

**Richard Marsh's Redundant Crime Narratives: Defining Gender through Crime at the Fin-de-Siècle**

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# **Richard Marsh's Redundant Crime Narratives: Defining Gender through Crime at the Fin-de-Siècle**

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## Abstract

Crime, criminals and the police investigation dominate the plots of Richard Marsh's Victorian *fin-de-siècle* novels and short stories. Over the years, research into his representations of crime has been limited; however, recently there is increasing discussion around the ways in which Marsh uses various themes of crime in his fictions, including the extent to which he engages with the 1888 Whitechapel murders. Despite this increasing attention, an analysis of the relationship between crime and gender within his novels is still fairly limited. This thesis will address this gap, and contribute to current discussions of the author in two ways: (1) by exploring how Marsh's representations of crime and the criminal investigation exemplify the *clear* ideological stance of his novels in regards to not criminal issues, but the societal changes in thought towards gender at the *fin de siècle*; and (2), how this particular strategy of using the theme of crime as an avenue to discuss issues of gender illuminates the significant extent to which Marsh reiterates the rhetoric and narrative techniques within the newspaper reports of the Whitechapel murders at the end of the nineteenth century. In order to explore these two aspects four of Marsh's *fin-de-siècle* novels will be analysed: *The Beetle: a Mystery*, *The Goddess: a Demon*, *The Crime and the Criminal* and *Mrs Musgrave – and Her Husband*. Through an exploration of three aspects of crime – the female criminal, the male criminal, and the detective figure – I will argue that Marsh's dominant representations of crime and the criminal investigation are used as a superficial way to express anxiety over the changing societal positions and characterisations of middle-class women at the end of the century. In this thesis, I aim to illuminate a new way of interpreting Marsh's use of crime, an interpretation that demonstrates the extent to which Marsh responds to the Whitechapel murders and highlights further his importance as a *fin-de-siècle* author.

## **Acknowledgements**

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## Introduction

In recent years, Richard Marsh's significance as a Victorian *fin-de-siècle*<sup>1</sup> author has become increasingly recognised. The social commentary within Marsh's texts is illuminated by his extensive engagements with the various anxieties and concerns that existed at the end of the nineteenth century. The topicality of his novels and short stories is frequently discussed in literary research on the author; a topicality that critics<sup>2</sup> explore through various themes and interpretations. Some of these explorations include: how his personal and professional background may have influenced his literatures, his literary response to the increasing anxieties around imperialism at the *fin de siècle*, how his novels represent masculinity, the inclusions of the 'New Woman' figure within his fiction, the way he tests various societal and physical boundaries, and how his writing could be placed within the Gothic genre. However, amongst these discussions, an analysis of how Marsh uses crime or the criminal investigation is still fairly limited, despite the clear significance the theme of crime plays within the foundations of his novels and short stories. For example, *Mrs Musgrave – and Her Husband* (1895) presents a woman who commits murder and the subsequent attempts to evade police capture; *The Beetle: a Mystery* (1897) revolves around crimes of murder and theft instigated by an Egyptian-shape-shifting, gender ambiguous monster; *The Crime and the Criminal* (1897) portrays a miscarriage of justice where a man is imprisoned for a murder he did not commit and *The Goddess: a Demon* (1900) describes a brutal murder carried out by an Indian idol figure and the subsequent criminal investigation<sup>3</sup>.

A recent collection of essays, edited by Victoria Margree, Daniel Orrells and Minna Vuohelainen (2018), dedicates a section to analysing Marsh's 'topical discourses of crime' (p. v). This section includes three different interpretations of how Marsh engages with the theme of crime: Nick Freeman studies the relationships between

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<sup>1</sup> This research will focus on some of Marsh's novels published between 1890 – 1900s. However, at times it draws upon context that occurred in the 1880s – particularly of the Whitechapel murders - or earlier in the century, in order to effectively show how Marsh engages with cultural changes at the *fin de siècle*.

<sup>2</sup> For example: Victoria Margree (et.al, 2018), Leslie Allin (2015), Minna Vuohelainen (2015), W. C Harris and Dawn Vernoooy (2012) and Kelly Hurley (2004).

<sup>3</sup> Crime also has a strong presence within a large proportion of other novels and short stories written by Marsh, such as *The Mystery of Phillip Bennion's Death* (1899) and 'A Psychological Experiment' (1900).

