so, as I had heard that you were good enough to give advice to poor folk who were in need of it, I came right away to you.'

'And you did very wisely,' said Holmes. 'Your case is an exceedingly remarkable one, and I shall be happy to look into it. From what you have told me I think that it is possible that graver issues hang from it than might at first sight appear.'

'Grave enough!' said Mr. Jabez Wilson. 'Why, I have lost four pounds a week.'

'As far as you are personally concerned, remarked Holmes, 'I do not see that you have any grievance against this extraordinary league. On the contrary, you are, as I understand, richer by some thirty pounds, to say nothing of the minute knowledge which you have gained on every subject which comes under the letter A. You have lost nothing by them.'

'No, sir. But I want to find out about them, and who they are, and what their object was in playing this prank - if it was a prank - upon me. It was a pretty expensive joke for them, for it cost them two-and-thirty pounds.'

'We shall endeavour to clear up these points for you' (Doyle, 2002: 79)

Wilson's description of Holmes as someone who 'give[s] advice to poor folk' underlines the financial theme in the story. Similar to Mary Sutherland, Wilson approaches Holmes because he has learned of his reputation. Unlike Mary, however, Wilson benefits financially in the larger scheme of bank theft.

In this extract Holmes is described as giving support to the poor: "Mr. Holmes. I did not wish to lose such a place without a struggle, so, as I had heard that you were good enough to give advice to poor folk who were in need of it, I came right away to you'" (Doyle, 2002: 79). In 'The Red-Headed League' Holmes is a beacon of light to the financially poor, the vulnerable, and the legally poor. Wilson is financially poor and that is why he is tempted by the fake job proposition. Wilson rarely leaves the confines of his shop and must be induced to move. He is legally poor; this is because at the moment he sees Holmes, Wilson does not know or realise he is a victim of a crime. He initially visits Holmes because he loses his new-found job with no explanation. He does not realise the extent of his manipulation or the crime that is going to be committed via his basement. It is Holmes who draws this information out. This is similar to 'A Case of Identity' where Mary goes to Holmes because her fiancé disappears. Mary does not know that romance fraud has been committed against her and that she is a victim of attempted finance fraud too. Again, Holmes is the person who discovers that a crime has been committed and that, in fact, Mary is a victim. Neither victim knows that they

are victims at each story's outset. Mary never learns the extent to which her own family are duping her and although Wilson does not learn of the ruse and the crime in the context of the story, the arrest of Spaulding/Clay will no doubt be revealed in the press. However, by making Wilson the victim, Doyle is illuminating that both men and women can be defenceless. This modern insight shows how Doyle was 'ahead of his time', prefiguring the twenty-first century societal issue of male vulnerability.

From the Pawnbroker to the Bank: Public Fraud

The larger crime in the story is, of course, a public one as Spaulding (whose real name is Clay) digs into the earth connecting the pawnbroking business to the bank to ascertain the bank's monies. "We are at present, Doctor - as no doubt you have divined - in the cellar of the City branch of one of the principal London banks. Mr. Merryweather is the chairman of directors, and he will explain to you that there are reasons why the more daring criminals of London should take a considerable interest in this cellar at present" (Doyle, 2002: 81). Attempting to break into a bank and steal money is firstly a criminal offence of theft. However, infiltrating a bank and stealing its contents is fraud too. This is because the bank works for The Bank of England, thus any monies lost effects the public.

Both pawnbroking and banking are institutions which are, of course, involved in financial transactions. Pawn-broking, with its origins in the Middle Ages, worked on the local level, with transactions undertaken around material possessions and, as Jennifer Tate Becker argues, "the need for ready money to meet basic needs, especially for those without access to other

forms of credit, made pawnbrokers indispensable” (Becker, 2014: 5). They provided a local and often discreet service for the lower classes. Their nature is more private than that of the public middle-class bank.

For many working-class Victorians, pledging was a part of daily life. A person might pledge the same objects on a regular basis; often these pledges were clothes, bedding, work tools, or common household objects, and typically the lady of the house did the pledging, as she managed the household. When a person took his or her belongings to the pawnbroker, he or she could usually choose to go straight to the counter, or go into one of the private booths that opened up to the counter from the side. The pawnbroker would examine the item, the pledge, to determine how much he could lend on it. He had to consider the pledger’s ability to repay the loan, as most profits were generated through interest payments made upon redeeming the article, not the resale of surrendered pledges. (Becker, 2014: 280)

Pawnbrokers, however, were controlled by the legal system in the nineteenth century:

Pawnbroking became subject to much Parliamentary scrutiny. The stipulations of the landmark Pawnbrokers Acts of 1800 and 1872, as well as the numerous other laws touching on the trade passed during the Victorian era, reflect the cautious trust of lawmakers as they reconciled themselves to the fact that regulation, not prohibition, was the best way to approach pawnbroking. The regulations set by the Victorians, with a few twentieth-century adjustments, would govern the business until the Consumer Credit Act of 1974. (Becker, 2014: 5)

The robbery of the bank becomes public fraud when the police get involved in the investigation. The police represent the state thus they are a representation of the public. We see the public and private working together in this story. The police represent the public whereas Holmes represents the private. Both entities must work together to stop the bank being a victim of theft.

On entering his room, I found Holmes in animated conversation with two men, one of whom I recognized as Peter Jones, the official police agent; while the other was a long, thin, sad-faced man, with a very shiny hat and oppressively respectable frock-coat.

'Ha! our party is complete,' said Holmes, buttoning up his pea-jacket, and taking his heavy hunting crop from the rack.

'Watson, I think you know Mr. Jones, of Scotland Yard? Let me introduce you to Mr. Merryweather, who is to be our companion in to-night's adventure. (Doyle, 2002: 81).

By stating that "our party is complete", Holmes demonstrates how the crime has left the confines of the private realm (Wilson's shop) to the public space of the bank. Holmes himself realises that private detective must call on the services of the state to stop the robbery of a bank.

The bank itself is vulnerable, not only to incursion from below, as Clay penetrates the cellar's floor, but also in that its manager is inadequate. The bank is susceptible to robbery and is not as strong and resilient as one would have thought.

'You are not very vulnerable from above,' Holmes remarked, as he held up the lantern and gazed about him.

'Nor from below,' said Mr. Merryweather, striking his stick upon the flags which lined the floor.

'Why, dear me, it sounds quite hollow!' he remarked, looking up in surprise."

(Doyle, 2002: 81)

At first glance the bank seems impenetrable until further inspection reveals vulnerabilities. The bank functions symbolically, underlining the inadequacy of its manager as well as the institutions which hold up the middle-class system. Merryweather exhibits a typical front, his middle-class world seems secure and his bank and lifestyle, strong and resilient. But underneath there are insecurities and Merryweather is revealed as weak and fragile. Just like the bank, Wilson, and some of Doyle's other male characters are shown to be vulnerable. In the Holmes stories women's vulnerabilities are often a result of what happens in the home, while men's vulnerabilities often lie in their interaction with the world of work and finance. The bank manager (Merryweather) will not accept the bank's or his own vulnerabilities, until they are exposed. Again, Holmes has to intervene. It is, however, through the seemingly private problem (the loss of a lucrative job without explanation) that Holmes uncovers a dangerous criminal. Wilson's very vulnerability – he needs the extra money – is the aristocratic Clay's downfall. The private crime reveals the public crime. The

pawnbroker has done a good service to the bank. Similarly, in 'The Disappearance of Lady Frances Carfax', "a kidnapping case is solved when a pawnbroker reports a pledger matching the description of the culprit. A diligent, observant pawnbroker is once again the key to uncovering the truth" (Becker, 2014: 264).

We see male weakness in Paget's illustrations. This first image (like we have seen so many times before in Doyle's work for women) shows a vulnerable person coming to Holmes to get help.



Figure 15: *What on earth does this mean?*

Just like so many women clients in the stories, Wilson is presented at a disadvantage to a criminal like Vincent who is younger, stronger, smarter and from a privileged social class. Wilson's age and class are working against him here. In 'A Case of Identity', Mary is a victim of a romantic disappearance; Wilson suffers from employment disappearance. Paget's

composition of Holmes, Watson and Wilson in his opening illustration is similar to that of Violet Hunter in 'The Copper Beeches' and Helen Stoner in 'The Speckled Band' in their Baker Street consultation. The difference here is that Watson is consulting a newspaper advert. There is no gender distinction here as in Paget's illustrations as in so many of Doyle's short stories, we see a client going to Holmes for help. By choosing to illustrate this moment, and illustrate it similarly, Paget is highlighting the significance of these moments.



Figure 16: *The league has a vacancy.*

Paget's illustration of the specific moment that Spaulding / Clay manipulates Wilson shows Wilson seated, with Spaulding / Clay at a height advantage. This image depicts the assistant overlooking and overshadowing Wilson and exuding a strong presence. His stance is authoritative, modelling the image of Watson in the previous image of the Baker Street consultation. Wilson's quill is paused in writing as his attention is drawn to Spaulding / Clay. Elegantly dressed, his assistant looks plausible and authoritative. Paget has taken the

essence of Doyle's work by creating Wilson as a susceptible character and a victim of what he later describes as a 'prank'.

'The Engineers Thumb'

The story was first published in the *Strand* in March 1892 and focuses on financial fraud, both public and private. It starts with Victor Hatherley visiting Watson for medical attention. He suffers an injury which results in the loss of the top of his thumb and requires immediate medical treatment. After Watson treats Victor, he takes him to Holmes as he believes the injury to be suspicious. Victor admits that he was hired by a Colonel Lysander Stark to fix a hydraulic press for him. Victor was sworn to secrecy. While in the house a female inhabitant warns Victor to leave, but tempted by the lucrative payment for the work, Victor ignores her warning. He discovers that Stark is using the press to print counterfeit money. After this discovery Stark attacked Victor, first by trapping in the room in which the press will crush him and, when Victor escaping pursuing him with a butcher's knife and cutting off his thumb. When Holmes goes to investigate where the press was located, he finds the house has been set on fire and the fraudsters have departed.

Doyle starts this story with the victim visiting Watson instead of Holmes. This is a major shift which requires observation. Most of Doyle's works start with a victim visiting Holmes for assistance but in this story the tables are turned, and Watson is the saviour, as it is his immediate medical help which is required. Doyle gives Watson and Holmes two different roles. Watson treats Victor physically by treating Victor's thumb whereas Holmes treats Victor's mind. Watson describes both Victor's physical and presumed mental illnesses when

he sees him in his consultation room: "Round one of his hands he had a handkerchief wrapped, which was mottled all over with bloodstains. He was young, not more than five-and-twenty, I should say, with a strong masculine face; but he was exceedingly pale and gave me the impression of a man who was suffering from some strong agitation, which it took all his strength of mind to control" (Doyle, 2002: 118). The physical injury makes Victor a vulnerable victim, in this case, of physical violence. Watson suggests that Victor is using all his mental capabilities to keep calm about his severe pain. Diana Barsham notes that "Hysterical men feature conspicuously among his early clients – victims of loss whose capacity to sign and represent the masculine has been damaged or stolen. Victor Hatherley in 'The Engineer's Thumb' laughs hysterically as he presents Watson with his amputated thumb" (Barsham, 2000: 129).

Holmes treats Victor's mind as he listens to his story:

"It is easy to see that your experience has been no common one, Mr Hatherley," said he.

'Pray lie down there and make yourself absolutely at home. Tell us what you can, but stop when you are tired, and keep up your strength with a little stimulant.

'Thank you,' said my patient, 'but I have felt another man since the doctor bandaged me, and I think that your breakfast has completed the cure. I shall take up as little of your valuable time as possible, so I shall start at once upon my peculiar experiences.'

Holmes sat in his big armchair, with the weary, heavy-lidded expression which veiled his keen and eager nature, while I sat opposite to him, and we listened in silence to the strange story which our visitor detailed to us. (Doyle, 2002: 119)

Holmes is a protector, a confidante, and a comforter in this scene. He provides Victor with breakfast, induces him to lie down and offers him a stimulant (more than likely brandy). The detective is treating the mind; Victor is victim of traumatic experience. This is an unusual side to Holmes, hinted at in previous stories in his engagement with female clients, particularly Helen Stoner, when Holmes spots bruises on her wrists. The extremity of violence that Victor has endured has escalated the mental trauma. Doyle does not portray this often. The figure of logic, often seen as cold and indeed Doyle himself described Holmes as a machine, is portrayed in a therapeutic role. What is illuminated here is male vulnerability, exposing how men need support as they navigate the world. Barsham notes: "Holmes is situated at that threshold of anxiety where the encounter with the spoken word takes place. Watson presides over the written word; Holmes controls interviews and spoken encounters" (Barsham, 2000: 129).

Again, this text emulates themes from Doyle's earlier stories; Victor does not realise he is a victim at first. It is not until he has fixed the hydraulic press that he realises he is a victim of fraud and has aided in a criminal offence. The private fraud within this story is that Victor is hired under false pretences. The job he is hired to do is real but the motives behind the job are not honest. Victor's skills in fixing the hydraulic press are taken advantage of for criminal activity. He is not aware he is a victim when hired under fabrication:

“This we have now been doing for some time, and in order to help us in our operations we erected a hydraulic press. This press, as I have already explained, has got out of order, and we wish your advice upon the subject. We guard our secret very jealously, however, and if it once became known that we had hydraulic engineers coming to our little house, it would soon rouse inquiry, and then, if the facts came out, it would be good-bye to any chance of getting these fields and carrying out our plans. That is why I have made you promise me that you will not tell a human being that you are going to Eyford to-night. I hope that I make it all plain?”
(Doyle, 2002: 120).

Here Stark is convincing Victor that the job needs to be secret because he does not want anyone to interfere with his business. This is private fraud. Stark has created this scenario and mystery to gain Victor as an employee knowing his intentions are to commit a criminal offence. Victor is duped by Stark and thus becomes party to counterfeit, forgery and fraud.

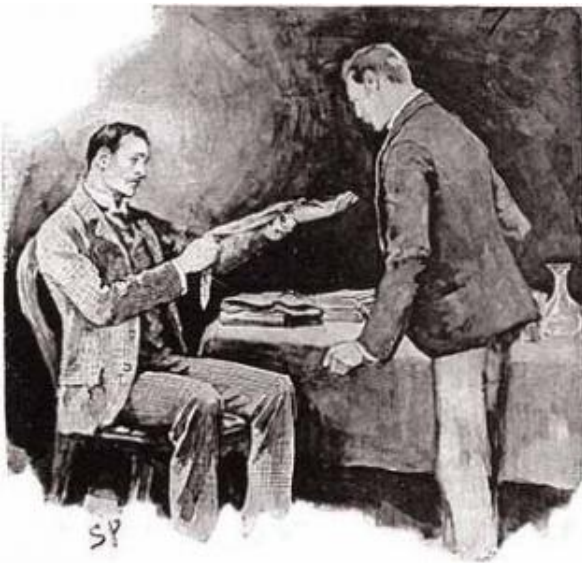


Figure 17: *“He unwound the handkerchief, and held out his hand.”*

This illustration by Paget illuminates a significant change in the Holmes stories. As stated earlier, Victor visits Watson first rather than Holmes. This is a shift in what is usually portrayed by Doyle. Paget is illustrating the importance both protagonists play in these short stories. Watson here is treating the body. He tends to the wounds of Victor. Later we see Holmes tend to his mind. Doyle is portraying the significance of these two roles. Watson is the caring, emotional, comforting party whereas Holmes assumes the rational and logical part. The combination of these two roles allows justice to be served and victims to be vindicated. In Doyle's story and in Paget's illustrations, body (Watson) and Holmes (mind) come together.



Figure 18: *"He settled our new acquaintance on the sofa"*

The image follows on from the previous one as Holmes treats the mind. Standing next to Victor, Holmes is treating the patient with brandy and trying to get him to remember the events that led to his assault. As in the previous illustration where only Watson is present with the victim, in this illustration we only see Holmes. Watson has already dealt with

Victor's physical wounds and now Holmes is trying to unravel and solve the cause of them. Again, it is interesting that Paget chose these two scenes to illustrate. The roles of Watson and Holmes are defined, thus affirming the importance of the different characteristics and skills Holmes and Watson bring to the case.



Figure 19: *'Not a word to a soul!'*

This is the moment of fraud in the story. Victor has made an agreement to work for Stark and Stark is being deceptive about the employment and his intentions. Paget's choice of illustrating this scene is significant as it is a common and key situation we have been seeing throughout Doyle's work: a person manipulated and deceived by another for the purposes of a criminal offence. The victim never seems to know they are a party to a crime until it is revealed to them. Paget's image illuminates the importance of the manipulation of the vulnerable. Stark further confuses his victim on his journey to the house "through the trick of luring [him] into a carriage, only to convey [him] in a confusing circle creating his

disorientation of thinking he is somewhere else when, in actuality, he is back where he started. (McCoy, 2018: 183)

'The Stockbroker's Clerk'

Andrew Lycett notes of Doyle that,

Taken with his meticulous notes (now in the British Library) of the payments he received for each item of his work, a picture emerges of a man careful with his money, growing increasingly rich, and gradually learning to enjoy the fruits of his labours. In 1892, we learn, he wrote a total of 214,000 words, which contributed to the large part of his overall income of 2,729 pounds, while his expenditures were only 1,433 pounds. (Among those words, he included seven Sherlock Holmes stories of 7,000 words each, as well as 'The Naval Treaty,' which had been conceived as a double feature at 14,000)" (Lycett, 2008: 197).

Lycett argues that the writer's "expenditures show a taste for financial investments. The name of a stockbroker, Pim, Vaughan, begins to appear, as he acquires holdings in basic utilities including the Portsmouth Tram Company and the Glasgow and Southwestern Railway, in business-related ventures like George Newnes, and in Australian mines." Then, "Little wonder that shares and company promoters crept into his Sherlock Holmes stories in "The Stockbrokers Clerk" (Lycett, 2008: 197).

'The Stockbroker's Clerk' focuses on finance fraud. This story illuminates the depth Pinner will go to, to commit fraud, theft and murder. The story like so many we have seen before, starts with an unknowing victim visiting Holmes. Both Holmes and Watson travel to Birmingham with Pycroft and he describes the ordeal he had been through. Pycroft was a practising stockbroker's clerk. He found himself out of work and was offered a job by a firm called Mawson and William in Birmingham. Pycroft's reputation preceded him because they did not require him for an interview, the only contact he had before his start day was written correspondence. He accepted. Pycroft then received a second job offer. A man named Arthur Pinner approached him and offered him a better-paid job at Franco-Midland Hardware Company. Pycroft accepted. The only condition was that he should not hand in his resignation notice to Mawson and William. When Pycroft started his new job the offices were empty and dreary. Pinner's brother, Harry, was there to meet him. Pycroft was given meaningless jobs such as looking up Parisian hardware stores. During his time with both Arthur and Harry, Pycroft realises that they both have the same exact gold filling in the same place.

When they reach Birmingham Holmes asks Pycroft to introduce him to Harry. When they arrive, they meet Harry who, after looking at a newspaper, leaves the room abruptly. When a strange noise is heard from next door, Holmes breaks down the door and finds that Harry has attempted to hang himself. After Watson revives him, Holmes explains the purpose of Harry's actions. The fake job made by Arthur Pinner was to keep Pycroft away from London. No one had yet met Pycroft at Mawson and Williams. Due to Pycroft not resigning someone was impersonating him at that firm. Holmes sees Mawson and Williams had been robbed

and a man called Beddington shot by police. Harry's actions are a result of his discovery in the newspaper that his brother has died. Meanwhile Pycroft is the victim of fraud with his identity stolen so the Pinner brothers could infiltrate and rob Mawson and Williams.

Identification is key in 'The Stockbroker's Clerk'. There are several layers to the identification of Pinner and his brother. The lack of ability to identify someone and the ease of self-creation shows Doyle's concerns around these issues. The first identification Doyle raises is the fact that Pycroft never appears at Mawson and Williams so no physical identification is possible. They correspond through letters which allows an imposter to take his place.

'At last, I saw a vacancy at Mawson and Williams', the great stockbroking firm in Lombard Street. I dare say EC is not much in your line, but I can tell you that this is about the richest house in London. The advertisement was to be answered by letter only. I sent in my testimonial and application, but without the least hope of getting it. Back came an answer by return saying that if I would appear next Monday, I might take over my new duties at once, provided that my appearance was satisfactory. No one knows how these things are worked. Some people say the manager just plunges his hand into the heap and takes the first that comes.' (Doyle, 2002: 155).

As Pycroft outlines his job opportunity, it becomes clear how both Pycroft and the firm could be the victims of fraud. As Pycroft is called to present himself at the offices, Pinner's intervention in decoying Pycroft to a fake position, allows him to infiltrate Mawson and Williams in his name. The only way the company could identify Pycroft (like in many other Victorian stories) is through his handwriting. Pinner needed a sample of Pycroft's

handwriting to breach Mawson and Williams. Holmes explains the importance of handwriting:

Don't you see, my young friend, that they were very anxious to obtain a specimen of your handwriting, and had no other way of doing it?'