Marsh's fictions and the journalism of the *fin de siècle*, including the Whitechapel murders (p. 12); Johan Höglund argues that *Mrs Musgrave - and Her Husband* is a 'unique contribution to the debate surrounding hereditary criminality by simultaneously and deliberately validating and critiquing the racist and sexist matrix' of the late-Victorian era (p. 46) and thirdly, Minna Vuohelainen explores how Marsh represents his only female detective, Judith Lee, through 'the use of the latest medical, scientific and technological advances of the period' (p. 18). Overall, these three essays contribute to the overarching argument of their text: that Marsh's engagements with various *fin-de-siècle* concerns 'are often ideologically ambivalent' and 'counter hegemonic' (p. 3), and that Marsh's literature 'forces us to reconsider our interpretations of the dominant discourses of the *fin de siècle*' (p. 20). Furthermore, within the discussions of Marsh's use of crime, some literary critics - notably Nick Freeman (2018), Emelyne Godfrey (2012), Daniel Persia (2012) and Minna Vuohelainen (2010) - highlight how the author uses literature to engage with the 1888 Whitechapel murders. While these three interpretations are crucial for any study into Marsh and his representation of crime, there is still room for further exploration into the subtle relationship between the narrative of the news reports and Marsh's fictional writing. The aim of this thesis is to contribute to these discussions and offer a new way to interpret how crime functions in Marsh's texts. In this thesis I will explore two things: firstly, how Marsh's representations of crime demonstrate the *clear* ideological stance of his novels in regards to not criminal issues, but the societal changes in thought towards gender at the *fin de siècle*; and secondly, how this particular strategy of using the theme of crime as an avenue to discuss issues of gender illuminates the significant extent to which Marsh mirrors the narrative techniques used within the late-nineteenth-century newspaper reports of the Whitechapel murders. The preoccupations with gender at the heart of Marsh's discourse of crime is an area that has, until now, not been accredited much significance. This thesis will address this gap as I argue that the representations of crime within Marsh's novels are redundant, as the criminal acts are not portrayed as 'behaviour which is prohibited by the law' (Michael and Adler,

2001: p. 20)<sup>4</sup>. By using the term 'redundant' I do not seek to argue that his plots, or the novels themselves, are pointless, but that his use of crime serves no criminological purpose. In theory, literary engagements with crime are expected to resolve the crimes and discuss the various criminal issues around it; however, with Marsh's fictions this is not the case. Instead, as I argue, crime operates as a superficial theme within Marsh's novels, despite it being central to the plots, that exists as a tool to discuss the anxieties around the changing characterisations and positions of middle-class women at the *fin de siècle*. In order to evidence this, I will explore Marsh's portrayals of the female criminal, the male criminal and the function of his male detective figures in four of his late-nineteenth-century novels: *Mrs Musgrave - and Her Husband*, *The Beetle*, *The Crime and the Criminal* and *The Goddess: a Demon*. In each instance, it is clear that Marsh uses crime to condemn female characters who demonstrate independence, especially sexual independence, and symbolise the middle-class woman's growing access to professional spaces of work or education, whilst upholding women who embody the traditional Victorian perceptions of the female gender as passive and belonging to the domestic space, committed to duties of marriage and motherhood.

Furthermore, as this thesis will show, this particular *method* of using crime to express concerns around female transgression from societal stereotypes is also evident within the *fin-de-siècle* newspaper reports of the Whitechapel murders. These murders have become an important part of nineteenth-century history, and many historians and literary critics<sup>5</sup> have pointed out how the press was more preoccupied with criticising the deviant lives of the female victims rather than analysing the crime itself. However, what critics do not currently discuss is how Marsh mirrors the narrative techniques and rhetoric of the reports by using crime as a strategy to condemn women who do not conform to societal perceptions of their gender. By exploring this connection, this thesis not only contributes to current research, but highlights further

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<sup>4</sup> It is important to note that this thesis, when discussing criminal acts, follows Michael and Adler's (2001) definition of crime as an 'behaviour prohibited by the law' (p. 20). As these authors have pointed out, the boundary between crime and social transgression has become blurred. Michael and Adler mention that when a crime is committed it is judged by its social transgression, as well as its violation of the law, where it has been common 'to shift the emphasis somewhat from what is thought of as the intrinsic quality of conduct to its social consequences' (p. 19). Due to the increasing variations in what 'crime' actually means, this thesis focuses on the essential definition of crime as an act that transgresses the law.

<sup>5</sup> Including: Megha Anwer (2014), Elyssa Warkentin (2011), Andrew Smith (2007), L. P Curtis (2001) and Judith Walkowitz (1992).



the significance of Marsh as a *fin-de-siècle* author by exposing the complex degree to which he uses his texts to respond to crucial aspects of late-nineteenth-century culture.

### **The changing perceptions of middle-class<sup>6</sup> women at the *fin de siècle***

For this study, the shifts in gender expectations at the *fin de siècle* are important in recognising how Marsh's crime discourse engages with the landscape of gender at the time. Throughout the nineteenth century, the lives of women were burdened by social doctrine that propagated a belief in a biological difference between the sexes. Many aspects of Victorian society sought to define what a woman should be and how she should act, in an effort to establish 'a single version of ideal femininity' (Moran, 2006: p. 35). In this 'ideal', which, at times, spanned the distinctions of class, women were expected to be exemplars of 'innocence, purity and passivity' (Moran, 2006: p. 35), whilst focusing on what was believed to be a biological commitment to motherhood and marriage. At the time, many believed that these aspects 'justified the exclusion of women from the institutions of power that shaped their future' (Moran, 2006: p. 35), so that women were expected to stay away from the male dominated spheres of the professional workplace and exercise their powers in the domestic space. Furthermore, the middle-class woman's access to further education outside the home, even though it was at a higher extent than working-class women, was still limited (Moran, 2006: p. 36). This belief formed the foundation of the Victorian middle-class ideology of the separate spheres, which sought to define women as naturally designed for the home and men as more biologically inclined for the workplace and the public environment<sup>7</sup>. As critics demonstrate, it would be historically inaccurate to claim that middle-class women *always* adhered to these ideas of their gender, as women often left the sphere of the home in search of a career and did not follow

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<sup>6</sup> When discussing the gender issues of the nineteenth century it is important to acknowledge that the experiences of middle-class women were not always the same as women of the working classes. The separate spheres ideology was a specifically middle-class notion. Even though working-class women still lived under certain expectations of their sex, they were not destined to stay at home as they often *had* to work, mainly out of financial deprivation (see: Warwick and Willis, 2008). While the study of the lives of working-class women is crucial for any discussions of the representation and treatment of women, due to the strong association between his female characters and middle-class attributes (which will be outlined later on in this thesis) within the novels of Richard Marsh, the context of middle-class women's lives is most relevant for this study.

<sup>7</sup> See: Mauren Moran (2006), John Tosh (2005) and Elaine Showalter (1991).

commitments of marriage or motherhood<sup>8</sup>. Despite this, the ideology of the separate spheres was still central to ideas of gender in nineteenth-century society, and was, as Elaine Showalter (1991) states, a 'cherished...belief' which 'amounted almost to religious faith' (p. 8).

However, as the century drew to a close, many within society began to question these attitudes towards the female gender. Those that supported the development of women's societal opportunities advocated more and more for an improvement in women's rights, succeeding in granting women more access to divorce if their husbands had been abusive, more control over the custody of their own children following divorce, and the right to owning their own property and fortune (Ben Griffin, 2012). Furthermore, within social circles, the *fin de siècle* also saw more women beginning to move away from the stereotypes that defined them as figures of the domestic sphere; instead, they began seeking out professional careers and more education outside the home<sup>9</sup>. While this was still limited – for example, even though women had access to higher education, in '1897 there were only 844 women in all English universities' (Showalter, 1991: p. 7) – the change was still a significant factor that began to undermine the ideology of the separate spheres and threaten the polarisation of the sexes, as women began to occupy spaces once reserved for men. Furthermore, the belief that women had to embody 'innocence, purity and passivity' (Moran, 2006: p. 35) decreased in strength as 'the image of the submissive 'child-woman' had been vanquished by a strong individual with a voice of her own' (Moran, 2006: p. 39). In society, women were becoming less and less reliant upon men and, instead, they began to gain a stronger, collective agency that threatened to deconstruct the boundaries of gender.

The increasing interest of many authors to explore the new opportunities for women within society saw the emergence of a literary figure known as the 'New Woman'. The term 'New Woman' – established by Sarah Grand in 1894 (Amigoni, 2011: p. 156) – referred to a literary representation that symbolised the female movement away from the domestic home and into the professional space; she was often a single woman, committed to a career and, in some cases, showed qualities

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<sup>8</sup> See: Elaine Showalter (1991) or M. Jeanne Peterson (1984).