'And why?'

'Quite so. Why? When we answer that, we have made some progress with our little problem. Why? There can be only one adequate reason. Someone wanted to learn to imitate your writing, and had to procure a specimen of it first. And now if we pass on to the second point, we find that each throws light upon the other. That point is the request made by Pinner that you should not resign your place, but should leave the manager of this important business in the full expectation that a Mr Hall Pycroft, whom he had never seen, was about to enter the office upon the Monday morning.'

'My God!' cried our client, 'what a blind beetle I have been!'

'Now you see the point about the handwriting. Suppose that someone turned up in your place who wrote a completely different hand from that in which you had applied for the vacancy, of course the game would have been up. But in the interval the rogue learnt to imitate you, and his position was therefore secure, as I presume that nobody in the office had ever set eyes upon you?' (Doyle, 2002: 158).

The use of handwriting as a form of identification is critical as we have seen in 'A Case of Identity'. This story further illuminates the issue. Pinner acquires a sample of writing from Pycroft so he can forge it underlining the significance of problems around identification. It

also underlines how dispensable Pycroft is and how the professional world he is navigating poses dangers.

There are many fraudulent acts committed, both public and private, by Pinner to achieve his goal. The first is the false job opportunity. Pinner lies about the job; he lies about the money and the financial incentives for Pycroft as well as he lies about the company. These are all fraudulent acts to persuade and manipulate Pycroft to work for him. This is a mixture of both public and private fraud. The fake company is public fraud as Pinner has presented this company to the world which does not exist. The private fraud is the false job and money offer put forward to Pycroft. Private and public fraud interlink with Pinner/Beddington's use of a false identity not only with Pycroft but with the company Mawson and Williams. The deception of an entire company to defraud and steal from them moves from the smaller crime of private fraud (just manipulating Pycroft) to an entire new crime of impersonation, false identity, stolen identity and the crimes that follow.

Fortunately, in terms of identification, Pinner cannot change his gold filling and this gold filling is what leads to his downfall and his exposure:

'You may well look surprised, Dr Watson, but it is this way,' said he. 'When I was speaking to the other chap in London at the time that he laughed at my not going to Mawson's, I happened to notice that his tooth was stuffed in this very identical fashion. The glint of the gold in each case caught my eye, you see. When I put that with the voice and figure being the same, and only those things altered which might be changed by a razor or a wig, I could not doubt that it was the same man. (Doyle, 2002: 157)

Although this is a failed attempt of identity fraud, it is interesting to note that it was a significant dental feature that raised suspicion. Pycroft states that everything could be “changed by a razor or a wig” which suggests that it was only the unchangeable identifiable features that caught him out. If Pinner did not have a gold tooth, would he have been caught? The ability to read the body is critical in the detection of crime.

Another recurring theme we see through Doyle’s later works with Sherlock Holmes is the movement from the vulnerable woman to the vulnerable male. In ‘The Engineer’s Thumb’, Victor was a good ‘mark’ with his lack of family and ties to anyone. This is again repeated in Doyle’s work specifically with Pycroft. There are two vulnerable males within this story, the first being Pycroft himself. He is not depicted as the usual vulnerable male we have seen in Doyle’s work before. Pycroft is described:

He wore a very shiny top-hat and a neat suit of sober black, which made him look what he was - a smart young City man, of the class who have been labelled Cockneys, but who give us our crack Volunteer regiments, and who turn out more fine athletes and sportsmen than anybody of men in these islands. His round, ruddy face was naturally full of cheeriness, but the corners of his mouth seemed to me to be pulled down in a half-comical distress. (Doyle, 2002: 155).

This is not the typical helpless male description such as in ‘The Red Headed League’ in the elderly Wilson or the isolated and wounded Victor in ‘The Engineers Thumb’. Pycroft is young, strong, and intelligent, yet is duped by Pinner. Again, we see a victim not knowing

they are a victim until Holmes figures out what is going on. The fact that Doyle allows a seemingly competent male to be manipulated puts a spotlight on the vulnerabilities of a wider part of society. Mari Isokoski suggests that Doyle presents males as victims due to class issues and hierarchies at the time. She suggests Doyle presents 'true' victims such as Pycroft as middle class and this is because Doyle is showing that people of lower standing bring trouble and crime onto themselves. Mari comments: "Professional, educated middle middle-class men such as Hatherley, Pycroft, Treveylan and Phelps, the representatives of Doyle's own social position, are all in all depicted as hard-working, honest men, but one could presume that Doyle suggests that Wilson and Baker, impoverished members of the lower middle class, who are in a danger of assimilating with working class have ended up in trouble because of their own actions" (Isokoski, 2008: 24). This interpretation suggests that Doyle, because of his societal position, is naive in his writing and conforms to the societal hierarchy expectations. However, Doyle's male 'victims' are a mixture of ages, professions and classes. Vulnerability to fraud is not restricted to a particular gender or a particular class. Doyle presents that any male can be a victim.

This assertion is supported by 'part two' of the vulnerable male as the suicide attempt of Beddington's brother shows male mental instability. He tries to hang himself because of his brother's actions at Mawson and Williams:

A coat and waistcoat were lying on the floor, and from a hook behind the door, with his own braces round his neck, was hanging the managing director of the Franco-Midland Hardware Company. His knees were drawn up, his head hung at a dreadful angle to his body, and the clatter of his heels against the door made the noise which

had broken in upon our conversation. In an instant I had caught him round the waist and held him up, while Holmes and Pycroft untied the elastic bands which had disappeared between the livid creases of skin. Then we carried him into the other room, where he lay with a slate-coloured face, puffing his purple lips in and out with every breath - a dreadful wreck of all that he had been but five minutes before (Doyle, 2002: 158).

The suicide attempt allows us to make the assertion that the mind of Beddington's brother was not right, thus leading to male weakness and then a suicide attempt. Statistics show "suicide rates in males steadily increased by 67% from 1861 to reach a peak of 30.3 per 100 000 by 1905" (Thomas and Gunnell, 2010: 1465). Alongside Doyle's work these statistics suggest mental health, male strength, and male vulnerability were significant issues. It has not been really until the twenty-first century that this issue has gained momentum. A 2021 article in the *Lancet* notes: "Traditional gender norms commonly drive young men to present as strong, competitive, in control, and unburdened by vulnerability. These cultural scripts prize toughness, anger, hostility, and emotional control. Conversely, emotions characterised by vulnerability, including sadness, anxiety, and fear, trigger shame and become a barrier to help-seeking" (Rice *et al.* 2021). By Doyle expressing men as vulnerable as women indicates he was ahead of his time on this matter. Indeed, an article in the *Journal of Neurology, Neurosurgery & Psychiatry* in 2012 asserts that Doyle was ahead of his time in the diagnosis of a disease mentioned in the story: St Vitus's Dance. The disease afflicts the elderly doctor from whom Watson buys his practice:

Conan Doyle's use of the specific medical term 'Saint Vitus' dance' in this context is remarkable. In medical textbooks of the late 19th century, the terms 'Saint Vitus' dance' and childhood chorea (chorea minor, Sydenham's chorea) are commonly understood as synonymous with one another. By the late onset of the physician's disease in *The Stockbroker's Clerk*, Conan Doyle suggests an association of the term 'Saint Vitus' dance' with adult chorea 1 year before Osler's important monograph on chorea was published... Conan Doyle's association of Saint Vitus' dance with adult chorea is uncommon in terms of the contemporary medical discourse. (Voss, 2012: 997)

His understanding of male frailties under social and professional pressures suggests he was ahead in his thinking on mental health. When Holmes comes to visit Watson at the start of the case, the doctor is reading the *British Medical Journal*, demonstrating that Watson is well read in his field. Equally, Doyle, as Nicki Buscemi argues, was "not only familiar with the medical literature of his day; he was an active and astute participant in this discourse" (Buscemi, 2014: 219)

Equally, medical researchers have located in Doyle's work (particularly his non-Sherlock Holmes medical stories) advice which is relevant today. Alena Chong argues in the *British Journal of Medical Practice* that Doyle's

medical tales paint a vivid picture of general practice in the 19th century and contain many insightful and poignant quotes about GPs, illness, reflective practice, and portfolios, which have numerous consonances for the modern day GP: 'And a doctor

has very much to be thankful for. His patients are his friends — or they should be so. He goes from house to house, his step and voice are loved and welcomed in each. What could a man ask for more than that? It is a noble, generous, kindly profession, and you youngsters have got to see that it remains so'. With a contemporary viewpoint, Conan Doyle's narrative explains that 'Dr Winter is of more avail than all the drugs in his surgery', because of his 'healing touch — that magnetic thing which defies explanation or analysis. His mere presence leaves the patient with more hopefulness and vitality'. Interestingly, this pre-dates Balint's phrase 'The doctor is the drug', that was coined in 1957. (Chong, 2013: 597)

'The Stockbroker's Clerk' is more focused on the public fraud rather than private. Many of the Holmes stories combine both but the attention is largely restricted to the private and to the environs of the home. This is a public case which involves the police and a trading house. Holmes solves the case but informs the police at the earliest opportunity: "I suppose we ought to call the police in now," said he, 'and yet I confess that I like to give them a complete case when they come" (Doyle, 2002: 158). We see the convergence of Holmes as private detective and the public exposé of financial fraud. Holmes is, however, less invested in this case. In the private cases he is more invested in the personal as he polices private fraud and takes a moral stance. He is the 'knight in shining armour' for the vulnerable and societally shunned and this is shown in Doyle's writing as we see more investment from Holmes in those who are victims of moral and private crimes.



Figure 20: *'Mr. Hall Pycroft, I believe?' said he.*

Paget illustrates, as in previous stories, the unknowing victim of the crime approaching Holmes for help. This is a scene Paget has 'brought to life' suggesting its significance.

Holmes is standing while talking to Pycroft, a man who is well dressed and in good health.

The only sight change to this scene is that Pycroft is not a typical vulnerable victim.

However, his visit to Holmes changes that.



Figure 21: *Pycroft shook his clenched hands in the air.*

This is a powerful image. Pycroft has come to the realisation of what he has contributed to and that he is a victim of fraud. “‘Good Lord!’ he cried. ‘While I have been fooled in this way, what has this other Hall Pycroft been doing at Mawson's? What should we do, Mr Holmes? Tell me what to do!’” (Doyle, 2002: 158) In shock, disbelief, and panic, Pycroft begs Holmes for advice. His initial confidence changes into a hysterical reaction to the news that he has been victimised. Traditionally, women are presented as ‘hysterical’, but Doyle has made this switch which Paget brings to life.



Figure 22: *Glancing at the haggard figure.*

Paget illustrates a weak and feeble male in this image. Beddington is cowering in a corner after he had attempted to commit suicide. Firstly, the suicide attempt shows an issue with Beddington, emotionally and mentally. This powerful image shows Beddington as a vulnerable male. His fraudulent crimes have exposed him and his brother. The fact that the case was made public by Holmes with the involvement of the police is what causes the

capture and downfall of both the Beddington brothers. Paget presents a cowering figure but the group (Holmes, Watson and Pycroft) are separated in this image from this figure. There is no sympathy for the fraudster.

There are significant similarities and parallels across these male-centred cases. 'The Red-Headed League' and 'The Stock-Broker's Clerk' involve the crime of fraud, both men are given pointless tasks to complete for their jobs (encyclopaedia and phonebook transcription), both men did not know they were victims of a crime until Holmes made the discovery. The criminals in these two stories, as well as in 'The Engineer's Thumb', use the same ruse to draw the victimised males into the criminal plot. They were all offered false job opportunities to gain access to either their professional abilities, their places of work or, in the case of Pycroft, to steal an identity. It can be argued that Doyle may have become repetitive with his theme and some critics argue it is because he lost interest in Holmes. This thesis departs from this critical thinking by demonstrating the variation in the individual cases. Each case is repetitive in the use of fraudulent crimes such as identity fraud, identity theft, bigamy but their working out and their situations are different. From a pawnbroker to an engineer to a stockbroker, these fraudulent crimes cover a gamut of professions: the lower middle-class profession of the pawnbroker to the middle-class profession of the engineer and the stockbroker. The men are different from the elderly Wilson who rarely leaves home, to the socially isolated Hatherley to the competent but unemployed Pycroft. What Doyle is highlighting through these figures and cases across various professions is that the crimes of fraud were prevalent in everyday life and that Doyle was responding to the lack of law around fraud at this time. What we will see in the next chapter is how Doyle responded to true crimes.

Part Two

Doyle as Criminologist

While Doyle is remembered for his creation of Holmes, he also engaged in exploring 'true crime' and became involved in detective work in the first decades of the twentieth century when his reputation as the creator of Holmes was secure. This section examines Doyle as a detective, emerging out of the shadow of his own creation to engage in an examination of historically recorded and contemporary real-life crimes. This examination of the real-life detective mirrors the work on real-life bigamy cases in chapter three, as the thesis explores relationships and mirrorings between the crimes of fiction and the crimes of real-life. Doyle was integral to several cases which saw the creation of the appeals system in the United Kingdom (the establishment of the Court of Criminal Appeal) as well as changes in divorce laws. Seeing him simply as the creator of Sherlock Holmes would be a disservice to Doyle. In addition, an exploration of Doyle's involvement in true crime cases is a further articulation of, and engagement, with the theme of fraud which is this thesis's concern. Three cases are examined in this section: The Holocaust Manor Place, The Adolf Beck Case and The Oscar Slater Case. These cases show Doyle's development as a detective through his career, as we see increasing involvement from him and the development of his detective abilities as these cases progress.

Mary Wells: Romance Fraud and Murder

Overview of case:

This case was one of Doyle's first attempts at examining true crime and being a detective in his own standing. This was an historical crime which took place when Doyle was an infant. He examined this case decades after the crime was committed and he published it as an article, 'The Holocaust of Manor Place', in *The Strand Magazine*. Like the Holmes stories, the case was illustrated by Sidney Paget. Published in 1901, it was published before Doyle's 'resurrection' of Holmes from the Reichenbach Falls in 'The Final Problem' (1893). Unlike the Holmes stories, 'The Holocaust of Manor Place' is an historical true crime case dating from 1860 but Doyle provides his own title which underscores the multiple murders in the case. At the same time, Doyle's recovery of the case engages with a historical re-imagining of the events and, consequently, sits in the space between history and fiction.

The actual case, as detailed by the Old Bailey records (Old Bailey 2018) involved a young woman, Mary Wells Streeter. Mary became engaged to a man named William Godfrey Youngman. William was a little elusive and was not well known, even by Mary. William was based in London and therefore wrote a lot of lover letters to Mary, resident in the countryside near Tunbridge Wells. Some of the letters were romantic and others were insistent on Mary getting life insurance. He wrote several times persuading her to insure herself.

Inviting Mary to stay with his family in London, William also asked Mary to burn all the letters he had sent to her or to bring them with her to give to him. Mary did not do this and

left them at home in a safe place. This was critical in terms of the trail of evidence later. William met Mary at the train station. He took her to his family home where his mother, father and two brothers lived. The family home was located in a large property occupied by different families on various floors. Mary explored London with William, went to the theatre and met an acquaintance, Edward Spicer. Spicer warned her about William: "Mary, I would sooner see you take a rope and hang yourself in the skittle ground, than marry a man like that" (Old Bailey, 1860: 97).

On the morning of 31 July, William's father woke up and saw his son next to him. He did not think anything of it and got up and went to work. The neighbours on the floor below, Mr and Mrs Beard heard (not long after the father had left) strange noises, including footsteps, crying and a loud thud. Sufficiently concerned, Beard ran upstairs to find several bodies. Another neighbour, Mr Bevan, was also alerted by noises and was summoned by Beard. In his testimony to the prosecution Bevan records:

I remember the morning of 31st July—I was disturbed about ten minutes to 6, or something like that—I was then in bed, in the lower back room on the ground floor—I was disturbed by hearing a lumbering, as I supposed, on the top of the house; a lumbering, or heavy fell on the floor; a lumbering noise, as if something had fallen on the floor—the noise proceeded from the top of the house, as I supposed at the time, the second floor—as soon as I heard the noise I immediately jumped out of bed to hear and see what was amiss, and, before I could get to the door, Mr. Beard, who has the first floor, tapped at the door and said, "For God's sake come up stairs, here is murder;" that was before I had got out of my room—I immediately

proceeded up stairs. ('Trial of William Godfrey Youngman,' *Old Bailey Proceedings* Online 1860)

Bevan and Beard saw four bodies on the floor and William standing over them. William claimed his mother had killed his two young brothers and Mary, which Bevan cites in his testimony: "he told me his mother had done all this." The prosecutor clarifies:

COURT. Q. What were the words he used, as near as you can say? A. He said, "My mother has done all this; she has murdered my two brothers and my sweetheart, and I, in self-defence, believe I have murdered her." ('Trial of William Godfrey Youngman', 1860)

Beard and Bevan both ran home and got changed, they then went looking for a policeman and a surgeon. William was left with the bodies. The men found Constable Varney. He went to the crime scene and told William to get changed. He did not entertain any of William's claims or stories of what happened.

When the crime scene was inspected, William's case unravelled. A dagger, belonging to William, was the murder weapon. The victims had been stabbed with such brute force that the dagger itself was damaged. The bodies were severely mutilated by the attack, including facial disfigurements. William's mother had no blood on her hands, undermining William's claims that she was the perpetrator. This would have been impossible. The motive of the crimes for William was that he wanted Mary's insurance. So eager was he to access her insurance that he insisted that his letters to her should be destroyed in an attempt to hide

the evidence. William's defence was poor, but he maintained his story. It was pointed out by Justice Williams that if his mother had committed such crimes, and that he managed to disarm her, then why did he kill her. If she had no weapon, she was no longer a threat, she did require multiple stabbings to disarm her. William Godfrey Youngman was sentenced to death and was hanged in 1860.

That the crime was motivated by finance is evident in the manner in which William ensured that Mary sign the insurance documents, as testified by the clerk dealing with the paperwork:

THOMAS TANNER . I am clerk in the office of the Argus Insurance Company—on 19th July last I saw the prisoner at that office (he had had a form previously)—he brought a form of application with him; I have it here (*produced*)—this is one of the forms issued by our office; the name of William Godfrey Youngman was signed in my presence by the prisoner—he wrote the answer to question No. 18, it is "William Godfrey Youngman, 16, Manor Place, Newington, London, retired from the business of a tailor"—that is written opposite the question "Name and place of residence"—before he signed it I asked him what he was—he said he was no trade—he came again on the following day, the 24th, accompanied by a young woman—she was examined by the medical officer, and a policy on her life was prepared—that is the policy (*produced*)—there is no attesting witness; that is the policy that was effected on that day—the premium was paid on 25th, 10s. 1d. for three months—the premiums are according to the wish of the parties; if they wish they can pay quarterly or half-yearly—in this case the prisoner expressed a wish to pay

quarterly—I gave a receipt for the premium; I have it here, this is the first receipt—I believe the young woman paid the money. ('Trial of William Godfrey Youngman', 1860)

The prosecutor further provided evidence of the correspondence to Mary from her fiancé:

Now, come to London, dear girl, on Monday next, the 23d, and stay till Mrs. Walker leaves her situation, then go back home again and come up again on Friday morning, 10th August, and I will come on 10th August to meet you, and shall stay at the lodgings I shall take for you and myself. I shall engage furnished lodgings for a week only, when I shall be able to settle all things and go down to your father and stay with him a day or two. You can lodge somewhere on the Friday you come up, and I, at our lodgings, so be ready for Saturday morning, when we will be married at St. Martin's, Charing Cross, on Saturday, August 11th next; I have published the banns of our marriage, last Wednesday, and it will be asked in church on Sunday next, and Sunday, 29th, for the third time ... I think I want to assure your life when you come up on Monday week; it will be settled in the time you are here, two or three days; bring all your things when you come on 10th August; say to your mother you are going to stay with my Mends a fortnight and then look for a situation in the time. After we are married you can have all you wish for, so you will have enough money for the present time, as you do not want to buy anything; all the clothes you have will do for the present, till we are married, and on Wednesday, after we are man and wife for life, I shall take money enough to supply all your wants and wishes, so rest happy till then, my dearest girl. ('Trial of William Godfrey Youngman', 1860)

He promises her marriage, assuring her that after their marriage she will have “all” she desires, but he wants to “assure” her life. When Mary agrees to sign the insurance document her life span is limited. This is an extreme example of Victorian romance fraud. Mary even pays for the insurance document which condemns her to death.