<sup>9</sup> Alexandra Warwick and Martin Willis (2008) state that 'the first women began attending university in the 1870s' (p. 39)

and characteristics that were often perceived to belong to the male gender<sup>10</sup>. However, the ways the 'New Woman' was represented in literature of the period were mixed. For instance, novels such as Thomas Hardy's *Jude the Obscure* (1895) or those by Sarah Grand 'welcomed the possibilities of greater openness in relations between men and women', suggesting that 'women's suffrage' was 'an overdue entitlement for women' (Tosh, 2005: p 121). Novels such as this often conveyed the 'New Woman' as an 'icon who signified real shifts in the relative freedom and occupational choice available to many young women near the end of the century' (Miller, 2008: p. 10). However, this figure was also a controversial one. She was 'widely construed as a threat to the patriarchal order' (Tosh, 2005: p. 45), and some authors used the figure of the 'New Woman' to raise concern over the increasing freedom of women. For instance, as Elaine Showalter (1991) points out, Walter Besant's *The Revolt of Men* (1882) seeks 'to warn against' the 'infiltration' of professional spaces 'by women' (p. 35), as he portrays a world where women dominate important careers, whilst men are reduced to the 'subordinate' position women once occupied (Showalter, 1991: p. 42). Showalter states that Besant 'writes entirely without irony of a future in which men must band together in revolt to re-establish patriarchal dominance' (p. 43). Therefore, the literature of the era was not universal in its representations of independent women and illuminates the numerous debates around whether the professional spaces of society should be more inclusive to women.

### **The instabilities of masculinity at the *fin de siècle***

Within any study that focuses on gender issues of the *fin de siècle* it is imperative not to forget that men were also expected to embody certain qualities and attributes in order to be considered masculine. Elaine Showalter (1991) states that masculinity 'is a socially constructed role' and that 'the redefinition of gender that took place at the end of the century, was not limited to women' (p. 8). Even though, as John Tosh (2005) points out, throughout the nineteenth century, unlike men, 'women were carriers of their gender' and 'their reproductive role was held to define their place in society' (p. 30), to suggest that men did not live under expectations of their gender would be inaccurate, as the concept of masculinity determined certain attributes to be

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<sup>10</sup> See: Elizabeth Miller (2008), John Tosh (2005), Elaine Showalter (1991)

the prerequisite for being “truly” a man. Qualities such as ‘physical vigour, courage and independence’ (Tosh, 2005: p. 95), alongside ‘emotional disclosure’ and ‘the stiff upper lip’ (p. 22), were the main determinates of masculinity in the Victorian era; these attributes were regarded as ones that could ‘transcend class’ boundaries (p. 95). In addition, a strong commitment to work, exhibiting values of ‘self-discipline’ (p. 87), was an element of masculinity that was cherished by both middle-class and working-class men. Tosh notes that the ideology of separate spheres is actually ‘misleading’ as men had the ‘privileged ability to pass freely between the public and the private’ (p. 39); men were both the ‘master’ (p. 36) of the domestic home and the ‘bread-winner’ (p. 130). However, as Tosh continues, this ‘privilege’ actually accentuated the polarisation of the sexes and illuminated the physical freedoms for men compared to the inhibited opportunities available to women (p. 38). The values and constructs of masculinity, while still confining the freedoms of the male identity, held a certain level of control within the Victorian era and ‘men were the norm against which women and children should be measured’ (p. 30).

However, masculinity as a fixed and stable construct began to falter and the *fin de siècle* witnessed a ‘crisis of masculinity’ (Tosh, 2005: p. 119). One particular way this crisis emerged was through the increasing changes to the definitions of the female gender. While masculinity exists under its own principles it cannot be ignored that its foundations are also formed through ‘polarisation’, that is, ‘masculinity can only be understood in relation to its ‘other’ (Tosh, 2005: p. 69): the woman. Many of the attributes accredited to masculinity are the opposite of ‘the [Victorian’s] single version of ideal femininity’ (Moran, 2006: p. 35). For instance, ‘manly independence dramatised by feminine dependence, manly action by feminine passivity’ (Tosh, 2005: p. 91) and male domination of the professional workplace versus the woman’s associations with the home. This differentiation that sought to uphold the patriarchal structure of Victorian society, a structure that masculinity could not ‘exist apart from’ (p. 115), made masculinity an inherently unstable and dependable concept. The increasing desire of *fin-de-siècle* society to see more middle-class women within the workplace undermined the ‘masculine identity as the [only] working sex’ (p. 37). This societal polarisation that upheld masculinity as the superior gender was losing its power at the *fin de siècle* and, by association, so was masculinity.

## Victorian perceptions of sexuality

However, it is not just the above changes to the perceptions of gender that Marsh engages with in his novels; he also engages with *fin-de-siècle* transformations in the ideas of sexuality. Over time, a stereotype has emerged that associates the Victorian era with a sense of prudishness, a stereotype that alludes to a Victorian dislike and avoidance of talking about sexuality and sex, especially that of women. However, over the years, historians have shown that this stereotype is in fact a myth. For instance, Steven Seidmann (1990) mentions that 'in the early decades of the twentieth century' many 'developed a construction of the repressed Victorian'; a 'construction' that soon became an 'orthodoxy' (p. 47). Seidmann goes on to state that the Victorians, however, 'did not shroud sex in a veil of silence' (p. 62). Despite this, Seidmann also states that even though the Victorians did discuss sex and sexuality much more than we might have originally believed, 'the Victorians held that the sex instinct is a powerful force that needs to be channelled in the proper way to be beneficial to humanity' (p. 48). In other words, marriage 'was considered the ideal sphere for sexual expression' (p. 48). They believed sex to be 'healthy' and 'necessary' when carried out within the confines of the marriage institution, but without the adequate 'channell[ing]' through this structure sex has the potential to be a 'dangerous' and 'menacing force' (p. 50). Therefore, even though the Victorians believed in the free expression around *heterosexual* sexuality, it was potentially feared if it was not confined within a married couple.

Therefore, this fear was one reason why Victorian society sought to control not just sexual liberation of women but also female and male homosexuality, which, due to law and social doctrine of the period, was not allowed to exist within the constructs of marriage. As Tosh (2005) states: 'it was no coincidence that the first modern homosexual panic occurred in the 1880s, when the clubability of the propertied classes was particularly pronounced and their age of marriage (around thirty for men) unprecedentedly late' (p. 38); this suggests that the delay in men marrying sparked a societal fear around foregrounded homosexuality. Male homosexuality was defined and condemned during the *fin de siècle*. It was treated as either a medical condition where 'the man who engaged in same sex practices was pathologised as degenerate and effeminate' (Tosh, 2005: p. 22) or 'outlawed by the Labouchere Amendment to the Criminal Law Amendment Act of 1885, which made all male homosexual acts,

private or public, illegal' (Showalter, 1991: p. 14). In comparison, the concept of female homosexuality was 'not recognised' throughout the nineteenth century (Showalter, 1991: p.23). At the *fin de siècle*, however, many began to acknowledge lesbianism, yet sexologists tended to define female homosexuality as something 'morbid and masculine' (Showalter, 1991: p. 23). In addition, lesbianism was often discussed in relation to the suffrage movement and feminist endeavours (Showalter, 1991: p. 23) within social discourse, associating this sexuality with the societal fears of female freedoms. There was both a desire to control and also deny sexualities that had the potential to exist outside of the heteronormative institutions of marriage.

Fear of sexuality that exists external to marriage is a *fin-de-siècle* issue that Marsh engages with in the novels studied in this thesis. This, along with the changes in gender definitions, highlights the context Marsh's novels exist in. It is my belief that Marsh's novels express anxiety over the above changes to gender boundaries and ideas of sexuality that were occurring. This claim is not a new one to make, however, currently the research that chooses to focus on Marsh's representations of gender and sexuality is limited in its recognition of the significant role crime plays in these depictions. By exploring this through the ways outlined below, I will show how Marsh uses crime and the criminal investigation as an avenue to challenge these societal changes within the constructs of gender and sexuality, whilst upholding a differentiation between the sexes and a belief of confining sexuality to marriage that prevailed prior to the *fin de siècle*.