Doyle’s Engagement with the Case

It is not recorded why Doyle chose this case, but it certainly has features similar to some of the Holmes stories: the victim is a female who is vulnerable to the manipulations and deceits of a male she has become involved with. In this regard, she is similar to Mary Sutherland. Although a feature in some of the Holmes stories such as ‘The Speckled Band’, gruesome murders, particularly on the scale of the murders perpetrated in this historical case, are not common in the Holmes stories. The real motive of the crime in this case is insurance fraud and fraud, both romantic and financial, is a key feature of the Holmes stories. In this true crime case William killed four people to gain Mary’s insurance. He killed his family and his fiancé for monetary reasons and to commit financial fraud. Again, this thesis has uncovered numerous instances where monetary fraud is the intended crime, but other crimes are committed to either cover the fraud up or to maintain the fraud. In ‘The Speckled Band’, as we have seen, the motive is financial, but murder is seen as necessary to secure the finance.

This case is based on an attempt at financial fraud, but similar to *Great Expectations* and *Lady Audley's Secret*, the financial fraud is linked to romance fraud. It is clear that William Godfrey Youngman never intended to marry Mary or actually love her, she was just a naive woman from the countryside who was an easy mark. This case shows elements of what we see now in twenty-first century in terms of romance fraud, where individuals are romanced for fraud. William romanced Mary with letters and manipulated her into getting insurance, into meeting him and even manipulated her into falling in love with him.

In writing up the case, Doyle takes a novelistic approach as he imagines Mary's feelings when she reads the letters from her lover:

There were fifteen love-letters in all some shorter, some longer, some wholly delightful, some with scattered business allusions, which made her wrinkle her pretty brows. There was this matter of the insurance, for example, which had cost her lover so much anxiety until she had settled it. No doubt he knew more of the world than she, but still it was strange that she, so young and so hale, should be asked and again asked to prepare herself for death. (Doyle, 1901 Online).

Mary is presented by Doyle as vulnerable; she is not worldly like her lover. Doyle provides details of her lover's request:

'Dearest girl,' he had written, 'I have filled up the paper now, and took it to the life insurance office, and they will write to Mrs. James Boric today to get an answer on Saturday. So you can go to the office with me before two o'clock on Monday.' And

then again, only two days later, he had begun his letter: 'You promised me faithfully over and over again, and I expect you to keep your promise, that you would be mine, and that your friends would not know it until we were married; but now, dearest Mary, if you will only let Mrs. James Bone write to the insurance office at once and go with me to have your life insured on Monday morning next!' So ran the extracts from the letters, and they perplexed Mary as she read them. But it was all over now, and he should mingle business no longer with his love, for she had yielded to his whim, and the insurance for £100 had been duly effected. It had cost her a quarterly payment of 10s. 4d., but it had seemed to please him, and so she would think of it no more. (Doyle Encyclopaedia, 1901)

Sidney Paget's first illustration of the story shows Mary reading one such letter near the window of her home. The flowerpots on the window, the birdcage hanging above, and what seems like sunflowers outside, suggest her home's tranquillity. Mary, though, is entering a trap or like the bird above her, a cage:



"HER BUNDLE OF LOVE-LETTERS UPON HER LAP."

Figure 23: Her bundle of love-letters upon her lap. *The Strand Magazine*.

Again, it is interesting that Paget chose to pick that specific moment in the entire case to illustrate. Out of all the scenes he could have chosen he chose the moment in which the letters have their most significance. Like Doyle, Paget is focusing on the romance fraud. He is making the letters important by bringing them to life because they play such a major part in the romance fraud in this case.

The second illustration is one of movement. Mary is moving away from the security of home in this image of her leaving the train on the arm of her fiancé. The movement of women, as we have seen in Holmes's cases, can often be dangerous. Doyle quotes from the letter summoning her to her murder:

I shall expect to see you, my dear girl, on Monday morning by the first train. I will await your coming at London Bridge Station. I know the time the train arrives—a quarter to ten o'clock. I have promised to go to my uncle's tomorrow, so I cannot come down; but I will go with you home on Monday night or first thing Tuesday morning, and so return here again Tuesday night, to be ready to go anywhere on Wednesday; but you know all that I have told you, and I now expect that you will come up on Monday morning, when I shall be able to manage things as I expect to do. Excuse me now, my dearest Mary. I shall now go to bed to be up early tomorrow to take this letter. Bring or burn all your letters, my dear girl. Do not forget; and with kind love and respects to all I now sum up, awaiting to see you Monday morning a quarter to ten o'clock. Believe me, ever your loving, affectionate,
WILLIAM GODFREY YOUNGMAN.'



Figure 24: "They walked down the platform together." *The Strand Magazine*.

Paget's final image shows the couple at the theatre. Mary is being entertained in a conventional way by her lover but Paget's caption about her lover's distraction and silence is ominous:



"SHE SAT IN THE CROWDED PIT WITH
HER SILENT LOVER AT HER SIDE."

Figure 25: "She sat in the crowded pit with her silent lover at her side." *The Strand Magazine*.

Conan Doyle, with his medical training, reads the murderer as insane:

The horror and the apparent purposelessness of the deed roused public excitement and indignation to the highest pitch. The miserable sum for which poor Mary was insured appeared to be the sole motive of the crime; the prisoner's eagerness to

have the business concluded, and his desire to have the letters destroyed in which he had urged it, forming the strongest evidence against him. At the same time, his calm assumption that things would be arranged as he wished them to be, and that the Argus Insurance Office would pay over the money to one who was neither husband nor relative of the deceased, pointed to an ignorance of the ways of business or a belief in his own powers of managing, which in either case resembled insanity.

The letters are critical in demonstrating that Mary was duped, a fatal victim of romance fraud. They also provide the evidence of the romance fraud, helping to convict her fiancé. This case demonstrates romance fraud is not a twenty-first century crime but one that has been in existence for centuries. This case reaches the extremities of romance fraud in that its endpoint is multiple murder (Doyle Encyclopaedia, 1901). Doyle wrote this case during what is called the Holmes 'hiatus', before resuming his Holmes stories in 1901. While Doyle is experimenting with form – reimagining historical crime – he is also engaging with the issues that were showcased in the Holmes stories but allowing him to explore the extremity of crimes against women. There are few murders in the Holmes stories. Julia Stoner's murder is recalled by her sister and Holmes prevents Helen's murder in the story. In the new century, Doyle turned his investigative mind away from history and fiction into an intervention in real-life crimes.

The Adolf Beck Case: Vulnerable Victims and Mistaken Identities

Overview of Case:

The Adolf Beck case was one of mistaken identity. On the 16 December 1895 Adolf Beck was accused of conning a woman out of two watches and some other jewellery. As Adolf Beck was walking down the street near his London home a woman followed him. He found a police officer and told him about this woman and suggested she might be a working woman. She, however, came with her own allegations that Beck had conned her out of some valuable items. Both Beck and the woman were taken into custody by the police officer. The woman was named Otilie Messonier. She was an unmarried, a seemingly upstanding citizen and a teacher. The allegation she made against Beck was that Beck approached her in the street some weeks before. They talked for a while, and he charmed her. He gave an alias of "Lord Willoughby". Otilie invited him around for tea the next day. He arrived at her house and again charmed her. He suggested she travel with him on his yacht to France. He even gave her £40 cheque to buy herself clothes for this trip. He then asked for her rings and watches so he could get her correct size and buy new and more expensive ones. Otilie realised that the individual she identified as Beck had taken more than what he said of her jewellery and the cheque he had given her was worthless. After these allegations were made to the police Beck was arrested. After some more investigation it was discovered that a further twenty-two women were defrauded over a two-and-a-half-year period in the same way. Beck then was a participant in a police line-up. (It is crucial to note that in this line-up he was the only man with grey hair and a moustache). Beck was subsequently charged with four felonies and misdemeanours. The police believed that Beck was in fact a man called

John Smith. John Smith was released from prison for defrauding women using the alias of Lord Willoughby. Beck denied all charges and claimed he had an alibi and was, in fact, in South America in 1877.

On the 3 March 1896 his trial began at the Old Bailey. His entire defence during the trial was one of mistaken identity. Handwriting samples were compared during the trial. A comparison was made between a list 'John Smith' had made whilst defrauding women and Beck's handwriting. This was not a match but the expert stated that Beck had written in a "disguised hand". Victims of John Smith/Lord Willoughby took the stand in the trial and stated it was Beck who had defrauded them. Although they all had varied descriptions of the man (scar on neck, American accent, long moustache) which did not fit Adolf Beck, he was still found guilty of fraud on the 5 March 1896 and was sentenced to seven years penal servitude. This case conjoins romance fraud with mistaken or stolen identity.

During this time England had no Criminal Appeal Court. Thus, Beck had no means of appeal. There were petitions for a retrial and in 1898 the Home Office looked at the 'John Smith' case file. They noticed that on 'John Smith's' prison records that he was Jewish and therefore circumcised but Adolf Beck was not. However, even after this discovery Adolf Beck's sentence was not changed.

George Robert Sims, who knew Adolf Beck, wrote about this injustice and unfairness in the *Daily Mail*. This captured Doyle's attention. In 1901 Beck was paroled from prison and released back into society. In 1904 the same crime was committed again, and a woman called Paulina Scott was a victim of a man who had defrauded her. The police set a trap for

Beck and when confronted Beck panicked. He was arrested again and put on trial for this crime. He was again found guilty by a jury of his peers. The judge was not sure about the case and postponed the sentencing until he could gather more facts. It was only ten days later, and the case was solved.

A man who looked very similar to Beck was committing these crimes. His name was Wilhelm Meyer. He used many aliases such as 'John Smith', 'William Wyatt', 'William Weiss' and 'Lord Willoughby'. When Beck was arrested Meyer had gone back to America and thus the crimes stopped while Beck was in prison. He returned to England in 1903 when he thought Beck was out of prison. He started his crimes again until he was finally arrested in 1904.

This case illuminates a great injustice from the criminal justice system in England during this time. This 'real life' case substantiates the key features analysed in this thesis: crimes of fraud, coupled with lack of identification and social injustice. This case revolves heavily around identity. Beck was accused of crimes committed by a completely different person from a different country but was still found guilty.

In addition, the victims of the crimes, perpetrated not by Beck, but by Wilhelm Meyer, were vulnerable, living on the margins of society. The fraudster romanced them, stole their jewellery and abandoned them:

The modus operandi of the con man was distinctive and remarkably uniform, as if he always worked to a single script. First, he chose his prey from a certain class of woman: single, widowed or divorced, with some pretension to gentility but little

money to support it. They called themselves actresses, music teachers and the like, but some of them topped up their income by, in the coy phrase of the time, "seeing men for money"; the rest were not far off having to do so.

In each case the con man struck up a conversation with his victim in a public place, using a line such as, "Did I not meet you at the ball last night?" He was charming, intimated that he was a wealthy aristocrat and, before long, suggested he might call at the woman's home.

Once seated upon her sofa the following afternoon, he told an alluring story. He was the Earl of Wilton (or Lord Wilton, or Lord Wilton de Willoughby) and he had a house in St John's Wood that was in urgent need of a housekeeper. This position, complete with income, horse-and-trap and the promise of foreign travel, he offered to the woman.

All parties seem to have understood that the housekeeper would also be his lordship's mistress, and to these women the offer, with the stability and comfort it implied, was very tempting ... It was, as the trial judge would say, a "base and wicked crime", rendered all the more so by the vulnerability of victims who, because of their circumstances, were unlikely to involve the police. (*Independent*, 2004)

In many of the fictional texts examined in this thesis, handwriting is presented as a key method of identifying someone. Even Doyle used this form of identification in 'A Case of Identity' and 'The Stockbroker's Clerk'. In the case of Beck, handwriting was used as a form

of identification but because it did not fit the narrative of the prosecution it was manipulated. A handwriting expert was used:

THOMAS HENRY GURRIN. I am an expert in handwriting, at 59, Holborn Viaduct—I have had many years' experience—I have examined the cheques and promissory note forms produced—also this manuscript book. (MR. FROEST *identified the book as the one he found at the Covent Garden Hotel, and which purported to be a report of the Galapagos Mine.*) I have also examined the three letters which Chetwynd has sworn to be the prisoner's writing—they are written to Chetwynd—they are all in the same writing—there are two handwritings in the book—I do not include all the handwritings there—I include the writing in the address book produced—the prisoner's writing is in different hands—I prepared the report produced, giving my reasons, and with *fac-similes* showing similarities—the cheques and lists are not written in the prisoner's ordinary hand—two forms of disguise have been adopted—one is a back-handed or vertical scribble—that occurs in the signatures, the list of addresses, and on the envelopes—the other disguise is an ordinary hand, more resembling his writing in the books, but written large and more Distorted.” (Old Bailey, 1896)

The fact that handwriting was used as a form of identity in the Courts of Law proves that it was a valuable and accredited way to identify someone during this period. However, in this case it did not fit the narrative of the prosecution and was thus manipulated to incriminate Beck. The witness Thomas Henry Gurrin states that the handwriting did not match but makes the assertion that the “prisoner's writing is in different hands” (Old Bailey, 1896).

The Adolf Beck case underlines how a physical appearance could not be a reliable way of identifying someone. There were several witnesses that identified Beck as the criminal, even though he did not have some of the physical features that they claimed he had. One witness suggested he had an American accent, another said he had a scar on his neck and someone else said he had a longer moustache. These are all conflicting physical features that Beck did not possess.

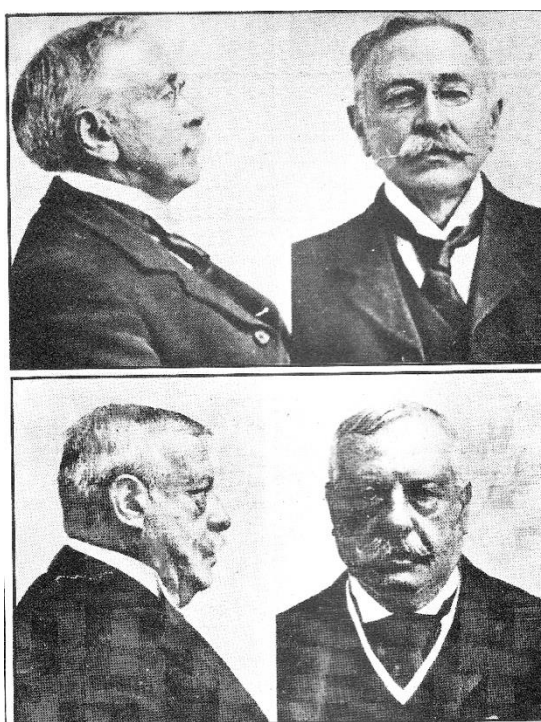


Figure 26: Adolf Beck (Top) Wilhelm Meyer (Bottom)

Figure twenty-six shows photographs of Adolf Beck and Wilhelm Meyer. Although these men do look very similar, they are different. They have some similar facial features but are clearly distinguishable. The fact that the courts, police, and government could not

distinguish between these two men highlights the issue of identity and an issue of identification. A key factor that aided the prosecution and not Beck was the police line-up. Beck was the only man in the line-up who had grey hair and a moustache. So, it is not surprising that he was picked out as the man who defrauded the women. If he had been put in a line-up with men that looked like him then he probably would not have been the one chosen by the witnesses. Beck's was a wrongful conviction by mistaken identity on crimes of romance fraud. Doyle comments on this issue:

Identification evidence is a class of evidence which the law distrusts. The most famous authority is the case of Adolf Beck. Beck was, in 1896, sentenced to seven years' penal servitude, on the evidence of ten women, who swore positively that he was a man whom they had each met on two occasions, and spent some time with in their own houses, and who had defrauded them, and on the evidence of two policemen, who swore positively that Beck was the man who had been previously convicted of similar crimes, taken along with certain circumstantial evidence—that he was known to frequent a hotel on the notepaper of which one of the women had received a letter. Again, in 1904, Beck was convicted of similar crimes on similar evidence. It was subsequently demonstrated that Beck committed none of the crimes, but that a man bearing a general similarity to him was the criminal. (Doyle, 1912: 98)

Doyle's Involvement

This case demonstrates the progression of Doyle as an investigator as he publicly supported Beck. The Adolf Beck case shows a vulnerable female (Otilie Messonier) and unearths

through the process of the trial several vulnerable women who were duped by a clever fraudster. This case also shows a vulnerable male (Adolf Beck). Beck also lived near the margins of society and with his limited means Beck was both economically and legally vulnerable. “Beck, in fact, was a shadowy figure who spent most of his career operating on the fringes of the Victorian and Edwardian underworld” (Whiteway, 2008). He had little money and became entrapped in a legal system that worked against him. Although the cases are different, he is not socially dissimilar to Doyle’s pawnbroker in ‘The Red-Headed League’. Although an “unprepossessing figure”, it was Beck, “who finally focussed public attention on the need for a method of dealing with criminal appeals” (Whiteway, 2008). Doyle’s involvement in the case reveals the cross-over between the real-world crimes he was interested in, the injustices he wanted to reverse, and the fictional world he created with Sherlock Holmes. The success of Holmes gave him public prominence to speak on issues beyond fiction. He was knighted in 1901 and in the decade up to the First World War used his public prominence to speak to a number of issues, including as previously noted, divorce law.

Doyle would later become involved in the George Edalji case in 1906 in which a young Indian solicitor was convicted of maiming a pony. However, in terms of this thesis’s interest in romance fraud and notions of identity, the Oscar Slater case is more significant. Doyle’s involvement in these cases helped to change the law in England. While the earlier cases (Manor Case and the Beck case) are examined from a distance, by 1912 Doyle is an active investigator, when he champions the wrongful conviction of Slater. This case, in which he was heavily involved, and the Beck case which drew his interest, were two of four cases

which were instrumental in the establishment of the Court of Criminal Appeal which began sitting on 15 May 1908. Ken Whiteway elaborates:

Until then, although appeals in civil cases had been allowed since the mid-17th century, there was neither judicial support nor political will to create a forum for criminal appeals. The prerogative of mercy, exercised after 1837 by the Home Secretary, could be invoked; however, the only form of judicial review of a verdict was the rather limited one provided by the legislation of 1848. This act provided for the creation of a Court of Crown Cases Reserved to which trial judges, if they were so inclined, could “state” a case. “If the Court...thought that the point of law had been wrongly decided at the trial, the verdict was set aside and the conviction quashed. But it will be observed that a case could be stated on a point of law only and that the judge could not be compelled to state it if he did not wish to do so. (Whiteway, 2008).

An article in an American newspaper in May 1914 describes Doyle’s part in the creation of the Court of Criminal Appeal: “If Conan Doyle was led to take a leading part in the public movement for the creation of a Court of Criminal Appeal, it was because his interest had been aroused by the fate of two victims of judicial error, namely, Adolph Beck, an English citizen of Swedish birth, and a lawyer — a solicitor — of the name of George Edalji”. It further draws a connection between him and his fictional detective: “It is unnecessary for me to state that Conan Doyle keeps himself thoroughly informed about all criminal cases. His Sherlock Holmes stories show that.” It further comments on what drew Doyle’s attention to these cases: “Certain features in the evidence on the strength of which these

two men were convicted, the one of cattle maiming and the other of a number of cruel frauds upon women, created doubts in his mind as to their guilt. The possibility that they might be innocent aroused his sympathy in their behalf, and accordingly he devoted those powers of deduction and of sleuthing which he ascribes in his books to Sherlock Holmes, to the unravelling of the tangle" (F. Cunliffe-Owen, *The Sun*, 1914).

The Oscar Slater Case: The Falsely Accused

The Oscar Slater case started in 1908. An elderly woman named Marion Gilchrist was murdered. On the day of her murder, her maid had left her in her home. Neighbours heard knocking from Gilchrist's home but when they went to investigate there was no answer. The neighbour and Gilchrist's maid went back up and found her mistress dead, with a head wound and personal papers strewn everywhere. An unidentified man was spotted in the hallway. The case eerily prefigures Hamilton's *Gaslight* as prior to the play's opening Manningham murdered an old woman in the house he now inhabits with the wife he is gaslighting, with the intention of searching for a jewel which he failed to find when he murdered his elderly victim.

Slater was an early suspect. Many factors contributed to this: he lived nearby, he was known for running illegal gambling, he had recently sold a diamond brooch and he left the country after the murder using an alias. Slater returned from America to prove his innocence. He proved that the brooch he sold was not Gilchrist's. He also had an alibi for the time of the murder. However, this was not enough for the police as they had a witness stating they saw

Slater (it later turned out this witness was told what to say by the police). Slater was also found to be in possession of a hammer which the police claimed was the murder weapon. In 1909 Slater was found guilty of the murder of Gilchrist. He was sentenced to death. It was only two days before he was going to be put to death that his punishment was changed to imprisonment with hard labour.

Doyle's Involvement

In 1912 Doyle published *The Case of Oscar Slater*. Here he demonstrates Slater's innocence, drawing a lot of attention to the case. Doyle forensically examines each of the discrepancies of Slater's case. He determines that Slater used a false identity to leave the country because "he was travelling with his mistress". He used the false name so his wife would not find out about his infidelity. Doyle also examines the hammer found in Slater's possession, demonstrating that the hammer was the wrong size to create the wounds found on Marion Gilchrist. Doyle also suggests that she knew her killer and that Slater had never met her before. Doyle's work heightened the public outrage and there were calls for a new trial. Doyle emphasizes that he has little regard for Slater's character calling him a "blackguard" (60). At the same time, he is moved by the injustice and noting that it was the "irregularities of [Slater's] life which helped to make his conviction possible" (61).