## **Chapter outlines**

### **The 1888 Whitechapel murders**

Between August and November of 1888, London's East End slum known as Whitechapel saw the brutal murder of at least five women. While the number of victims murdered by Jack the Ripper is still undecided, researchers identify five definite victims - Catharine Eddowes, Mary Jane Kelly, Annie Chapman, Mary Anne Nichols and Elizabeth Stride – who had their throats severely cut and were subjected to bodily mutilations of varying degrees. These women were then disrespectfully discarded in streets or houses of Whitechapel, or the surrounding areas, to be discovered by unsuspecting members of the Victorian public. Despite the investigations of the police

forces, alongside the daily reports from different media sources, efforts to apprehend the killer were unsuccessful. While the Victorian public had many theories and conspiracies regarding the identity of the Ripper, the perpetrator of the crimes was never caught and the case remains unsolved. At the time, the newspapers discussed the crimes through many anxieties around various cultural aspects of race and class, but one particular concern was around gender. More specifically, the newspapers were more preoccupied with the potential consequences of women living the transgressive lives that the female victims followed - as they often, due to financial struggle, engaged in prostitution - rather than the actual crime.

Before analysing the chosen fictions of Richard Marsh, this thesis will dedicate its first chapter to an exploration of the *fin-de-siècle* newspaper representations<sup>11</sup> of the Whitechapel murders. The purpose of this chapter is to provide an analysis of a notorious crime at the end of the century in order to highlight how the news reports and Marsh's work employ a similar narrative method of using crime to define the female gender. This chapter will discuss the portrayals of the female victims, the anxieties of masculinity that exist in the narratives, and the criticisms of the police force from new angles, in order to illuminate how the newspaper reports' preoccupation with these women and judging their lives caused the crime to become overshadowed. What is really on trial in these reports is the female gender and women who dare to transgress its societal definitions rather than the actual crime, employing a similar narrative strategy to Marsh's novels. Here, I do not seek to imply that the narrative of the Whitechapel reportage is identical to Marsh's fiction. I do not seek to equate the female victims of the Ripper crimes with the female criminals of Marsh's novels, but instead seek to highlight how *fin-de-siècle* discussions of crime become an avenue to define and secure the boundaries of what is expected of women.

While it is important to acknowledge that these newspapers still condemn the crime, their narratives often ended up discussing the victims rather than the criminal. The reason this particular crime is chosen for further analysis, rather than any other crimes of the *fin de siècle*, is because it is well-known amongst literary critics and historians as a crime that predominately focused on the female victims more than the

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<sup>11</sup> For this research, quotations referring to the murders from *fin-de-siècle* newspapers were collected in numerous ways. Most of the newspapers used for this research were retrieved from British Library databases, specifically the database: *British Library Newspapers, Part 1: 1800-1900*. Furthermore, some of the quotations used in this thesis have been obtained through references made by other historians and literary critics, including Andrew Smith (2007) and L.P Curtis (2001).

actual crime<sup>12</sup>; it is also a notorious crime within the period and critics have already highlighted the connections between these murders and Marsh's novels<sup>13</sup>, yet they have not discussed the relationship through the perspective this thesis employs.

### **Richard Marsh's portrayals of female criminality**

The second chapter of this thesis will explore Marsh's representations of the female criminal. Research into Marsh and his fiction has often focused on his representation of women. Victoria Margee (2007) and W. C Harris and Dawn Vernooy (2012) analyse Marsh's depictions of the 'New Woman' in *The Beetle*. In both cases, the critics associate the character of Marjorie Lindon with the figure of the 'New Woman'<sup>14</sup>, but highlight how the text fails to support her. For instance, Harris and Vernooy state that *The Beetle's* 'New Woman' figure 'fails...to question or disturb male hegemony' (p. 342), whilst Margree states that the textual comparisons between the 'New Woman' and the homeless man, Robert Holt, suggest that this is 'the only type of man a woman could hope to be: one that is...dissolute, enfeebled and emasculated' (p. 74). Furthermore, Kelly Hurley (2004), mentions that Marsh's beetle monster can be interpreted as a fear of racial difference but also 'one must read her [the beetle] in terms of a Victorian mistrust of femininity' and that the novel's 'fearsome depictions of unleashed feminine potency offer a rationale for the continued constriction of female roles' (p. 129). Therefore, the current discussion around Marsh's portrayals of women is extensive, often highlighting Marsh's lack of support for the increasing prominence of the female position in society; however, this discussion rarely analyses the significant relationship between the female gender and crime in Marsh's writing.

The concept of female criminality was a significant anxiety at the *fin de siècle*. The female criminal was deemed to be 'doubly deviant'; she was both a transgressor of the law and of her expectations as a woman (Worthington, 2011: p. 42). Most, though not all, of society assumed that women 'were morally superior to men' (Zedner, 1991: p. 23) due to their commitments to motherhood and domesticity. This perception of women as 'morally superior' created a 'view of most women as innately non-

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<sup>12</sup> Megha Anwer (2014), Elyssa Warkentin (2011), Andrew Smith (2007), L. P Curits (2001), Judith Walkowitz (1992)

<sup>13</sup> Nick Freeman (2018), Daniel Persia (2012) and Minna Vuohelainen (2010).

<sup>14</sup> See also: David Stuart Davies (2007) and Minna Vuohelainen (2006).



criminal' (Zedner, 1991: p. 23). Therefore, when a woman committed a crime she was not just a criminal like men, but was also 'judged' as being 'at odds with the culturally nurtured image of acceptable womanly behaviour' (Morris, 2014: p. 8). The female criminal in Victorian society was perceived as 'the very negation of the ideal of femininity' (Zedner, 1991: p. 19).

In this second chapter, I will explore how Marsh draws upon Victorian perceptions of the female criminal but for a specific purpose. I will outline how the crimes committed by Marsh's female criminals are never truly represented as 'behaviour which is prohibited by the criminal law' (Michael and Adler, 2001: p. 20). His portrayals of female criminality do not function for a criminological purpose but rather they are used to judge the increasing freedoms of middle-class women at the *fin de siècle*. In this chapter, I will highlight how Marsh conveys two different types of female criminal that are, depending on their conformity to Victorian constructions of femininity, presented differently. The first type, characterised as passive, vulnerable and a symbol of the domestic space, are discussed with sympathy. However, the second type, depicted as 'odd women'<sup>15</sup> who express agency, autonomy and are associated with the public space, are demonised as monsters and their independent sexuality is expressed as something dangerous or threatening. By comparing these two types of criminals against one another, the difference in representation becomes clear and exemplifies how Marsh is using his dominant plots of female criminality as a strategy to express anxieties around the potential threats of female agency and the dwindling female commitments to the home.

### **Marsh's literary justifications of male violence**

In conjunction to this, in these four novels Marsh also explores ideas of male criminality. Many previous discussions of Marsh's male characters focus on his portrayals of masculinity. For instance, Victoria Margree (2007) focuses her representations of the 'New Woman' through the perspective of masculinity. In her explorations of masculinity in *The Beetle*, she argues that 'the novel's conflation of its 'New Woman' character with the figure of the emasculated and vagrant clerk' exposes

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<sup>15</sup> See: Emma Liggins (2014) or Elaine Showalter (1991) for this concept, as well as novels such as George Gissing's *The Odd Women* (1893).

how Marsh seeks to 'safeguard a version of virile British masculinity against what are perceived to be joint threats of gender and class instability' (p. 63). In comparison, Leslie Allin (2015) discusses masculinity but argues that its power is *not* upheld in *The Beetle*. Allin contends that *The Beetle* 'explodes traditional concepts of masculinity'. According to Allin, in the novel 'patriarchal governance and imperial legitimacy' (p. 113) are portrayed as 'leaky, grotesque and, thus, profoundly unstable' (p. 114). Previous discussions of Marsh's engagement with the *fin-de-siècle* issues of masculinity are, therefore, extensive; however, there is currently limited exploration of the relationship between masculinity and crime in his novels. Chapter three will address this gap through an analysis of male violence in Marsh's novels.

At the *fin de siècle* male violence was becoming increasingly criticised and no longer regarded as a vital characteristic of masculinity. Martin Weiner (2004) states that violence, in the late-nineteenth century, was seen as 'relic of benighted ages and a practice of barbaric peoples' (p. 6) and that 'violence came to fall within the circle of condemnation and punishment' (p. 6). However, as this third chapter will show, these societal changes in thought towards male violence are not reiterated in Marsh's novels. Instead, in this third chapter, I argue that Marsh portrays male violence, not as truly criminal acts, but *justified* behaviour that is instigated by women. I explore how Marsh does this in three different ways: the first is that male crimes of violence are perceived as acts of protection towards the female characters that are conforming to feminine values; the second is that these violent acts are displayed as justified battles against female transgression; and the third depicts male violence as acts of victimisation caused by the transgressions of women. In each instance, male characters become exempt from their crimes as their behaviour is accepted by the texts and depicted as the consequences of female behaviour. Marsh seems to suggest that male violence is justified as long as it either protects the domestic woman or seeks to dispel the deviant one; any use of violence outside of this paradigm is deemed to be un-masculine. By representing this, Marsh is not only defining women but also men. He suggests that men are not supposed to support women who choose to defy gender restrictions and that in order to maintain their masculinity they have to fight against the powers of agent women and support women who conform to the characteristics of vulnerability and focus on the home. In doing this, much like his representations of female criminals, the theme of crime functions as a tool to define how the genders should be and act.