During 1914 new evidence emerged. His alibi was verified and the fact the maid had not identified him as the man in the hallway. Even after all of this, nothing changed and Doyle was furious, writing to the *Spectator*: "How the verdict could be that there was no fresh cause for reversing the conviction is incomprehensible" (Doyle, 1914 Online). No further

progress was really seen until 1925 when Doyle received a message smuggled out of prison from Slater. Slater begged him to keep working on his case, not to forget about him and to use his power and influence to help him prove his innocence. He did just this and wrote letters to many influential people such as the press, powerful friends and even the Secretary of State. Nothing changed for Slater.

In 1927 journalist William Park published *The Truth about Oscar Slater*. Park agreed with Doyle, his detective deductions and findings in his book. Doyle wrote the introduction to Park's book in which he briefly outlined the case. He also commends Park as a journalist-investigator who would not "be at rest while a patent wrong was being done to a helpless and friendless man" (Conan Doyle, Introduction, 6-7). Here Doyle is underlining Slater's vulnerability – he is "helpless" and "friendless". Not long after this book was published Slater was released from prison, but he was not pardoned. The case was reopened and retried. Doyle and others helped him with his legal fees for compensation. Slater eventually won his case and was compensated with £6000. It is interesting to note that Slater never paid Doyle back for the money he lent him. The author was not upset about the money but was disappointed in Slater as he deemed this act dishonourable.

This case underscores many issues present in the fictional texts examined in this thesis. False identity reappears as a key issue. Although Oscar Slater did not use a false identity to flee the country because he had committed a murder, he used it to be unfaithful to his wife. The use of false identity highlights other issues because, firstly, Oscar Slater could just change his name and leave the country using an alias. This illuminates a lack of security and policing on fraud during this period. Such concerns have been demonstrated throughout

this thesis in a variety of texts including Old Bailey records on bigamy cases. Doyle comments on the issue with identity in the Beck case, as well as in the Slater case:

It is notorious that nothing is more tricky than evidence of identification. In the Beck case there were, if I remember right, some ten witnesses who had seen the real criminal under normal circumstances, and yet they were all prepared to swear to the wrong man. In the case of Oscar Slater, the first three witnesses saw their man under conditions of excitement, while the second group saw the loiterer in the street under various lights, and in a fashion which was always more or less casual. It is right, therefore, that in assigning its due weight to this evidence, one should examine it with some care. We shall first take the three people who actually saw the murderer.

(Doyle, 1912: 27)

The second issue of using a false identity was a major factor in proving Slater's guilt. A man changing his name and leaving the country is suggestive of guilt. The third issue is the infidelity within Oscar's marriage. The fact he could change his name, travel and start another romantic relationship somewhere else strengthens the arguments made in my true crime case studies, where men could simply up-root and move somewhere else to start something new.

These three cases demonstrate Doyle's development as a detective, deploying the skills he honed in his detective writings to the problems of real life. He progresses from being engaged and curious about a criminal case, to publicly showing support for injustices and then investigating a crime himself. Doyle became increasingly more active as a private

detective, as Howard Haycraft confirms when he notes that he was a fighter in any cause he “believed to be right “ (Haycraft, 1941: 87). Haycraft observes that Doyle as an individual was “much closer to Watson and Holmes” (Haycraft, 1941: 87). One can only agree with this assertion because Doyle was both Watson and Holmes and his ability to create these characters and stories is what made him a great detective in his own right. Harold Orel argues:

Unlike Sherlock Holmes, who had little or no interest in opinions or leading articles, Conan Doyle was a man who held strong opinions and wanted a free play of opinion in an open forum ... he did not want to be ignored, or his proposals for remedying social wrongs and injustice to be taken lightly ... He was on the side of right most of the time – the morally right side, the ethically right side. He deserves to be remembered ... for both the passion of his convictions and the eloquence with which he expressed his views. (Orel, 1995: 178)

The cases that Doyle became interested or involved in demonstrate the vulnerability of victims: women romanced for their money by men who make false promises and individuals who become victims of mistaken identity and for whom the law is no recourse. The insecurity of the legal system is outlined by Doyle in his introduction to Park’s text: “The revelations of the Slater case show that if circumstances should seem to be against them, no man or woman is safe” (18). It is unsurprising that Holmes is the figure that the vulnerable turn to in Doyle’s fictions, as Holmes offers the safety which is not found in official systems, and it is unsurprising that the belief that Holmes was a real person was a belief that many entertained or wanted to entertain in an uncertain world. It is also unsurprising that the

National Archives list Doyle as “knight author physician criminologist” (National Archives, 1859 - 1930). Fraud at this point was still under the ‘umbrella law’ of The Larceny Act 1916 which did not define fraud but rather gave a few of its offences a criminal punishment. This law was very naive in its outlook at fraud.

Chapter Five

The Shapes of Fraud in Agatha Christie's Poirot Fictions

This final chapter examines the shapes of fraud in Agatha Christie's Poirot fictions; how romance fraud is used for financial gain, and how different forms of romance fraud such as bigamy feature either as the main plot or a subplot in the texts. In the Christie Poirot fictions under discussion here, romance fraud frequently operates as a triangle and the victim is often entrapped in further circles of crime, circles which often draw in other victims. Like Doyle's Sherlock Holmes, the "roots" of Christie's Poirot go "back to the medieval morality play in which a drama of good and evil is played out within a secure theological framework" (Rowland, 2004: 10). With Poirot Christie modernizes the male detective, as Alison Light points out: "Poirot embodied a compromise between the present and the past (Light, 1991: 73). Desirée Prideaux notes that Poirot is an alternative to the "dark intensity of a Holmesian investigation" and that Poirot offers an alternative version of Holmesian masculinity in that Poirot's "portrayal as an emotive, dandified foreigner draws attention to, and undermines social prejudices. It also provides a space for readers to reconsider established ideas about masculinity" (Prideaux, 2022: 48).

Christie's fictions often replicate the true crimes discussed in earlier chapters as criminals frequently resort to murder to shield more minor crimes such as bigamy. In Christie fraudulent identities abound. "Though not much of Christie's fiction takes place in law courts or police stations, and whilst her works rarely focus on points of law, nonetheless her work engages centrally with law and lawlessness in a grander sense" (Nicol, 2019). Susan

Rowland points out that crime fiction “crucially supplements the culturally authoritative texts of the law.” She clarifies:

What I mean by this is that all crime fiction, when clearly defined as fiction, is offering a story that the laws cannot or will not tell. It is saying, in effect, that there is more to crime than the institutionalised stories told in courts and police stations; there is more to criminals, their motives, actions and lives that can be represented through the cultural authority of the legal system. Crime fiction is the other of the powers of legal institutions to represent crime to the culture. Perhaps the appetite for crime fiction is driven by the desire generated by a sense of cultural excess to the operations of the law. There is always 'more to it' than legal institutions can represent, so crime fiction comes to answer that excessive desire by evolving an aesthetic form. Paradoxically, its definition 'as fiction' means that crime fiction can happily occupy the role of other to the laws, so helping to constitute the laws' claims to be 'factual'. Yet, a characterisation 'as fiction' simultaneously guarantees that it can never satisfy that demand for the 'true excess' to the laws; a demand that, if met, would transform the role and power of the legal system by collapsing the binary opposition of law/crime fiction. (Rowland, 2004: 17)

Interpretations of Christie’s work tend to divide among critics who see her as conservative, such as Stephen Knight who sees her as a figure who “firmly believed and recreated the values of the English property-owning bourgeoisie” (Knight, 1980: 107), and critics, like Alison Light and Rowland, who see her as engaged in the social issues of her time. Prideaux’s recent work establishes Light as a trailblazer in this regard: “Light argued against the

established critical view of Christie as a writer of crime fiction that both reflected and reinforced traditional social norms and conventions” finding evidence in “plots that revolve around social instability, a questioning approach to patriarchal order and a disturbing sense that true menace is located in social structures such as the family” (Prideux, 2022: 4). Gill Plain notes a “tension exists in Christie scholarship” between those who refuse to see her seriousness and “those who note the emphasis on evil and individual responsibility in her work [and] a profound moral seriousness underpinning the superficial lightness of her puzzles” (Plain, 2020: 182-183). Merja Mackinen argues that Christie was writing in a period of “intense gender renegotiation” and while she may be politically conservative, she has a

questioning and even subversive attitude to cultural gender expectations. Where Christie's assumptions about class remained conservative and often reinforced retrograde, hidebound social divisions, her representation of femininity contested traditional expectations and found much in common with more left-wing writers such as Vera Brittain and Winifred Holtby, writing during the same period. (Mackinen, 2006: 1).

This chapter examines how Christie is, in many ways, a socially engaged writer through examining how her Poirot fictions examine and highlight vulnerabilities around victims and the law.

Christie is further interesting because she becomes a case in her own right following her brief disappearance in 1926 which generated a police search. While Doyle investigated

actual crimes, Christie became the possible victim of a crime. The chapter starts by examining the writer's disappearance, her assumption of a false identity and her position in her own real-life 'romance triangle'. Her disappearance was also investigated by Doyle who employed a medium who concluded that Christie was still alive (Worsley, 2022: 152). Life in Christie's real-life romance triangle is imitating the art of detective fiction.

The Case of the Writer's Disappearance

In 1914 Agatha Miller became engaged to and then married Colonel Archie Christie. This was the first love triangle Christie was involved in as she was already engaged to a man named Reggie Lucy when she agreed to marry Archie. It was a swift marriage (a wartime romance) and Agatha's mother was never fond of Archie, describing him before the marriage as, notes Laura Thompson, "not considerate" and "ruthless" (Thompson, 2007: 81). After the war marital problems started to emerge because of Christie's rise to fame and with that came her fortune. Her first novel was written during the war in 1916 and was published as *The Mysterious Affair at Styles* in 1920. In a tribute to the novel, Christie named her first marital home with Archie Styles, an act which may well have prefigured the future financial trouble in the marriage as money became a very sensitive topic in the household. Archie started an affair with Nancy Neele and wanted a divorce. The Christies argued on the 3rd of December 1926 and that evening Christie left her home after kissing her daughter, Rosalind. This was the start of which led to a cumulative series of events that climaxed in Christie's disappearance.

Christie was at the centre of the public's attention when she went missing. She had recently published *The Murder of Roger Ackroyd* (1926), one of her most famous novels. Her car was found abandoned in Surrey in the United Kingdom on the 3 December 1926. In her car she had left personal items including some of her clothes. This led to a mass search by both the Surrey and Berkshire police. The National Archives records show:

The car was found in such a position as to indicate that some unusual proceeding had taken place, the Car being found half-way down a grassy slope well off the main road with its bonnet buried in some bushes, as if it had got out of control. In the Car was found a Fur Coat, a Dressing Case containing various articles of ladies wearing apparel, and a driving licence indicating that the owner was Mrs. Agatha Christie of Sunningdale, Berks. (Howells, 2022)

A search of the nearby Silent Pool was undertaken as well as nearby public areas. It was claimed that Christie travelled to London and boarded a train to Harrogate in Yorkshire. Christie checked into the Swan Hydro Hotel under an alias, using the name 'Teresa Neele'; 'Neele' was the surname of her husband's mistress. Her disappearance caused a nation-wide search. Archie was interrogated, becoming a suspect in her disappearance. He was, as Thompson notes, "suspected of adultery at best and murder at worst" (Thompson, 2007: 216). Johnson comments that, "In the aftermath of Agatha's disappearance both Archie Christie and his mistress Nancy Neele were under suspicion and a huge manhunt was undertaken by thousands of policemen and eager volunteers. A local lake known as the Silent Pool was also dredged in case life had imitated art and Agatha had met the same fate of one of her unfortunate characters" (Johnson, 2014).

After her discovery, Christie never really addressed her eleven-day disappearance. She claimed she had amnesia after having sustained a knock to her head. This was corroborated by her husband's interview with the *Yorkshire Post*: "She is suffering from complete loss of memory and identity. She does not know who she is" (Thompson, 2007: 216). Theories, which remain to this day, started to develop. In her autobiography Christie does not allude to the disappearance, merely to the breakdown of the marriage. She describes this year in her life as one that she "hate[d] recalling" (Christie, *Autobiography*, 2011: 346). Critics and biographers have pointed out Christie's recurring childhood dream of the 'gunman'. Light points out:

In one of the few passages in her autobiography which deal with the darker side of her life, Christie in old age vividly recalls a recurring childhood nightmare which involved the repeated appearance of a soldier in uniform - "the Gunman". Her terror at this figure was not, she believed, connected to either the gun he carried or the idea of shooting. Rather it was his presence, not always in costume, in amongst ordinary events - a tea-party or a walk with people she knew - which frightened her. She would be sitting happily in the company of relatives and friends but when "the pale blue eyes in the familiar face turned to meet her - 'It was really the Gunman'". (Light, 1991: 87)

This can be read as a psychological vulnerability and one that shapes not only her personal life but her fictions as well. Christie's disappearance along with her amnesia suggests mental

instability. Her female characters become victims of men who mingle “amongst ordinary events”. Rowland substantiates the point:

Evidence of her [Christie’s] vulnerability to psychological hurt can be gained from her description of a recurrent nightmare as a child. ‘The gunman’ was a figure of absolute horror who would appear in her dreams in the guise of immediate family. It is not too fanciful to suggest that Christie’s generic devotion to the menace behind conventional domesticity may have been fuelled by these terrifying dreams.

(Rowland, 2004: 8)

Some regarded Christie’s disappearance as a form of revenge on her husband for having an affair and abandoning her. Christie’s disappearance demonstrates the convergence of real-life and fiction. A wealthy woman going missing as her husband embarks on an affair could, indeed, be case straight out of one of her own novels. In *Death on the Nile* (written long after the collapse of her marriage) a wealthy woman is murdered in a love triangle. What can be traced in Christie’s crime novels is much of this material derives from the personal.



Figure 27: What Really Happened when Agatha Christie Went Missing', *The Times*
 (<https://www.thetimes.co.uk/article/what-really-happened-when-agatha-christie-went-missing-7qgw5strl>)

Christie's disappearance received global media attention. The above image demonstrates how her vanishing was front news. Jared Cade's *Agatha Christie and the Eleven Missing Days* (1998) examines the evidence. The press was very involved in Christie's disappearance and Cade refers to their hindrance and presence whilst the search was underway. Cade points out that the *Daily Express* and the *Daily Chronicle* went to Harrogate to search for Christie and visited the hotels. However, there was no one checked in under the name 'Agatha Christie' so their search came to nothing. However, Christie was there at that point so her use of an alias shielded her. Christie had and did use aliases in many of her fictions and through the use of false identities, individuals escape recognition and, in many cases, justice. In *The Mysterious Affair at Styles* one of the murderers assumes the other

murderer's identity in a complex plot which is designed to mislead their mutual involvement in murder. So why would it have been any different for Christie?

Cade's version of events suggests that on the day of her disappearance Archie yet again asked for a divorce. Cade details the state of Christie's abandoned car. The staging of the car reads like a page out of one of Christie's novels. Cade observes that Christie left three letters before her disappearance: one to assistant Charlotte in which she "asked the secretary to cancel rooms that had been booked for Agatha in Beverley for the weekend" (Cade, 2006: 69). Cade also states that Christie also left a letter to her husband before she disappeared. No one knew the letter's contents but Archie and his behaviour with the letter generated suspicion: "he burned it without telling the police of its existence" (Cade, 2006: 66). Christie sent a third letter to her brother-in-law's (Campbell Christie) place of work. This letter stated that she was going to a spa in a Yorkshire town. Again, this letter was lost. This letter was sent after her disappearance. Cade suggests that Archie's life started to disintegrate because he was a potential murder suspect, he was losing his mistress, Nancy, and the press were pursuing family and friends. If Christie's goal was to punish Archie because of his infidelity, one cannot argue that she did not achieve this. Archie did not help himself in the matter of Christie's disappearance as he constantly tried to deceive officials about his marital problems and subsequent affair but his 'punishment' during this time was severe: "It needed very little imagination to deduce that Archie was the person Agatha wished to spite" (Cade, 2006: 96). Thompson suggests that Christie "absconded in the belief that giving Archie a weekend of agony, making him fear that she was dead, awakening his buried feelings, might restore him to her" (Thompson, 2007: 221).

Christie's location was found when two men visited the Harrogate police as a woman in their hotel resembled the missing author everyone had been searching for. The police watched her in the hotel until they could get her husband to come down and identify if, in fact, she was Agatha Christie. No one could believe that Christie had been there the entire time and no one had recognised her. However, Harrogate was frequented by the wealthy and hotels there were discreet. When the police finally confirmed the identity of Christie they collected her from her room and brought her to the reception where Archie was waiting: "When Agatha at last appeared it seemed evident to witness that she was no more suffering from amnesia or mental breakdown than was Archie (Cade, 2006: 117).

Christie's disappearance can be viewed in many ways and Cade suggests Christie could have been mentally ill (along with other theories) at the time of her disappearance. In an obituary of the distinguished archaeologist, Joan Oates, who worked with Christie and her second husband, Max Mallowan, on digs in the Middle East, Oates is quoted as saying that no one spoke of Christie's disappearance, years after its occurrence: "It was the unspoken subject ... It was a real no-no. I was told once . . . that someone had broached the subject and she wouldn't speak to that person again" (*Times*, 2023). Ultimately, as Thompson notes, "Something of the mystery will always remain ... A mystery story. Her best, because it cannot be solved" (Thompson, 2007: 218).

However, one cannot depart from the idea that Christie may have used her literary powers and penned her own disappearance in revenge. Undoubtedly, Christie was, for all her wealth and fame, a vulnerable female, a potential societal embarrassment, and a lonely woman, as divorce was anathema in her society; despite additional legislation to simplify

divorce law, such as the Private Member's Bill of 1923 which passed into legislation as the Matrimonial Causes Act which "made adultery by either husband or wife the sole ground for divorce. A wife no longer had to prove additional faults against the husband" ('Changes in divorce: the 20th century' UK Parliament). But Christie did not want a divorce and these combined factors could justify her actions and the reasons behind them, if they were, in fact, deliberate. She describes her views on divorce in her autobiography:

I had been brought up, of course, like everyone in my day, to have a horror of divorce, and I still have it. Even today I have a sense of guilt because I acceded to [Archie's] persistent demand and did agree to divorce him. (Christie, 2011: 355)

Her disappearance, wittingly or unwittingly, punished him in so many ways which potentially gave her back some 'power' in their relationship. Nevertheless, whether we understand her actions, the Christie affair defrauded the entire country for eleven days. This is something which is rather impressive, if this is what she did, and is only something a world-class detective writer could execute. What becomes interesting here, however, is to disentangle Christie the person from Christie the story. If we read the episode as a story we see financial jealousy, infidelity, vulnerability, an unwanted wife, a love triangle, an abandoned car pointing to a potential crime and a false identity.

As this chapter explores 'Love Triangles', deceptive and fraudulent behaviour in Christie's works, it is pertinent to showcase how Christie had first-hand experience of being involved in a destructive love triangle. Her husband was having an affair, Christie was the victim of infidelity thus was a fatality of divorce too. The societal shame around divorce was quite

significant during this period and this could link to what was read as her revenge towards her husband. We see this mirrored in her literary works such as *The Mysterious Affair of Styles*, *Death on the Nile* (1937) and *Dead Man's Folly* (1956). Christie's disappearance, or the way in which it is presented and left unsolved, suggests the idea that Christie, one way or another, was involved in the fraudulence of her disappearance. She became a character in her own story. She had abandoned her car with personal items left behind which one could argue was a staging and a manipulation to fake her own disappearance. All of this led to the notion of foul play. She stayed in a Harrogate hotel and read newspaper accounts of her disappearance. Her alias even incorporated her husband's mistress's name. Perhaps Christie wanted the exposure. She knew that her husband had had an affair and that infidelity would go unpunished, therefore she sought her own justice by framing her husband for her own disappearance. The fact that some people thought Christie could have been dead suggests that she faked her own disappearance and even death. She had, in other words, committed 'pseudocide'. Janet Morgan argues that both Christies "paid" by having their "lives and characters become the object of widespread, intense and lasting public interest" (Morgan, 1997: 161). Christie became, and remains, the mystery story.

Christie returned to the events of her marriage in her fictionalised story of her life, *Unfinished Portrait* (1934). This text portrays her own marriage breakdown to Archie. Christie illuminates the inner works of her marriage when she comments in the voice of her character: "Nobody can hurt you except a husband—nobody's near enough. A lover wouldn't be so terrifying as a husband—you'd never get to depend so on a lover—it's all the little shared intimacies of life that hold you so with a husband and tear you to pieces when you part... A lover you just have occasional meetings with—your daily life is your own"

(Christie, 1972: 279). Christie is expressing her problems with Archie through this fiction and bringing her personal life to the forefront of her work. His infidelity clearly has an emotional impact on Christie, and she works it out through her fictional character. It is interesting to note that Christie does not fictionalize her own disappearance in this book but mentions a suicide attempt by the main character. This raises the question as to whether this was Christie's ultimate intention when she disappeared but being discovered in Harrogate may have stopped her.

The chapter will examine 'Love Triangles' and the 'Triangle of Fraud' in selected Christie novels, also examining bigamy and 'near bigamy' cases, highlighting and examining notions of the 'vulnerable'. It further explores the circles of crime which extend out from the victim.

"Millions she's got": *Death on the Nile*

The love triangle is at the heart of many of Christie's literary works. In particular, *Death on the Nile* and *The Mysterious Affair at Styles* have love triangles as their focal points. Both texts take similar, yet different, approaches to the idea of the 'Love Triangle', yet they both highlight the interconnectedness between romance fraud and finance fraud. These texts mirror each other in their use of the love triangle. Indeed, the triangle emerges earlier in thesis's exploration of the triangle of Miss Havisham, her brother, and Compeyson.

However, Christie deepens the complexity of the 'Love Triangle' as it becomes the focal points of both *Death on the Nile* and *The Mysterious Affair at Styles*. The only ways in which the novels differ is the way the two rich spouses are murdered.

Death on the Nile (1937) is one of Christie's most popular books, transferring to the stage as *Murder on the Nile* and into several film adaptations. The plot has layer upon layer of mystery, deceit and murder. The key murder within this text is of Linnet, a young rich American woman, by her new husband and her best female friend for financial gain. Simon, in a sophisticated plot devised by him and his co-conspirator and (allegedly) former fiancée, Jaqueline, romances Linnet with the sole intention of ascertaining her money. The name of the victim is unusual. It is the name of a bird, a beautiful bird, which was often caged in Victorian times (the era in which Christie was born), as Stephen Moss notes in the *Guardian*:

The linnet's song has been a double-edged sword: along with his attractive plumage it was the main reason why, during the Victorian era, linnets were trapped in vast numbers. For people of that newly urbanised society, keeping a caged songbird in your home was a reminder of their rural roots. So birds such as the linnet, and its equally attractive cousin the goldfinch, suffered incarceration for their beauty.

(*'Birdwatch: Linnet, Guardian, 2012*)

The financially independent Linnet is caged by her husband and friend in the most extreme manner. This is where the 'Love Triangle' comes in to play. These three are part of a triangle which contains several criminal acts from deception to brutal murder.

From the very beginning of the novel Christie underscores Linnet's wealth, setting up early in the novel the finance fraud of the love triangle. Christie foreshadows the reason behind the romance: money. After her purchase of a landed estate, Wode Hall, from the bankrupt Sir George Wode, she is described by a local: "That's her!" said Mr. Burnaby again. And he

went in a low awed voice: 'Millions she's got... going to spend thousands on the place' (Christie, 2010: 1). "She'll bring money into the town" (Christie, 2010: 1). Linnet is judged in the first pages by a 'lean man' who states: "It seems all wrong to me – her looking like that. Money and looks - it's too much! If a girl's as rich as that she's no right to be a good-looker as well" (Christie, 2010: 2). With so many references to Linnet and her money in the beginning of this text, Christie is illuminating that money was a considerable talking point for others, inciting both gossip and jealousy in the local community. The quotation that refers to her looks suggests that a woman should not be rich and beautiful. Is this because having beauty and money makes a woman a potential victim or the fact that Linnet is displacing the old landed and patriarchal gentry? Does possessing these things go against societal expectations at the time? These are all questions that arise from the beginning of the text. Christie's emphasis on Linnet's beauty and wealth which suggests that she is not only foreshadowing the finance fraud but the romance fraud as well. An obsession with wealth permeates the text. Money is the object, and the romance fraud is the gateway into the money. The origins of the love triangle are, however, initiated by Linnet, when she desires to possess her friend's fiancé. Linnet's wealth has enabled her to buy what she desires all her life. Her desire to have the impoverished Simon Doyle is no different. The social dimensions of the text – the displacement of the old family from Wode Hall by new wealth and Linnet's ability to purchase the estate – is a reflection on the processes of capitalism. Linnet is both a representative of capitalism and its victim when she falls for the conspiracy against her.

The Love Triangle comprises two people with malevolent intentions with the aim of gaining the trust of a vulnerable victim. Linnet does not seem vulnerable, her wealth should protect

her but the jealousy of the locals in the novel's opening pages establishes the danger in such wealth for a single woman. Poirot refers to the love triangle in chapter seven when he has a conversation with Mrs Allerton:

“Motives for murder are sometimes very trivial, Madame.”

“What are the most usual motives, Monsieur Poirot?”

“Most frequent—money. That is to say, gain in its various ramifications. Then there is revenge—and love, and fear, and pure hate, and beneficence—”

“Monsieur Poirot!” “Oh, yes, Madame. I have known of—shall we say A—being removed by B solely in order to benefit C. Political murders often come under the same heading. Someone is considered to be harmful to civilization and is removed on that account. Such people forget that life and death are the affair of the good God.” (Christie, 2010: 108).

In fact, although as readers we do not know this at this stage, Poirot is defining the love triangle between Simon, Linnet and Jaqueline. Linnet is “A” being removed (murdered) by Simon to benefit Jaqueline.

Simon's romance of Linnet and how he cultivates their relationship requires examination. His techniques in faking romance are critical to an understanding of how romance fraud functions in this text. He cleverly manipulates Linnet and orchestrates the romantic dimensions of their relationship. In Egypt with the holiday party, the couple appear as genuine honeymooners. Simon even saves Linnet's life from a falling boulder that could have killed her: “There was a shout – people running towards him waving their arms –

shouting ... Simon stared stupidly for a moment. Then he sprang to his feet and dragged Linnet with him. Not a minute too soon. A big boulder hurtling down the cliff crashed passed them. If Linnet had remained where she was she would have been crushed to atoms. White-faced they clung together” (Christie, 2010: 151). Simon is acting like an authentic loving husband. Saving Linnet and holding on to her could be interpreted as passion and the fear of losing her. The scene is misleading as he does not love Linnet; he loves Jacqueline. Simon’s behaviour in saving Linnet and the manner in which the couple “clung together” is manipulative as Simon is performing the role of caring husband, not only towards Linnet but toward the party of holidaymakers as well. He is creating the persona of the devoted husband and perfect partner to Linnet. So, when he eventually murders her, he would not be a suspect because everyone knew how loyal he was to Linnet. The fact that Christie states that both of them were “white-faced” also suggests Simon was shocked by the incident of the stone, as the rolling stone is not part of the plan that he has concocted with Jacqueline.

A further example of the manipulative behaviour of Simon is his demonstration of his hatred of Jacqueline contrasted with his devoted attention to Linnet. In a conversation with Poirot, Simon talks about Jacqueline in a derogatory manner: “Can’t she see what an ass she’s making of herself? Doesn’t she realize that no decent woman would behave as she is doing? Hasn’t she got any pride or self-respect?” (Christie, 2010: 90). Here he is trying to manipulate a world-class detective that he hates Jacqueline and loves Linnet. Simon is trying to paint Jacqueline as the ‘bad guy’, as unstable, and present himself as the loving and affectionate husband. All of this provides him with a cover for the later crime of killing his wife for her money. Christie is tapping into the crimes being committed during this era as

women now had some financial rights and are vulnerable to manipulation and control by deceitful men for their money.

Simon constantly manipulates not only Linnet but those around him: “After all, you’ve got to take your medicine when it comes to you. The faults mine, I admit. But there it is! If you no longer care for a girl, it’s simply madness to marry her. And now that I see what Jackie’s really like and the lengths, she is likely to go to, I feel I’ve had rather a lucky escape (Christie, 2010: 93-94). Simon is suggesting to Poirot that Jackie will go to “lengths” to end his relationship with Linnet. At this point in the novel, it seems as though Simon is trying to warn Poirot about Jacqueline’s instability, but in fact he is just preparing the groundwork for his fraudulent romance with Linnet, the impending finance fraud and the ultimate murder of Linnet.

It can be argued that Linnet is not the only woman Simon manipulates within the ‘love triangle’. It can be also suggested that Jaqueline is also a victim of Simon’s manipulative behaviour. Simon makes both Linnet and Jaqueline fall in love with him and then uses them both to achieve different goals. He constantly blames and points the finger at Jaqueline. He also encourages Jaqueline to orchestrate their scheming plot. Jaqueline wants Simon, but Simon wants Linnet’s wealth, and Jacqueline knows that to secure Simon she must have wealth. This is the triangle in operation. Simon manipulates Linnet to fall in love with him and to trust him. He isolates her from her social circle and support, so she is entirely under his influence:

“Monsieur Poirot, I’m afraid—I’m afraid of everything. I’ve never felt like this before. All these wild rocks and the awful grimness and starkness. Where are we going? What’s going to happen? I’m afraid, I tell you. Everyone hates me. I’ve never felt like that before. I’ve always been nice to people—I’ve done things for them—and they hate me—lots of people hate me. Except for Simon, I’m surrounded by enemies . . . It’s terrible to feel—that there are people who hate you. . . .” (Christie, 2010: 117).

Linnet feels that “lots of people hate” her and the only person she can trust is Simon. This technique of isolating their victim is something we see in the twenty-first century, described as gaslighting and catfishing or coercive control. Coercive control is defined by the Home Office’s Statutory guidance as “taking place over a length of time in order for ‘one individual to exert power, control or coercion over another’”. Furthermore, the Crown Prosecution Service (CPS) “notes that the behaviour is considered a crime in intimate or family relationships if it ‘causes someone to fear that violence will be used against them on at least two occasions; or causes them serious alarm or distress which has a substantial adverse effect on their usual day-to-day activities’” (Nutall, 2012).

Simon uses Linnet as a pawn in his own twisted game, but the novel suggests that he might well treat Jackie in a similar manner. Jackie, as Poirot points out, loves Simon too much. Simon plays the role of the doting husband but, in fact, is the main conspirator of the crimes against Linnet.

Alongside his manipulative behaviour Simon is revealed as misogynistic, calculating, and sly. He states: “A man doesn't want to feel that a woman cares more for him than he cares for

her. He doesn't want to feel owned, body and soul. It's that damned possessive attitude. This man is mine---he belongs to me! He wants to get away --- to get free. He wants to own his woman; he doesn't want her to own him.” (Christie, 1937: 92.). This attitude could be related to the progressing ‘power’ women were gradually achieving. Linnet’s wealth makes her a vulnerable female as it not only Simon who wants a share of her wealth, her lawyer does as well. Christie, as a wealthy author, understood the financial imbalances in her relationships as Archie did not like Agatha’s fame and wealth when he was unemployed for a significant time. Cade comments that: “Archie and Agatha constantly fought over money; she resolutely refused to share her earnings with him. The income from the books and the short stories had gone to her head – it was the first time she had income of her own – and she turned Archie down every time he asked for money, unaware that it was leading to a rift between them” (Cade, 2006: 43). Christie has experience to draw on here. Archie, like Simon, was handsome and attractive to other women, while her wealth gave him status. Simon is unemployed at the beginning of the novel; it is Jackie who secures employment for him as Linnet’s land agent. The story mirrors Christie’s own life with her husband Archie.

Circles of Crime in *Death on the Nile*

Death on the Nile’s ‘love triangle’ not only affects the three characters involved (Linnet, Simon and Jaqueline) but widens its ‘circle’ to include those who become collateral damage and are murdered because of the actions required to maintain the romance fraud. Louise and Mrs Otterbourne are casualties of the crimes that occur because of the ‘triangle’ created to commit fraud. Louise’s death is consequent upon her witnessing Simon entering Linnet’s room before her death. She subsequently attempts to blackmail him and Jaqueline.

Jaqueline kills Louise because she is under the influence of and manipulated by Simon, as Jacqueline crosses over from being co-conspirator to murderer. Similarly, Mrs Otterbourne's death is a result of the crimes committed to complete the romance fraud. Jaqueline kills Mrs Otterbourne because she had witnessed her enter Louise's room to kill her. Both murders are committed to maintain the romance fraud and the alibis of two of the participants in the murderous love triangle. Crimes, as we have seen in the real-life bigamy cases, generate other crimes often to conceal the original crime.

The body of the dead woman, who in life had been Louise Bourget, lay on the floor of her cabin. The two men bent over it. Race straightened himself first.

“Been dead close on an hour, I should say. We'll get Bessner on to it. Stabbed to the heart. Death pretty well instantaneous, I should imagine. She doesn't look pretty, does she?”

“No.” Poirot shook his head with a slight shudder. The dark feline face was convulsed, as though with surprise and fury, the lips drawn back from the teeth. Poirot bent again gently and picked up the right hand. Something just showed within the fingers. He detached it and held it out to Race, a little sliver of flimsy paper coloured a pale mauvish pink.

“You see what it is?” “Money,” said Race. “The corner of a thousand-franc note, I fancy.” (Christie, 1937: 305)

Christie depicting one of her characters clutching money when murdered is suggestive of the novel's morals. Finance fraud plays a significant role, as many of the travellers on the boat, want to gain money from Linnet. The torn note in the murdered Louise's hand shows

her greed and her willingness to betray her employer. There is no loyalty. Christie immerses much of her work in a Christian framework. The King James Bible states, “For the love of money is the root of all evil: which while some coveted after, they have erred from the faith, and pierced themselves through with many sorrows” (1 Timothy 6:10 King James Version (KJV)). As a committed Christian and member of the Church of England, she shows how money is the “root of all evil’ demonstrating how her belief system contributes to her work’s moral framework.

While Louise is guilty of blackmail and betrayal Mrs Otterbourne is an innocent victim. She is killed to maintain Jacqueline’s murderous secret. She witnessed Jaqueline leave Louise’s room after her murder thus becoming an involuntary witness to Jaqueline’s crime. Therefore, her death was a necessity to keep Jacqueline and Simon’s crimes a secret. She is killed just before she can reveal the identity of the killer:

“I saw someone knock on the maid’s door and go into the cabin.”

Race said, “And that person was—?”

Bang! The noise of the explosion filled the cabin. There was an acrid sour smell of smoke. Mrs. Otterbourne turned slowly sideways, as though in supreme inquiry, then her body slumped forward, and she fell to the ground with a crash. From just behind her ear the blood flowed from a round neat hole. (Christie, 1937: 326).

Beran suggests that the actions of Simon and Jacqueline and their ‘collateral damage’ is almost justified because of their love: “Jacqueline’s and Simon’s actions are, of course, morally highly questionable. Yet they do not trigger the same response as the actions of a

person who would murder out of mere self-interest, or self-love. Love, as Christie's detectives often observe, makes people do terrible things" (Beran, 2019: 522). While there is no doubt that the killers love each other, murdering Linnet, Louise and Mrs Otterbourne was all for financial gain. Jacqueline realises that her ability to keep Simon is entirely dependent on them having money and Linnet offers an ideal solution. Their love has a materialistic basis.

Linnet is also surrounded by friends and advisers who wish to defraud her. Tim and Joanna steal Linnet's pearls and replace them with fakes. This crime is overshadowed by the more serious crimes in the novel but highlights the circles of crime which surround the victim. Tim explains:

'No, I didn't kill her. I'm a thief, not a murderer. It's all going to come out, so you might as well know. I was after her pearls.' Poirot said, 'Mr Allerton's story is that he went to her cabin last night and exchanged a string of fake pearls for the real one.

'Did you?' Asked Rosaline. Her eyes, grave, sad, childlike, questioned his.

'Yes,' said Tim. (Christie, 1937: 370).

Linnet is surrounded by deception. She is constantly a victim of dishonesty, fraud, and scheming. Most of the characters that Linnet comes into contact with betray her, mainly for financial gain. Linnet is defrauded on all levels. Everyone wants something from her. Joanna confesses to the theft: "Well, sir, where do we go from here? I admit taking the pearls from Linnet's cabin and you'll find them just where you say they are. I'm guilty all right." (Christie, 1937: 368). This a different type of betrayal, because of its personal aspect: Simon's betrayal

was the deception of a lover, Joanna's betrayal was a deception of a confidante and friend. Both are heinous as each other, but only one of them is a killer. Similarly, Andrew Pennington, Linnet's trustee, tries to harm her when he pushed a rock off a cliff towards her. His intention for joining the trip is to manipulate her into signing papers which would mask the financial fraud he is perpetrating on her. The fear of a near death experience was to manipulate Linnet for financial gain. "However, in a letter she wrote him from Cairo, she mentioned casually that she had unexpectedly run across Andrew Pennington. My uncle's suspicions became acute. He felt sure that Pennington, perhaps by now in a desperate position, was going to try and obtain signatures from her which would cover his own defalcations" (Christie, 1937: 348). Pennington is in a position of trust, and he betrays her because of her wealth and his own greed. It is hard not to assume that Christie is bringing in her own personal experience into the character of Linnet. Like Linnet, Christie was a wealthy woman who was at the time of the publication of this novel at the height of her fame. Christie observes: "Where large sums of money are concerned, it is advisable to trust nobody" (Christie, 1992 Online). Clearly, Christie believed that money was a source of evil and that it brought the worst out in humanity, as demonstrated in this quotation and played out in *Death on Nile*.

Rowland supports this claim:

The murder of honeymoon heiress Linnet Doyle proves to be intimately connected to most of the party. Also aboard are her husband and his vengeful spurned fiancée, representatives of her two sets of lawyers, members of a family once ruined by her father, a kleptomaniac old lady after Linnet's pearls, a communist agitator who is

also a British lord, a professional upper-class jewel thief, and a dipsomaniac writer of sex stories with her increasingly desperate daughter. (Rowland, 2004: 73)

As Rowland notes, Linnet is connected to everyone in the story. There is not just a love triangle in *The Death on the Nile*, but a web of conspiracy, machination, and crime which Linnet is an unwilling participant in the centre of it all.

The Triangle of Fraud in *The Mysterious Affair at Styles*

The Mysterious Affair at Styles is similar to *Death on the Nile* when it comes to 'Love Triangles'. Here the 'Love Triangle' is between Alfred, Emily and Evelyn, with Emily the victim, Alfred the 'romancer' of the fraud and Evelyn the co-conspirator. Alfred takes a similar yet different approach to Simon Doyle in manipulating Emily to marry him and to eventually take all her money. "Apart from re-using mystery plots and character types, Christie's detective fiction tends to feature recurring themes: the dynamics of a large, slightly dysfunctional family, murders corresponding with the lyrics of a nursery rhyme, love triangles, and murder being a crime which demands justice. All of these elements were used repeatedly during Christie's long writing career" (Rouvinen, 2016: 5). While Rouvinen outlines the repetition we see in Christie's works, she does not examine the romance fraud and the legalities around the love triangles.

There are diverse opinions by various characters on Emily's relationship with Alfred. As she is a widow and a lonely rich woman, one can only describe her as vulnerable and as an 'easy

target', and Alfred takes advantage of this situation. John Cavendish comments on Emily's and Alfred's relationship: "The fellow must be at least twenty years younger than she is! It's simply barefaced fortune hunting; but there you are—she is her own mistress, and she's married him." (Christie, 2006: 12). Cavendish identifies Alfred as a "fortune hunter" which allies him with a romance fraudster. He is suggesting that Alfred is only with Emily for her money and that he is waiting for her to die and inherit her fortune. How Alfred goes about this, and manipulates Emily, raises the deceit to another level: murder.

Hastings observes Alfred's behaviour towards Emily: "His watchful and attentive manner never varied. From the very first I took a firm and rooted dislike to him, and I flatter myself that my first judgements are usually fairly shrewd." (Christie, 2006: 16). Hastings is suggesting that Alfred may be dominating as his "attentive" manner is also "watchful". The comments raise suspicions as to Alfred's motives and demonstrate in his watchfulness, a sinister quality. Alfred has a controlling personality.

To prepare for their crime, Alfred and Evelyn create a façade that they detest each other, in order to influence Emily. This behaviour is designed to commit romance fraud and thus finance fraud. Alfred, just like Simon Doyle, is the front man of the scheme. Their gender does not necessarily mean they are dominant in their partnerships in crime, but their gender allows them to manipulate the vulnerable women. In Christie's works, as well as Doyle's, we rarely see women as the 'front' person of romance fraud. Christie creates the partnership of Alfred and Evelyn, so they are secret lovers and have every intention of murdering and stealing Emily's money. They defraud not only Emily but those around them and they manipulate those around them into believing that their feud is real. Hastings states

after the death of Emily: “It occurred to me very forcibly at that moment that to harbour Miss Howard and Alfred Inglethorp under the same roof, and keep the peace between them, was likely to prove a Herculean task, and I did not envy John”. (Christie, 2006: 82) This is an example of the love triangle in action. Emily has been killed by the other two in the love triangle and they are proceeding to manipulate those around them until they get the money, they feel they deserve. Hasting believes that the lies Alfred and Evelyn spout to be true but in fact the techniques they use to manipulate everyone are not dissimilar to Simon and Jaqueline in *Death on the Nile*.

A technique used in several of Christie’s stories is gaslighting. As previously noted, the term derives from a 1938 play which was filmed in 1944. This is process of manipulation where the manipulator controls their victim, convincing them that their sense of reality is untrue. In *Gaslight* a woman is manipulated by her husband into thinking she is insane in order for him to have her committed to an asylum so he can search for her aunt’s jewels hidden in the house. Patrick Hamilton the author of *Gaslight*, shows the consequences the technique can have on the victim as Mrs Manningham (the victim) shows: “If I were not mad I could have helped you – if I were not mad, whatever you had done, I could have pitied and protected you! But because I am mad I have hated you, and because I am mad I am rejoicing with my heart – without a shred of pity – without a shred of regret – watching you go with glory in my heart!” (Hamilton 2005: 82). This quotation illuminates that gaslighting is intended to make someone ‘mad’ and doubt their own mind. Money is, as in Christie’s stories, the object, but the means of carrying out the manipulation differ. ‘Gaslighting’ as a term and as a behaviour has risen to prominence in recent years, becoming the *Oxford English Dictionary’s* word of the year in 2018 (Gleeson, 2018).

We see 'gaslighting' repeatedly in the triangle of fraud in *Styles* as the killers attempt to distort Emily's sense of reality. Firstly, Evelyn tries to convince Emily that Alfred is just after her money.

"True enough! Afraid I said some things to Emily she won't forget or forgive in a hurry. Don't mind if they've only sunk in a bit. Probably water off a duck's back, though. I said right out: 'You're an old woman, Emily, and there's no fool like an old fool. The man's twenty years younger than you, and don't you fool yourself as to what he married you for. Money! Well, don't let him have too much of it. Farmer Raikes has got a very pretty young wife. Just ask your Alfred how much time he spends over there.' She was very angry. Natural! I went on, 'I'm going to warn you, whether you like it or not. That man would as soon murder you in your bed as look at you. He's a bad lot. You can say what you like to me, but remember what I've told you. He's a bad lot!'" (Christie, 2006: 21)

This type of tactic could either lead Emily closer to Alfred or away from Alfred and to her best friend who 'has her back'. Evelyn is manipulating Emily's sense of reality. Ultimately, both of these scenarios lead Emily to a party that is trying to defraud her. Evelyn also infers that Alfred is having an affair, which he is, but not with Farmer Raikes's wife but with Evelyn herself. This poses some questions as to why she suggests the affair: is it just to give Alfred an alibi later or to obscure his secret relations with Evelyn? The affair in the end is what starts the downfall of Alfred's and Evelyn's plan, because when Emily finds out she decides to write a new will.

Alfred's manipulation and conduct does not just end with Emily and those around her. He also tries to manipulate the justice system. Christie has her villain, Alfred, try to make himself look guilty to Poirot and the legal system. His plan is to be found innocent of the murder of Emily, so he cannot be retried in the future. Double jeopardy was in place within English law during this period. Caroline Derry defines this:

English law has had the double jeopardy rule for over 800 years, but it was partially abolished in England, Wales and Northern Ireland by the Criminal Justice Act 2003 (Scotland would follow in 2011). In certain, very limited circumstances a person who was acquitted of a crime can now be investigated and put on trial once more." (Derry, 2019 Online).

Previously, and during the time of Christie's writing, individuals could not be tried for the same crime twice. The 2003 legislation is described by the Crown Prosecution Service as reforming "the law relating to double jeopardy, by permitting retrials in respect of a number of very serious offences, where new and compelling evidence has come to light. Previously, the law did not permit a person who has been acquitted or convicted of an offence to be retried for that same offence" (CPS Retrial of Serious Offences, 2022). The fact Christie brought such a crime to light suggests that criminals during this time were violating the law's weaknesses in their own favour.

Alfred's manipulation escalates throughout Christie's work. It commences with the romance fraud of Emily and then the manipulation of those around her with the help of Evelyn, he

then proceeds to manipulate the justice system. All of this so he can commit finance fraud upon Emily. Poirot is aware of the 'double jeopardy':

“Because, *mon ami*, it is the law of your country that a man once acquitted can never be tried again for the same offence. Aha! But it was clever—his idea! Assuredly, he is a man of method. See here, he knew that in his position he was bound to be suspected, so he conceived the exceedingly clever idea of preparing a lot of manufactured evidence against himself. He wished to be suspected. He wished to be arrested. He would then produce his irreproachable alibi—and, hey presto, he was safe for life!”

(Christie, 2006: 211)

Of course, it would be only Poirot who could decipher such an intricate plan, but it is interesting to see Christie incorporate a very controversial law into her work. The success of Alfred and Evelyn's crime rests on double jeopardy. Judy Suh cites Alison Light: “Alison Light argues that it would be a mistake to ‘imagine that Agatha Christie never addresses any sense of social disturbance; on one level her writing speaks nothing else’” (Suh, 2006: 61). Her deployment of double jeopardy underpins Light's observation. “Social disturbance”, as noted by Light, could be defined as social conventions, expectations, as well as the laws in place in this time period. Thus, this links to the double jeopardy argument that Christie is illuminating the injustices of this law as well as its manipulations in the pursuit of fraud and murder. The detective story demonstrates how Christie was commenting on her time in demonstrating how this law could be abused.

‘The type of woman who is invariably defrauded of money by some man or other’:

Romance Fraud in *Evil Under the Sun*

Evil Under the Sun was first published in 1941. From the novel’s outset there is, as Gill Plain observes of Christie’s work more generally during and after the Second World War, an “emphasis on evil” as well as a “profound moral seriousness” (Plain, 2020: 182). The focus on evil, as Poirot observes from a sunchair in an idyllic island off England’s southwest coast, never leaves the novel. Evil penetrates this space cut off from the rest of the world. In the ‘real’ world of the reader Britain was at war and combatting another evil under the sun. The minute and superficially safe world of the hotel holiday in the novel is penetrated by evil. This novel mirrors many different themes in earlier Christie novels, but, in particular, *Evil Under the Sun* intensifies notions of defrauding and romance fraud. This novel may not be Christie’s finest work, but it delves into the dynamics of different types of fraud.

Identity fraud is a key theme within this novel which we see multiple times throughout. Firstly, Christine impersonates Arlena in order to perpetrate the murder of Arlena. Christine does this by dressing similar to Arlena by putting sun cream on and wearing large clothes to cover her own skin.

On Linda's return Christine easily arranged an outing together to Gull Cove. She then returned to her own room, took out from a locked suitcase a bottle of artificial suntan, applied it carefully and threw the empty bottle out of the window where it

narrowly escaped hitting Emily Brewster who was bathing. Part II successfully accomplished.' (Christie, 2014: 259)

She “then dressed herself in a white bathing-suit, and over it a pair of beach trousers and coat with long floppy sleeves which effectually concealed her newly browned arms and legs” (Christie, 2014: 259). Arlena is tanned so Christine is required to use fake tan and then conceal her skin from the other guests. Christine is impersonating Arlena to bide her and Patrick’s time, so Patrick can lure Arlena out of the cave and kill her while everyone thinks she is already dead on the beach. The impersonation in this scenario is still financially based. Patrick and Christine have been defrauding Arlena of her inheritance to the point that Arlena’s husband, Kenneth, might discover their financial deception which would expose this and possibly their previous crimes. Arlena’s death is nothing more than a ‘cover up’. This is another instance of a crime being committed to cover up the initial fraud. J. C. Bernthal suggests that the use of swapping female identities is because Christie wanted to illuminate that the female body is expendable:

The victim in *Evil Under the Sun* is a fashionable actress, Arlena, who has made her career on the stage and her money through liaisons with men. The murderer’s ‘mousy’ wife is easily able to pose as Arlena’s corpse, to give him an alibi, by hiding behind fake tan and an oversized hat; the sex appeal that seems to define the successful woman can come out of a commercial bottle.” (Bernthal, 2015: 43)

On one level, Christie is exposing, as Bernthal points out, the expendability of women, but it is also crucial to note that the novel is also exposing flaws in the legal system around

identity at this time. Furthermore, on the surface at least, Arlena should have a level of protection as she is surrounded by family, unlike the victim in *Death on the Nile* who marries her killer, but her husband's detachment (due to her affairs) makes her vulnerable. She is not protected.

Identity fraud is right in front of us as a reader, from the minute we start reading *Evil Under the Sun*. It reaches a new level in this text in comparison to *Death on the Nile*. In the pre-war novel, the murderers do not assume false identities, but in *Evil Under the Sun*, the murderous couple have killed before and thus require new identities. Patrick is not really Patrick (he is Edward) and Christine Deverill is actually Christine Redfern. From the moment we meet these characters we have been manipulated by their false identities. This poses the question of why Christie uses identity fraud throughout the novel? Is it because it was too easy to commit? Christie herself knew how simple it was to change her name and disappear, so why not allow her murderous characters to do so too? Again, Christie misdirects us with the false identities in her novels. It is as if Christie wants to defraud us as readers by misdirection and omission and demonstrate the fragility and instability of the wartime world in which the novel is set. Christie, following Plain's analysis, distracts us but the novel reflects societal issues.

Romance Fraud is the main feature of *Evil Under the Sun*. The sole goal of Patrick is to romance Arlena to scam her out of her inheritance. Arlena is a vulnerable woman, without the obvious trappings of vulnerability due to her wealth, beauty and married state. She succumbs to the seductive nature of Patrick who cons her under her husband's gaze. Her husband interprets the relationship as another instance of Arlena's affairs, so Patrick

manages to con the husband as well. The romancing of Arlena is solely for financial purposes. He kills Arlena to cover up the romance fraud. Poirot describes how “Arlena had recently come into a large sum of money, left her by an elderly admirer who had not had time to grow tired of her. She was the type of woman who is invariably defrauded of money by some man or other” (Christie, 2014: 256). Poirot is suggesting that Arlena, although a beneficiary of former deceased admirer’s wealth, is an ideal candidate for romance fraud. It is just a matter of time for her to be a victim. Arlena, though successful as an actress, is not clever. She is beautiful, but vapid, and is new to money. The observation that she is destined to be a victim of romance fraud is almost callous. Her elaborate murder was an extension of the fraud, which was committed to cover up the fraud. This is similar to *Death on the Nile* in which a woman is sexually manipulated by a male figure for financial gain.

Evil under the Sun, which was written shortly after *Death on the Nile*, has a seemingly very similar plot with the latter. In each case, the murdered victim is a wealthy woman who appears to have taken a handsome young man from his fiancée or wife, but actually the apparently estranged couple is plotting this woman’s death for financial interest. (Xu, 2009: 135)

Yet the four-year gap in publication from 1937 to 1941 is significant as Britain moved from a pre-War context, a period described as the ‘Golden Age of Detective Fiction’ to the grim and evil realities of war. The depth of fraud and the elaborate killing of a woman in order to hide the fact that she has been defrauded seems excessive. At the same time, there is a common theme across these fictions of romance fraud as the fraud perpetrated on a woman can be seen repeatedly not only in Christie but in Doyle, Collins, and Dickens. In *The Woman in*

White, a wealthy woman is manipulated and penalised by the male gender, coerced into being relieved of her wealth, while another woman becomes collateral damage. In many of the texts examined in this thesis a common theme emerges: the wealthy or those who have a level of wealth or independence are vulnerable, and wealthy women, in particular, are targets of financial and romance fraud. Money makes them susceptible. Specifically, women such as Miss Havisham and Arlena Stewart, are the main targets because as a gender they are seen as vulnerable.

The Role of the Love Triangle

The love triangle is what makes the romance fraud work. In this instance, the love triangle is made up of Arlena (the victim), Patrick (the murderer) and Christine (the co-conspirator). She is oblivious to the romantic relationship between Patrick and Christine. Patrick and Christine are the 'darkness' of the love triangle as their intentions are malicious. Poirot describes Arlena and Patrick's relationship:

I saw in Arlena Marshall with her passion for men, a predestined prey for an unscrupulous man of a certain type. In Patrick Redfern, with his good looks, his easy assurance, his undeniable charm for women, I recognized at once that type. The adventurer who makes his living, one way or another, out of women. Looking on from my place on the beach I was quite certain that Arlena was Patrick's victim, not the other way about. And I associated that focus of evil with Patrick Redfern, not with Arlena Marshall. (Christie, 2014: 256)

Although this quotation does not describe Christine's involvement in the romance fraud, we can see two parts of the love triangle. As readers we are conned and mistaken: we initially see Arlena as a *femme fatale* and the locus of evil, but, in fact, it is Patrick. We can also see the characteristics behind the perpetrator and the victim. Christine is the third part of this triangle, and her role is that of accomplice and covering up for Patrick. From their first victim, Alice, the wife Patrick killed (with Christine's help) after he had taken out an insurance policy on her life, to their second victim, Arlena, Christine's role is to conceal her and Patrick's criminal activities. Xu comments on the love triangle within *Evil Under the Sun*:

[T]he murderer's ploy is not sufficiently clever to withstand too much narrative attention. If we are encouraged to review the actions of Patrick and Christine Redfern more closely than those of the other suspects, it might be likely for us to guess how Patrick might have killed his wealthy lover after he supposedly found her dead body. And once his idea occurs to us, the game is over. So Christie provides very few details about the Redferns even though they are two-thirds of the love triangle. She is also especially careful to give no hint about why the Redferns might profit from Arlena Marshall's death. Such tactics of concealment enables her narrative game to last till the novel's final pages. (Xu, 2009: 135)

Xu's analysis references to the love triangle but does not go into detail as they interrogate the plot limitations and issues. The love triangle is so much more than just a plot twist as it reflects the extent the parties went to in order to commit fraud.

Throughout this thesis identification has been a key issue in the crimes of fraud and romance fraud. The legality around identity and fraud has been ambitious and the crime of fraud did not get defined until The Fraud Act 2006. Not only in the 'real world', but also in fictions, identity is something which is manipulated, misused, and changed to further either criminal activities or to avoid detection. In *Evil Under the Sun*, Poirot identifies Patrick as Edward and Christine through a photograph. Poirot confronts Patrick (Edward): "You will be interested to hear that both you and your wife Christine were easily recognized and picked out by the Surrey police from a group of people photographed here. They identified you both at once as Edward Corrigan and Christine Deverill, the young woman who found the body." (Christie, 2014: 253). Their physical appearances cannot be changed; thus the development of photography is what leads to their downfall and ultimate demise.

Identification is used in different ways to identify a culprit: in Doyle's 'A Case of Identity', handwriting (or lack thereof) is used to make an identification and in this case, the use of the typewriter identifies the culprit. The fraudster does not sign his name to a love letter and his typewriter (with its individual features) betrays him. In *Lady Audley's Secret*, Lady Audley is identified through her handwriting. This is an ongoing feature of these texts.

Christie furthers this question around the issue of identity in both the Arlena case and the Alice case. Patrick (Edward) kills Alice Corrigan then manages to flee without any form of documentation or way to identify himself, thus he creates a new identity from nowhere. He becomes a completely different person to avoid being caught for the murder. Christie is developing themes which can be traced back to Dickens.

***Taken at the Flood* (1948): Leading 'on to fortune'**

Published in 1948, *Taken at the Flood* is a postwar literary piece. Unlike the wartime *Evil Under the Sun* which focuses specifically on 'evil' while more broadly nodding towards war, the war in *Taken at the Flood* is a shadow over the story. As Plain observes: 'While keen not to talk about the psychological damage of war, *Taken at the Flood* has much to say about the material conditions of post-war England. Characters struggle with taxation, bureaucracy, the cost of living and rationing' (Plain, 2020: 188). They also perpetrate crimes of fraud, assume false identities, and kill for money.

The story opens with a story from Major Porter which has its origins in the war. Porter relates the death of Gordon Cloade in *The Times*. Gordon Cloade has died after his house in London has been bombed by "enemy action" (Christie, 1948: 7). Cloade had recently returned from America where he had met a young widow, Rosaleen, and married her and his wife (now widow) and her brother, David, are the only survivors of the bombing. Then Porter reaches back to a pre-War story as he relates how he knew Rosaleen's first husband, called Underhay, in Nigeria. The marriage had not been a happy one: "It hit him pretty hard. He did the decent thing, sent her home and agreed to give her a divorce. It was just after I met him. He was all on edge and in the mood when a man's got to talk" (Christie, 1948: 8). Porter suggests that as Underhay was a Roman Catholic, he would not want a divorce, and he infers from their conversation that Underhay might commit suicide to free his wife: "If a report of my death gets back that will make Rosaleen a widow, which is what she wants: 'Well,' he said, 'maybe an Enoch Arden will turn up somewhere a thousand miles or so away and start life anew.'" (Christie, 1948: 9). Enoch Arden is a literary reference to a poem by

Alfred Tennyson about a man who returns home to find his wife has married again. Later Porter hears that Underhay has died of fever, seemingly confirmed by a letter in Underhay's handwriting that he is dying. Maybe, Porter, notes, "Underhay's buried up country in the midst of equatorial Africa but maybe he isn't – and if he isn't Mrs Gordon Cloade may get a shock one day. And serve her right, I say. I never met her, but I know the sound of a gold-digger!" (Christie, 1948: 9) The story introduces the possibility of bigamy from its opening page.

The Shadow of Bigamy

Taken at the Flood is primarily focused on the crime of bigamy. There is the possibility of bigamy which makes this story so fascinating as it is this possibility that fuels many of the novel's crimes or coverups. Cloade is supporting his large Cloade family with his wealth but upon his demise this financial support stops as Rosaleen is his beneficiary. However, a mysterious man arrives and claims he is Enoch Arden, and he knows that Underhay is still alive and is going to blackmail Rosaleen's brother (who has never met Underhay). This story examines the 'possibility' of bigamy and suggests that such a thought is almost as bad as the crime itself. If Underhay were to turn up in Warmesley Vale, it would be a "little embarrassing" for Mrs Gordon Cloade because she would not be Mrs Gordon Cloade at all. Even if she married Cloade in "good faith" believing Underhay to be dead she would still be committing "bigamy." Should it be proved that Rosaleen's first husband was alive, her wealth from her second marriage would revert to the Cloade family. The family has a motive for discovering if Underhay is alive or getting money from Rosaleen via blackmail. Thus, this

suggests that even in 'societal law' bigamy was seen as taboo. The bigamy in this case is mainly theoretical but the fact that it could be committed seems to be as bad as actually committing the crime.

At the story's end, we do not know if the actual Rosaleen Cloade was a bigamist through her marriage to Gordon. There is no evidence that her first husband is alive. The second marriage may well have been genuine. What is clear at the story's end is that both Rosaleen and Gordon die from the bomb blast. The family are unaware of this and accept the false Rosaleen as genuine. The possibility of bigamy, however, drives Frances to commit a criminal action: blackmail. The Cloades are obsessed with the possibility of bigamy but bigamy is never established in the story. Crimes are instead generated around its possibility. At the heart of the story's crimes is the pursuit of money: David substitutes a maid for his sister for financial gain and Frances substitutes her disreputable cousin for Enoch Arden for financial gain. As David has never met Rosaleen's first husband he is uncertain as to whether Arden is genuine. Both substitutes end up dead through murder and manslaughter respectively. Crimes motivated by bigamy or the possibility of bigamy result in death.

Circles of Fraud

Progressing from the term 'societal law' it is interesting that in societal terms certain crimes are viewed as worse than others. Such an example of this is that Frances attempts to extract money via her cousin through blackmailing Rosaleen. Interestingly, while Frances admits to

blackmail she insists that she would not commit fraud. Blackmail, at least in Frances's estimation, is a lesser crime, as she explains to Poirot:

'You think that because I was ready to blackmail, that I would stoop just as easily to fraud. But in my mind the two things are worlds apart. You must understand that I felt – indeed I still feel – that we have right to a portion of Gordon's money. What I had failed to get by fair means I was prepared to get by foul. But deliberately to swindle Rosaleen out of everything, by manufacturing evidence that she was not Gordon's wife – at all – oh, no, indeed, M. Poirot, I would not do a thing like that. Please, *please*, believe me. (Christie, 1948: 156)

Frances is suggesting that as a crime, blackmail is socially acceptable. It is against the law but you would not be shunned by society. However, fraud is different. Fraud is suggested as a more serious crime than blackmail, at least in Frances's judgement. Frances draws the line at fraud, but blackmail is tolerable. Frances has a morally skewed judgement which is attributed to her upbringing with a dissolute landlord father. The need for money in the post-war context, impels her and her husband (a solicitor) to undertake crimes which they judge according to their own scale. At the end of the novel, the crimes of Frances's husband are not punished, and Frances gets away with her blackmail. The punishments, or lack of, are unsatisfactory. There are no neat closures here, the types of closures we see in earlier Poirot novels, as Christie's post war fictions suggest that not all crimes are neatly resolved.

Frances's point about the crime of blackmail as less serious than fraud requires unpacking. An argument to be made here is that in the crime of blackmail you can see and know who

the perpetrator is in most cases. However, in fraud the victim can be completely oblivious to the fact that a crime is being committed against them and that a person they trusted is the perpetrator. This is a similar argument made in the Doyle chapter of this thesis, in that many victims are oblivious to the crimes that are perpetrated against them. As vulnerable victims they are easy targets and, uncertain of what has happened, seek the advice of a detective to unravel the mystery. This is also apparent in Christie's work, but it is clearly stated in *Taken at the Flood* that fraud is an unacceptable crime not only in law but in society as well. In Doyle's Sherlock Holmes stories, blackmailers are represented as heinous. When Holmes and Watson are inadvertent witnesses to the murder of a blackmailer, Holmes decides to shield the identity of the murderer and, in another story, a seducer and blackmailer is the victim of a vitriol attack. His scarred face will protect other women from falling under his spell.

In *Taken at the Flood* crimes of blackmail (Arden, Frances Cloade) are compounded by crimes of perjury (Porter is bribed by Ronald). The cases are all solved outside of the justice system: "someone went to Major Porter. Someone persuaded him or bribed him - to identify the dead man as Underhay" (Christie, 1948: 156). In 1911 a new act relating to perjury became law in the United Kingdom. The Perjury Act 1911 was designed to simplify the law around the crime of perjury. It stated:

If any person lawfully sworn as a witness or as an interpreter in a judicial proceeding wilfully makes a statement material in that proceeding, which he knows to be false or does not believe to be true, he shall be guilty of perjury, and shall, on conviction

thereof on indictment, be liable to penal servitude for a term not exceeding seven years, or to imprisonment. (Perjury Act 1911 Chapter 6 1 and 2 Geo 5)

Perjury and blackmail are not the story's only crimes. Frances's husband, the solicitor, Jeremy, has been misappropriating his client's assets and is facing exposure and conviction. Also, Arden is not the only character to assume a false identity to perpetrate a crime as Rosaleen is not the true Rosaleen Cloade. The real Rosaleen, as noted earlier, died alongside Gordon Cloade in the bomb, but her brother, seeing he was about to lose all her money through her death, compelled a maid, who survived the blast, to impersonate Rosaleen. Ultimately, David kills the false Rosaleen to protect himself. Thus, this cements the idea that such crimes were being committed cover up the original crime similar to *Evil under the Sun*. There is the initial crime and those which follow cover it up.

Laura Thompson suggests that it was the war that changed society during this period and that this 'behavioural shift' is reflected in the novel:

The great change, of course, came with the Second World War, and *Taken at the Flood*, published in 1948, holds some strong stuff beneath the cool Christie carapace. Its mood is that of the confused, bomb-wrecked country. The truism, that anybody is capable of murder, becomes especially credible; there is a very real sense that the rules of behaviour have been torn up. Identities are fluid. (Thompson, 2020: 8)

It would be naive not to agree with Thompson on this, but the point also requires expansion. Crimes of fraud, bigamy, and identity were present before the war, but the war

(and wars) made it simpler to get away with such crimes, just as many of the bigamy cases in the thesis's earlier chapter on 'real-life' cases took advantage of previous wars. Attention was focused elsewhere; the chaos of war created shifts and movements and made it easier to escape one's actual identity. Wars made it easier for such crimes as abandonment, bigamy, fraud and such other illegal activity to be committed in periods of instability. Therefore, it is inevitable that writers such as Christie would be attentive to such societal shifts and that her fictions would reflect it. As Plain notes, Christie is addressing the "new mess of new era" and "adopts, adapts and mutates her familiar practice to address them" (Plain 2020: 195). But the mess was there before in different ways.

"[A] means to wealth": *Dead Man's Folly*

Dead Man's Folly, published in 1956, focuses on the question of identity, but the story's backdrop is the romancing of a vulnerable woman, a bigamous union and the murder of the victim. What is different about this novel from earlier triangles of romance is that victim is not present in the novel. What happens to Hattie happens before the novel's present moment. This novel, however, focuses on the financial state of Hattie. Sir George Stubbs marries Hattie but his true identity was James Folliat, a war deserter. James/George managed to take Hattie's money so he could start a new life and buy his old family home under a false identity. James/George was already married to an Italian woman, making his marriage to Hattie bigamous. The real Hattie is the victim of a triangle of fraud. However, Hattie is not part of the bigamous marriage for long as George/James murders her and swaps his Italian wife to play the role of Hattie. This allows George/James to control Hattie's

wealth and property. Several murders cover up the murder of Hattie and financial fraud as Marlene Tucker and her grandfather are both murdered to preserve the fraud. This story veers towards the financial, the desperation to recover and maintain a family estate through any means. Hattie is used for this. The romance fraud is used to generate the wealth, but finance overshadows the romance fraud.

War is the shadow over this story. Here war generates, as in *Taken at the Flood*, chaos and confusion around identity and movement. Christie uses this to her advantage within this novel and illuminates that identity could be easily changed and manipulated for fraudulent activities. Mrs Folliat describes such chaos as she is forced to sell the family estate and live in the estate's lodge:

“It suited me very well - I was going through a difficult time. My husband had died just before the outbreak of war. My elder son who was in the navy went down with his ship, my younger son, who had been out in Kenya, came back, joined the commandos and was killed in Italy. That meant lots of death duties and this house had to be put up for sale.” (Christie, 1966: 35)

Mrs Folliat describes such sadness and disarray within her life mostly caused by the war. The loss of her husband just before it, then her two sons (apparently) in the war. Christie channels this grief and loss in this text as a 'red herring' for the fraud in which Mrs Folliat is a leading figure. The pandemonium and chaos of war allows Christie to lure her reader into a false sense of security with her character George Stubbs. George's wealth has assured the continuance of the country house, a seemingly pleasant environment in which the locals are invited, as is Poirot and his friend, the crime novelist, Ariadne Oliver, to partake in activities.

It seems like a re-creation of a pre-war world in which the landed gentry preside over the local community as benign figures. Of course, this view, historically and in the context of the story, is an illusion. The war causes so much uncertainty initially that we see this world as Christie providing stability, but instead she creatively manipulates this *Dead Man's Folly*. Gill Plain challenges Steven Knight's contention that "Christie's wartime writing superintends the contemporary from a distance is equally pertinent for war's aftermath, and Christie's writing can be seen to exemplify British culture's reticence in recognising the traumatic impact of the conflict" (Plain, 2020: 180). Christie is not reticent about "recognising the traumatic impact of conflict". What both *Dead Man's Folly* and *Taken at the Flood* demonstrate is that she was working it through in her fictions. Both fictions reflect a certain post-war gloom. The war's six-year period focused attention on pressing issues. Criminal offences benefited from the war's chaos, and Christie expresses this in her work to give a voice to those forgotten. Hattie is the forgotten figure in this text, submerged in the complex fraud perpetrated by George and his mother. *Taken at the Flood* focuses on notions of identity and the war and in the bigamy case studies, war generates the disruption which enables crimes against the vulnerable. Wars aided varieties of fraud, providing the opportunity for identity swaps, changes, and alterations.

This novel focuses on the financial aspect of fraud rather than the romance side of it. Throughout this thesis I argue that romance fraud and finance fraud interlink. In *Dead Man's Folly* this is also the case, however, Christie confines the romance side of George's relationship with Hattie to the past and focuses primarily on the financial aspect. The techniques used by George/James to get Hattie to marry him are not detailed in the text. Stuart Barnett suggests the real Hattie's key attribute is vulnerability "In terms of plot, the

only requirements for Hattie as a character were that she be wealthy and have no family that would investigate her death” (Barnett, 2016: 67). In other words, Hattie is an easy target. This represents a movement from Christie’s pre-war or wartime romance frauds of *Death on the Nile* and *Evil Under the Sun*. Hattie is replaceable and replaced, in a manner that evokes Christine’s role-playing of Arlena on the day of the latter’s murder. Hattie has very little family so an easy exchange is possible. George/James’s main aim is to ascertain Hattie’s money and to retake his family home. There was no real romance involved, it was a very clinical plan of to marry Hattie and then kill her and take her money. Hattie, like previous victims, has beauty and wealth, and becomes an ‘easy target’. She also has, like Anne Catherick in *The Woman in White*, a learning disability. Mrs Folliat describes her:

“I became very fond of Hattie, all the more perhaps, because I soon realised that she was - shall we say - not fully capable of fending for herself? Understand me, M. Poirot, Hattie is not mentally deficient, but she is what country folk describe as 'simple.' She is easily imposed upon, over docile, completely open to suggestion.” (Christie, 1966: 35).

This, paired with her wealth, accentuates her vulnerability, making her an easy target for George/James and for his mother. It is Mrs Folliat who engineers the relationship. What she says to Poirot about Hattie is true, but it also obscures how she uses Hattie’s vulnerability, her docility and her learning difficulties. Because Hattie is so obviously a potential victim, it is not necessary to demonstrate how the romance fraud is perpetrated. What we do learn is that Mrs Folliat, into whose care Hattie was given, transfers her to her murderous son, because she is determined to get back the family estate at all costs.

The crime of bigamy has been explored throughout the texts in this thesis and re-emerges in this work. James/George Stubbs had already married an Italian woman after deserting the war. This was his first marriage. Then after taking on the identity of Sir George Stubbs, he married Hattie whilst still married to the Italian woman and had no intention of divorcing his first wife. This is clear finance fraud, however, to achieve the goal of finance fraud, George/James had to commit the crime of bigamy. He does not, however, inform his mother of his first marriage. Poirot describes the criminal events to Mrs Folliat:

“You never dreamed – and your son carefully did not tell you, that at the time of the marriage he was already married. Oh, yes – we have searched the records for what we knew must exist. Your son had married a girl in Trieste, a girl of the underground criminal world with whom he concealed himself after his desertion. She had no mind to be parted from him, nor for that matter had he any intention of being parted from her. He accepted the marriage with Hattie as a means to wealth, but in his own mind he knew from the beginning what he intended to do”. (Christie, 1966: 174)

The war is used to generate a change of identity, then bigamy, finance fraud, and murder. Although bigamy is not the intended criminal act, it is a successful romance fraud and is a stepping stone, that leads to finance fraud. James's first wife is an accomplice to his crimes. She does not commit the act of bigamy, but she is a full participant in the crimes that are undertaken to commit the financial fraud aspect of this story. She plays the part of Hattie, taking her place as the lady of manor, while Hattie lies dead in the folly. The folly, found in country estates, is an ornamental building with no practical use. Christie chooses this as the location of the body, reflecting the greed, deceit and vanity of the Folliats.

The crime broadens to encircle Marlene Tucker and her grandfather. Both are murdered as they apprise that George is James in disguise. Both are killed to maintain the fraudulent identities of James/George and his Italian wife. Even the murder of Hattie could be classed as collateral damage. Her death is a means to an end. There is no emotion or hatred behind her death; it is business-like:

He meant murder. Hattie had no relations, few friends. Immediately on their return to England, he brought her here. The servants hardly saw her that first evening, and the woman they saw the next morning was not Hattie, but his Italian wife made up as Hattie and behaving roughly much as Hattie behaved. And there again it might have ended. The false Hattie would have lived out her life as the real Hattie though doubtless her mental powers would have unexpectedly improved owing to what would vaguely be called 'new treatment. (Christie, 1966: 174)

Hattie is just a fatality to the crime of finance fraud. Barnett comments: "The deaths in the novel become necessary to maintain the secret of the murder of the real Hattie, which occurred before the events depicted in the novel. The real Hattie was wealthy. James married and killed" (Barnett, 2016: 67). Barnett suggests that the secondary deaths in the novel were collateral damage, but Hattie's was not. However, all the murders were collateral damage as the 'true' crime in this case is financial fraud. Christie's work on vulnerable females who become victims to financially motivated villains reaches back to Dickens. Laws were changing but victims and vulnerabilities remained.

Although she went on to have a successful and happy second marriage, Christie's 1977 autobiography reveals that she never came to a resolution of her divorce: "I didn't want to

divorce Archie – I hated doing it. To break up a marriage is wrong – I am sure of it” (*Autobiography*, 355). Lucy Worsley notes that “hasty wartime marriages broke down. With divorce rate four times higher than it had been in 1913, the process was made easier. The Matrimonial Causes Act of 1923 made it possible for a woman to gain a divorce on the grounds of her husband’s adultery, something that until that point she’d simply been expected to endure” (Worsley, 2022: 167). Worsley points out that Archie wanted Christie to divorce him, but he did not want his lover to be “drawn in” so Christie “reluctantly agreed to take part in a new 1920s practice sometimes known as a collusive divorce, or ‘Brighton Quickie’” in which Archie would provide “staged evidence, provided by accomplices, that he’d committed adultery with a ‘woman unknown’”. While Brighton was the usual venue for such stagings, Archie went to hotel near London’s Victoria station and “paid a solicitor’s clerk and a waiter to say that they’d seen him with a woman in his bed” (167). This was a legal fraud and the judge “saw through the ruse” but it “worked”, and Christie was “awarded costs and the custody of Rosalind” (167). To be involved in such legal duplicity would have been difficult for the morally upright Christie who had never wanted a divorce in the first place. Archie’s staging of adultery to mask his actual adultery is similar to the ruses of Christie’s fictional villains. Worsley points out that during the divorce case, a significant act was passed in July 1928: the Representation of the People Act which gave all females the vote. “Emancipation was coming not just to Agatha, but to all women” (167).

In her autobiography, Christie notes that her divorce forced her to become a professional writer:

I was driven desperately by the desire, indeed the necessity, to write another book and to make some money. That was the moment when I changed from an amateur

to a professional. I assumed the burden of a profession, which is to write when you don't want to, don't much like what you are writing, and aren't writing particularly well. (Christie, 2011: 358)

The triangles and circles of Christie's fictions teach us about the vulnerabilities of victims and the vulnerabilities in the law. This chapter focused on the 'vulnerabilities' Christie illuminates in her Poirot fictions. We cannot just pigeonhole these susceptibilities as Christie explores so many in the victims, the law, women (who should no longer be victims) and even in herself. It is useful to return to a quotation from Rowland which opened this chapter: "What I mean by this is that all crime fiction, when clearly defined as fiction, is offering a story that the laws cannot or will not tell" (Rowland, 2004: 17). Christie fleshes out the legal complexities and the loopholes in the law. She examines the vulnerabilities of the victims and secures voices for them, even for those who should not be obvious sufferers. By using transgressive figures Christie allows her work to articulate what the law cannot tell. She looks at the limitations of the law when it comes to fraud, romance fraud and other inter-related crimes.

As a woman Agatha Christie was powerful and successful but also became a victim of a love triangle, infidelity and fraud, and had to navigate an unpleasant divorce. A woman in her financial and class position and situation would not be expected to be a victim. However, Christie draws upon her experience as a victim and imparts this into her literary work. She draws on her own experience to tell the stories the law cannot tell. She uses Poirot in a similar way that Doyle uses Sherlock Holmes: they are 'comfort blankets' to society,

protecting the vulnerable in their own homes. People need them to show that they were safe even if the law was not protecting them and that, in fact (or fiction), there is a light at the end of the fraudulent tunnel they are living in. Stewart notes:

Agatha Christie tread the fine line between critiquing and indulging in sensationalism, producing stories that question the representational strategies of both fictional and non-fictional crime writing. Vicarious pleasure may be gained from reading about other people's domestic difficulties but the importance of retaining one's own privacy and 'respectability' permeates these narratives, regardless of their class settings (Stewart 2017: 4)

If we can take only one thing away from Christie's works, it should be that she gave a voice not only to the vulnerable but also to the forgotten in the world and by doing this she draws attention to the law which let so many people down. In this way, she was like Doyle who was righting the wrongs of the vulnerable in Sherlock Holmes fictions which were set from the late nineteenth century to the eve of the First World War. Romance fraud is a frequent crime in the twenty-first century, but Christie and Doyle had already seen it in their respective periods before the legal system did. Christie was a master of the literary but was also a leader in telling stories that law could not or did not tell.

To end this chapter is a quotation from a memorial in London for Agatha Christie which sums up her works. The quotation suggests that her characters were not just simply fictional

figures but provided ways of understanding human behaviour and showcasing societal issues:

The Mousetrap, her many other plays, and more than eighty novels and books of short stories brought Agatha Christie world-wide fame in her lifetime. Through her unique understanding of human nature, her dramatic skills and mastery of the art of storytelling she has become one of the most successful and best loved writers of all time. (Twiston-Davies, 2012)

Christie combined a “unique understanding of human nature” with the “art of storytelling.”



Figure 28: Agatha Christie Memorial, London.

Conclusion

I

This thesis concludes with Agatha Christie's short story, 'Philomel Cottage' (1924), an apt story with which to end because the story mirrors the multiple findings of this thesis and explores issues that have been scrutinised in chapters from Dickens to Christie's Poirot. Published four years after the Hercule Poirot's debut in *The Mysterious Affair at Styles*, Christie adapted the story for the stage in the early 1930s. Although her version was not performed in her lifetime, the story formed the basis of a West End production in 1936. Finally, Christie's original play, *The Stranger*, was published in 2017 by Samuel French and debuted in America in 2019 and at the International Agatha Christie Festival in 2021, showing the relevance of this story today. Given the recent recovery of this story, it would be remiss not to include a text, particularly as it summarizes some of the key features that are drawn out in this thesis.

The 1924 story centres on a woman called Alix who inherits a substantial amount of money from the death of her cousin. At the story's outset she is in a platonic relationship with a man named Dick, but the money Alix inherits becomes an issue in the progress of the relationship, as Dick becomes withdrawn and reserved. As the relationship deteriorates Alix meets Gerald Martin. Affectionate and attentive towards Alix, the relationship results in an engagement after one week of meeting. Alix falls head over heels for Gerald and trusts him wholeheartedly. This swift progression of their relationship leaves Dick unhappy and he warns Alix: "The man's a perfect stranger to you! You know nothing about him!" Alix starts to have strange dreams about Dick and Gerald. In these dreams, Dick kills Gerald and Alix

thanks him for doing so and they reunite. These dreams confuse Alix, and she avoids contact with Dick.

Gerald and Alix decide to buy Philomel Cottage after Gerald finds it. As the owner would only sell the cottage rather than rent it, Alix is the only one in the financial position to buy it and uses her bearer bonds supplemented by a mortgage. The cottage's location is also remote. After moving in, strange things start to occur for Alix. Firstly, Gerald tells the gardener that Alix is travelling to London, when she is not as she hates London. Then when Alix has a conversation with the gardener, he claims she bought the house for two thousand pounds. Alix is confused and tells the gardener she actually paid three thousand pounds for the cottage. However, the gardener is adamant it was sold for the lower amount. After this conversation Alix finds Gerald's pocket diary. In the day's date she finds a note recording the time of 9pm. Alix confronts Gerald about the time in his diary as well as the gardener's comments. He has answers for all her queries He claims he was going to develop pictures with Alix at 9pm that day. He also claims that the gardener must have been confused about London and the price of the cottage. Gerald confirms that they paid two thousand pounds in cash for the cottage and paid one thousand pounds on the mortgage.

Gerald's behaviour remains strange. He refuses to let Alix go into the town. He pressures her to stay home while he goes alone. Alix becomes even more suspicious, so she investigates his belongings and finds a cheque book, a wallet full of money and some letters. The letters are her own, the ones she had written to Gerald before they got married. Alix also finds old newspaper clippings. These are from an American publication from seven years previously. The clippings concern a conman and bigamist called Charles Lemaitre and

his trial. He was accused of killing a woman, along with other crimes. Several of his victims were never seen again after he had swindled them. Lemaitre defended himself in court with a legal team. He was found not guilty of murder but was found guilty of the other charges against him (fraud, bigamy etc.). As Alix reads these clippings, she remembers the case and that Lemaitre escaped and was never seen again. Alix sees picture of Lemaitre in the clippings and identifies him as Gerald. The description of Lemaitre that accompanies the picture states that Lemaitre had a pocketbook, brown eyes and a mole located on his left wrist. Gerald does not have a mole, but he does have a scar in the same position.

Gerald returns to the cottage with a spade. He does not leave Alix alone, but she convinces him to let her ring their butchers for a meat order for the following day. But, in fact she rings Dick in code, in the hope he will come to her assistance. Gerald tries to convince Alix that they should go down to the cellar, but she declines. All she can do is buy time until someone comes to her aid, so she improvises and makes up a story that saves her life. Alix tells Gerald that she is a murderer and that she has killed two of her previous husbands by poisoning them. Gerald panics as his coffee tasted strange and bitter and is convinced that she has poisoned him as well. Shortly after, Dick and the police arrive at Philomel Cottage. The police find Gerald dead in his chair with a terrified look on his face. Gerald has, in fact, died of heart failure, wrongly convinced that Alix has poisoned him.

This short story highlights many of this thesis's findings. The first and foremost is the romance fraud that leads to financial fraud. Gerald romances Alix for the sole intention of gaining access to her financial assets. The romance is a means to an end for Gerald. This thesis has identified varieties of romance fraud from Collins's *A Woman in White*, Dickens's

Great Expectations, Braddon's *Lady Audley's Secret*, Doyle's Sherlock Holmes stories, Christie's Poirot crime novels and in the true crime bigamy cases and Doyle's historical crime. Although romance fraud has only been defined in the twenty-first century this thesis shows that it is not an exclusively twenty-first century crime. The crime has been overlooked by the law but not in literature. As noted earlier, romance fraud leads to financial fraud. Many of these stories have been examined using legal terminology and through legal frameworks that we have today, which the Victorians did not have access to, and which were emerging into legal focus as the nineteenth century progressed into the twentieth century. 'Philomel Cottage' allows us to acknowledge this through Christie's insight into human relationships and how she illuminates these issues at the story's conclusion. The police only arrive at the end. Alix must rely upon herself to extricate herself from the situation. The law or police could not and did not help her. The police arrive only to discover Gerald's dead body.

Like several of the texts examined in this thesis, issues of identity prevail. In this case, and in others, the uncovering of the fraudulent identity is key to uncovering the crime or crimes. Doyle swiftly apprised the importance of identity in his Sherlock Holmes stories as one of the detective's earliest cases draws attention to the notion of identity in its title: 'A Case of Identity'. Here the culprit is identified through the lack of handwriting while Braddon's *Lady Audley* is, by contrast, identified through handwriting. Christie's *Evil under the Sun* provides identification through a photo, and this is also demonstrated in the case studies. Gerald is identified through newspaper clippings and a photograph. He also tries to change his image by removing the mole off his wrist which could easily identify him. This cements the findings made in this thesis that identity and identifying people is significant in fictions and in true

crime cases, particularly, but not exclusively, before forensics became more established at the beginning of the twentieth century. The progress of law was behind the progress of crime, as identity fraud remained an 'easy' crime to commit and get away with just as misidentification has real-life consequences as evident in the early twentieth-century cases of Adolf Beck and Oscar Slater, in which Doyle took an interest. The fact that Gerald/ Charles was able to move to another country under a new identity allows us to illuminate the fact that men were generally more mobile, enabling them to escape their lives as well as commit crimes. War, as the thesis observes, exacerbates this, and this is demonstrated across the thesis from the earliest real-life case of Agnes Sharpe to Christie's post Second World War *Dead Man's Folly*. The thesis highlights how women in nineteenth-century texts rarely (Lady Audley is an exception) had the same ability to move in the same way as their male counterparts, and the thesis explores their progression in movement. Doyle's Sherlock Holmes stories show women moving from Mary Sutherland's coming to Baker Street on her own to the bicycling governess, Violet Smith, in 'The Adventure of the Copper Beeches'.

In 'Philomel Cottage', the name of the cottage is inspired from Greek myth about a woman, Philomela, who is tricked by her sister's husband, Tereus, King of Thrace. Tereus, in one version of the myth, tricks her into a sham marriage. In another version, she is raped. The gods turn Philomela into a nightingale to protect her and this association between a bird and a threatened woman is also a feature of Christie's *Death on the Nile* as the central victim is called Linnet. In 'Philomel Cottage' Gerald not only isolates Alix in a house in the country, a classic isolation tactic identified by Carter and other romance fraud theorists, but effectively imprisons her in the home just before his attempt to kill her. The true crime case study of Fredrick Deeming explored in this thesis demonstrates how Deeming managed to

travel and commit not only fraudulent crimes but more heinous ones such as murder and evade the authorities by moving countries, just like Gerald in Christie's story.

'Philomel Cottage' is the ideal story to conclude this thesis and reflect on its findings because the story starts with fraud and ends with fraud. Gerald/Charles commits romance fraud and finance fraud at the outset; that is clear. However, Alix is not the typical 'damsel in distress' that we see in *Great Expectations*. Alix defrauds Gerald/Charles by convincing him she is a 'black widow' and that she has killed her previous husbands. By telling this lie Alix is committing the act of fraud as she has created this persona. The persona is a necessity to extricate herself the dangerous situation she is in. There is a clever circle of fraud in this story where we start with fraud and end with fraud and where the fraudster's initial victim becomes the fraudster.

II

This thesis has several findings, but some key points are magnified. The first is that that the literature examined here demonstrates how the law always seems to be on the 'backfoot'. It is always catching up with crimes rather than the other way around. Just as we have seen in 'Philomel Cottage', the police arrive when it is too late. In the Holmes stories we constantly see the detective providing his own justice because of the lack of justice within the law. Some of the 'crimes' Holmes uncovers are punishable by law, but others are not. Christie's Poirot is similar as he often issues his own justice. We see this in *Death on the Nile* and in *The Mysterious Affair at Styles*. Even Christie's own disappearance remains ambiguous: was she seeking to punish her husband or suffering from extreme trauma which resulted in her

taking actions which highlighted his infidelity? Seeking their own justice when there is no legal recourse is a common theme in the writings explored in this thesis.

The slow progression of the law is reflected in these fictions and crime fiction which emerges from the earlier sensation novels of the 1860s is intimately connected with the law as sensation fiction drew on real-life situations and crimes for inspiration. The lack of legal definition prompted me to use twenty-first century terminology to examine these literary pieces and true crime cases. Criminologists have coined the terminology of romance fraud, while gaslighting, although dating from an early twentieth century play, has become a publicly recognised term. Bigamy was identifiable and prosecutable in the nineteenth century, but bigamous practices prevail in both real life and fiction today. The thesis has identified new ways of looking at these texts and has coined or adapted its own terms such as 'triangle of fraud' and the 'ripple effect' to apply to the scenarios uncovered in this thesis. That the law is catching up with crimes perpetrated in earlier centuries without definition is evident in how the crime of coercive control, for instance, was not defined in law until 2015: "Section 76 Serious Crime Act 2015 (SCA 2015) created the offence of controlling or coercive behaviour in an intimate or family relationship (CCB). It can be tried summarily or on indictment and has a maximum penalty of five years' imprisonment. "(CPS, 2023). The recent new definition of a crime that we have seen throughout the texts examined is just another building block of the argument that the law is catching up with the crimes and the tactics used to commit such offences. As the texts examined in this thesis demonstrate, fiction responds and identifies where the law fails. Doyle's Sherlock Holmes and Christie's Poirot are self-appointed detectives who work around the law and engage in a form of societal justice in instances in which legal justice cannot be attained.

The thesis further explored the notion of vulnerability, identifying vulnerabilities women face but also the vulnerabilities of men. Traditionally, the typical victim is usually a woman, a 'damsel in distress'. However, as we progress through the time from Collins to Christie, we see men becoming victims and a reflection by writers of how males are susceptible to fraudulent practices. In *Great Expectations* a vulnerable male child becomes a victim of victim in a cycle of victimization that crosses generations. Pip receives the backlash of the romance fraud of Miss Havisham and what he goes through alongside Estella can only be described as abuse. In Collins's *A Woman in White*, we have female victims as Collins highlights the interchangeability of women in society and law in the 1860s. A shift occurs in the Holmes stories in which there is a progression of gender vulnerabilities. We still see our typical female victims in 'A Case of Identity', 'The Solitary Cyclist' and 'The Speckled Band'. However, as Doyle adapts to societal changes and issues, we start to see male victims who seek out Sherlock Holmes in 'The Red-Headed League', 'The Engineer's Thumb' and 'The Stockbroker's Clerk'. Doyle progresses from the male being the criminals to males visiting Holmes and asking for help because the law is not on their side. Although Christie usually conforms to the classic female victim, her work focuses on the gender issues of the time in other ways.

Linked to vulnerable victims is this thesis's further finding of how victims change their roles in the fictions. Those who were once victims do not always stay as victims. Lady Audley is a victim of abandonment, damaged by her husband's actions. However, she does not remain a victim. She changes her identity, becomes a new person, committing heinous crimes to maintain her fraudulent identity. Thus, she makes Michael Audley a victim of her fraud. The fact that she does not remain a victim is examined but what also is observed is the length

she had to go to, to be able to move on with her life. In *A Woman in White* the interchangeable women remain victims throughout, and although Laura survives, her half-sister Anne dies. Miss Havisham is a victim of romance fraud who becomes an abuser, perpetrating a form of fraud on the children with whom she comes into contact by robbing them of their childhood. Doyle and Christie both enable their victims to be vindicated and while the victims often remain as victims, moral justice is often enacted, rather than what we see in Dickens' and Braddon's work.

Identity, the flexibility of it, and its manipulation are key findings in this research, explored in the fictions, the true crimes and case studies. Identity is manipulated and exploited with varying degrees of success. Most writers use identity to allow their characters to commit crimes, get away from situations or start afresh. This is also evident in the case studies. Both fictions and case studies demonstrate the immobility and mobility tied to gender. Men, as this thesis has discovered, are generally more mobile both in real life and in fiction. Women are relatively static. While women's mobility progresses from the Doyle stories, where transport features more extensively, women are still victims even when they are more mobile, like the well-travelled Linnet Doyle in *Death on the Nile*.

Another finding of this thesis is the 'true crime' cases and their illumination of how literature and the law intertwine. The cases show the parallels between the real life and fiction. They support the finding that, in fact, the law was behind the crimes and need to catch up or worked against certain people. The case studies demonstrate how men could be mobile and able to travel the country and even the world to hide from their crimes or commit new ones. Women often did not have this same pleasure. The case studies show

how women remained static in cases explored from the early nineteenth century to the First World War. If their husband left them, they could not get a divorce unless their male counterpart agreed, and divorce for much of the nineteenth century and beyond was a privilege of the wealthier classes and orientated towards men, as Doyle demonstrated in his campaign for reform of the divorce laws. They were legal 'stuck' and societally shamed. The case studies show the immobility of women and the mobility of men which is reflected in the fictions explored in this thesis. Dickens's Miss Havisham is immobile within the confines of Satis House. Lady Audley becomes static because she is put into an asylum. Collins's *Woman in White* is static because of the stolen identity. In the early Sherlock Holmes stories, we see woman confined in situations and asking Sherlock Holmes for help. We do see a progression in Christie's works as the female victims travel to exotic locations, but they are still trapped by the law and, what I defined as 'societal law'. A key finding from this line of enquiry is that in fact both genders can be victims, but only women seem to be stuck. In both the texts and case studies we see both male and female victims, but we rarely see a male being immobile, only women.

Throughout the thesis there is a term used called the 'ripple effect'. This is something in which a series events or actions occur from one main act. The ripple effect is present in most of the literary stories examined in this thesis and is a key finding of this research. This is because when examining crimes such as fraud, romance fraud and bigamy, the victims themselves are not the only ones affected. There are other victims of the collateral damage, unintentional victims of the crime. In *Lady Audley's Secret*, Sir Michael is collateral damage, alongside George. Both characters are victims of Lady Audley but were not her intentional victims. Dickens shows this in his characters of Pip and Estella. Miss Havisham is the original

victim but these two suffer because of the crimes committed against Miss Havisham. Doyle and Christie showcase the ripple effects of crime, as crimes of fraud often beget murder.

III

Chapter one's *The Woman in White*, both the novel and Collins's stage adaptation, observed the crime of romance fraud, through a close observation of the techniques deployed to defraud Laura. This story is significant in identifying strategies used to commit romance fraud. This chapter adapts the term 'third party' romance fraud to explore how the dynamic worked before examining the consequences, or 'ripple effects' of the crime. Carter's definition of romance fraud and her recognition and exploration of the crime are significant in not only the Collins's chapter but in the entire thesis. *The Woman in White* is a story of how Laura is defrauded by her husband Sir Percival Glyde and his accomplice, Fosco. This chapter focuses on these two characters and their crimes. Percival is the front man and the face of the crimes, whereas Fosco is behind the scenes but just as guilty (the 'third party'). This chapter focuses on the techniques these two characters use in their triangle of deceit. These include gaslighting, manipulation, manipulative language, and coercive techniques. These techniques and strategies to achieve romance fraud are underscored by Carter's definitions of tactics of achieving such crimes. Women's interchangeability was also investigated. The fact that a woman can be swapped in for another is closely examined. The chapter explored the proof of identity, the switching of identity as well as the loss of identity. The fact that someone's identity can just be taken, and the victim cannot prove they are truly who they are, highlights how issues of identity are a societal and legal problem.

Chapter two examined *Great Expectations* and *Lady Audley's Secret*. The key discoveries of this chapter were the crimes of romance fraud and finance fraud, how they interlinked and the impacts of the two frauds and their effects on the victims. The chapter explored how objects became significant in both stories as material possessions magnified or provided evidence of the original 'crimes.' It demonstrated how Dickens allowed his victim to be consumed by fraudulent crimes and how Braddon allowed her victim to engage and perpetrate fraudulent crimes to move from the situation in which she found herself in as an abandoned wife. The chapter identified Miss Havisham as the ultimate victim. She allowed the romance fraud and finance fraud committed by Compeyson to consume the rest of her life. This chapter looked at the negative impact the fraudulent crimes had on her, including self-entrapment in Satis House, allowing her wedding dress and bride cake to decay around her and her lack of motivation to extricate herself from the moment of betrayal. The objects in *Great Expectations* embody Miss Havisham. There is the rotting cake, the crumbling house and the decaying wedding dress which all show the physical and even emotional responses to the crimes of romance and finance fraud. *Lady Audley's Secret* also uses objects to signify fraud, but these are used to indicate the fraudulent crimes Lady Audley had to commit to get unstuck. The portrait and letters are significant objects in the novel because they are pieces of Lady Audley's past used to identify her. These objects do make her 'stuck' in a sense because without these her fake identity would be safer while the items she holds onto expose her.

The key finding of this chapter is the women victims react to the fraudulent crimes committed against them. Miss Havisham withdraws from the world and becomes a recluse

from the world. However, Lady Audley takes a different path and uses the crimes of fraud to make herself anew. She uses the gaps in the law and the ease to commit such crimes to start afresh and become someone else after being trapped by her abandonment. One character is consumed by fraud, and another uses the crime to get out of the situation she is left in. Both authors look at the crimes of romance and finance fraud but take different approaches with regards to their victims. The fact that these two early novels illuminate a 'twenty-first' century crime, underline that it not a new crime. The only difference is that we have a definition for it in the twenty-first century and the law and society did not have one during Dickens's and Braddon's time. The law is behind where crime is concerned, but the novelists are not. Romance crimes, as identified by Carter and others demonstrate layers of sophistication but this does not take away the fact that these crimes are not new.

To substantiate how the fictional findings have real-life application, chapter three focused on true crime cases, primarily, but not exclusively, exploring local cases in Kingston upon Hull and the surrounding areas. These were supported by non-local and national and sensational cases, which supported the findings of the local cases. The key cases within this chapter are the Yelverton case, The Toddington Landlady, Agnes Sharp and John William McCartney. These cases illuminate the key issues within the law and how crimes were being committed in 'real life' and how literature was using these cases. A key finding of this chapter was how the ability to travel was instrumental to committing bigamy. Many of the cases demonstrated how that by moving to a different city allowed people to restart their lives and erase their pasts or attempt to erase their pasts. In these cases which were brought to trial both for bigamy and for other crimes, the past caught up with them. The inability to locate and identify individuals and movement brought about by factors such as

war led to the crimes of bigamy. This chapter also examined how bigamy generated a ripple effect and was not generally the bigamist's only crime. Bigamists often engaged in monetary fraud, abuse and even murder. Bigamy was not the only crime committed but was one of many to shield the bigamy or progress the culprits to another, often a financial, goal.

Chapter four discovered how Doyle's work is layered with fraudulent crimes: identity fraud, identity theft, bigamy and romance fraud. The chapter explored Doyle's fictions through the lens of private fraud and public fraud as well as Doyle's own criminal investigations. Doyle highlights the defraudment of the everyday, ordinary figure as well as of the corporate world, highlighting how the fissures in the law are addressed by Holmes. This chapter explores the limitations of the legal system. Doyle exploits the ambiguity around the law and exposes it in his writing, making Sherlock provide justice where the law either cannot or will not. Vulnerability is key within this chapter. Doyle is exposing the vulnerabilities of males as well as females to fraud and, we progress through Doyle's work from 'A Case of Identity' where the victim is a female, we see an increasing interest in the vulnerable male in, for example, 'The Stockbroker's Clerk', exploring how fraud can be non-gender specific. Doyle does have the typical damsel in distress towards the beginning of this chapter, but he does seem to have a twenty-first century outlook on the vulnerable male and, in this way, the chapter presents him as ahead of his time. We see Doyle's development in his gender exploration, and it is interesting to note that he himself was entwined within the legal system and its development through his investigation of actual criminal cases.

This chapter, like the others, also explored the use of identity not only in Doyle's literary works but also his own detective work. This chapter examined how identity is manipulated,

stolen and created for characters to get away with crimes. Doyle investigated the Adolf Beck case and the Oscar Slater case which were miscarriages of justice. Doyle created the character of Sherlock Holmes who became not just literary entertainment but as a front man to societal, legal, and moral issues. Sherlock Holmes was and is a beacon of light for justice. If the law could not provide it, then Holmes could. Holmes brought a sense of hope to this time period when the everyday man and woman felt let down by the law. Doyle explores many themes within his work but the key theme in this chapter is that Holmes sought justice for the forgotten, the vulnerable and the weak. However, if legal justice was not available Holmes had his own form of justice.

The concluding chapter five of this thesis is about Agatha Christie, her works and her life story. This chapter examines Christie's personal life and the fact that she became a victim. Christie's disappearance is crucial to this research as her disappearance as well as her domestic problems with her husband shows how even a woman of her stature could be a victim. It would be naive not to think that Christie did not use her own personal experiences in her works. This is what made her work so relatable and successful. *Unfinished Portrait* is a prime example of her drawing on her own relationship with her husband and applying it to her works. Christie's disappearance is so integral because she used a false identity, she (arguably) framed her husband and she was the victim of fraud too.

The triangle of fraud is examined in this chapter. It demonstrates how Christie often has three participants in the fraudulent crimes. There is the victim, the perpetrator, and the accomplice. All three play an integral part but the development from fraud being committed to three people being involved shows the development of the techniques used to commit

such crimes. In this chapter romance fraud is examined and what is explored is the fact romance fraud always links to financial fraud in some way. There is the 'front man' who commits the romance fraud and then there is his co-conspirator who works in the background and helps their partner draw in the victim to ultimately achieve financial fraud. What Christie does bring into this chapter and into the triangle of fraud is the collateral damage. We often see in her works innocent victims being drawn into the triangle and being subsequently physically or emotional hurt by it.

Murder always seems to be the main crime in Christie's works. Someone is usually killed, and Poirot investigates. However, what is different about Christie's works compared to the others examined is there is layer upon layer of different crimes under the 'main' crime of murder. It seems that other crimes branch off from the murder and smaller crimes such as fraud, bigamy and romance fraud are committed. This chapter does examine the murders but focuses more on these smaller crimes and the reason for these smaller crimes. As in the other chapters often crimes are committed to maintain the fraud but in Christie's case these smaller crimes are in the orbit of the murder.

A key finding to be taken away from this chapter is that Christie gave a voice not only to the vulnerable but also to the forgotten in the world and by doing this, she highlights the frailties of the law which let so many people down. Romance fraud is a frequent crime in the twenty-first century, but Christie had already comprehended it before the legal system did. Christie was and still is the 'queen of crime' and this is not just because of her writing capabilities. It is because she was a leader telling the stories of the vulnerable. She showed the weaknesses in the law and told stories of how the law let people down. This, alongside

her own experiences, allowed her to connect with her audiences. She was ahead of her time.

What all these chapters demonstrate is that there were historical limitations in the law and that the lack of legal progress impacted lives, just as it does today. Recent victims of romance fraud (Cecilie Fjellhøy and Anna Rowe) who now run a support organisation for romance fraud victims (Love Said) commented in an interview that we still “need to educate people and change the narrative around romance fraud. Change the stigma. We need to think about the language used that isolates victims further. Society isolates victims... When it is an in-person fraud they (the police) consider it to be domestic or that it needs to be a civil matter” (Fjellhøy & Rowe, 2023). Literature is a way to bring these issues to the forefront. The crimes examined such as romance fraud and financial fraud, the use of tactics such as gaslighting always existed but they were not defined in law. The fact these authors picked up on such crimes illuminates the impact they had on society and the lack of justice that was given for such crimes. Although we see these crimes in everyday life, we also see more advanced and sophisticated ways of committing them. While we now see social media and the use of the internet in the perpetration of such crimes, the period under discussion in this thesis focuses on the nineteenth century to the mid-twentieth century to show how ‘villains’ used the gaps in the law to achieve the same outcomes. When we look at victims in these fictions and case studies, we must also see the law’s vulnerabilities.

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