## Policing gender: Marsh's male detective figures

A comparative study of Marsh's representation of the male detective, across his novels, has not been given significant analysis. Those that do explore Marsh's representations of male detectives tend to focus on the character of Augustus Champnell who is introduced to us in *The Beetle*. The general consensus around this character is that his entrance towards the end of the novel relates Marsh's text to the crime fiction of the *fin de siècle*, with particular reference to Arthur Conan Doyle's *The Adventures of Sherlock Holmes* (1892)<sup>16</sup>. One detective figure that also receives significant attention within research is Marsh's character Judith Lee: his only female detective. Minna Vuohelainen (2018) points out Lee's importance within discussions of Marsh, describing her as 'a sexually and ethnically ambiguous, highly strung and startlingly independent boundary crosser with seemingly telepathic ability' (p. 63). Vuohelainen notes that through the character of Judith Lee Marsh seems to convey two sides of *fin-de-siècle* ideology of gender: one that sympathises with an independent and unconventional female figure, and the second which portrays a desire for a conformity to traditional notions of the female gender. For example, as Vuohelainen mentions, even though Lee is a detective figure – suggesting female independence – 'she is not a professional investigator' (p. 65) and her employment as a version of a governess 'questions her apparent independence' (p. 74).

I would, however, add that the narrative of *The Adventures of Judith Lee* is a consequence of male burglars violently cutting off her hair and her following desire to pursue a career in detection is initiated out of revenge (Godfrey, 2012: 140). In the story entitled 'The Man who Cut off My Hair' Judith describes how one of the burglars 'caught hold of [her] hair...and with that dreadful knife sawed the whole of it from [her] head' (p. 20). Similarly, *The Beetle* also describes a scene where Marjorie Lindon, a potential 'New Woman' figure, is kidnapped and assaulted by the monster figure. In this, the beetle violently removes Marjorie's hair from her head; an act so violently carried out that 'it had been cut off at the roots – so close to the head in one place that the scalp itself had been cut, so that the hair was clotted with blood' (p. 221). However, in each of these instances, neither act is truly represented as a crime, instead the

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<sup>16</sup> See: Stephan Karschay (2015), David Stuart Davies (2007) and Minna Vuohelainen (2006)

removal of female hair is used as a way to challenge the progressive powers of strong female characters.

In explorations of the representations of female hair in Victorian literature, Galia Ofek (2009), states that:

descriptions of the heroine's hair were an expression or encoding of femininity, and as such, they were a meaningful and illuminating part of the text, registering a growing contemporary anxiety concerning the changing power relations between the sexes (p. x).

Ofek also mentions that representations of hair in Victorian fiction 'questioned, revised and redefined assumptions about the nature and making of femininity' (p. x). Marsh uses the removal of female hair as a way not just to question 'the changing power relations between the sexes' but to place potentially strong women into positions of weakness. In the case of Marjorie Lindon, the beetle's removal of her hair is the textual marker that ends her associations with the 'New Woman' figure. Not only does the text ridicule her potential to be a 'New Woman' through this act, as Victoria Margree (2007) states, the text suggests that 'Marjorie in men's clothing is a parody of a man, she is only a poor imitation of a man' (p. 74). The action of removing her hair also begins her decline from a potentially strong woman to one that conforms to expectations of the time. She ends the novel in a helpless and vulnerable state as the attack left her 'under medical supervision as a lunatic' (p. 273) and her ending is not described under ideas of female empowerment or professionalism but rather that of a 'universally revered wife of one of the greatest statesmen the age has seen' (p. 273). Her identity is completely transformed into a caricature of what nineteenth-century society expected of women. In this instance, the cutting of Marjorie's hair textually prevents 'the changing power relations between the sexes' that the century was beginning to see.

In regards to Judith Lee, the violent cutting of her hair becomes 'motivation for solving crime' (Godfrey, 2012: p. 141). While it can be argued that Judith Lee is using crime as a way to fight back against male violence against women it cannot be ignored that her entire career and identity as a female detective has been created on the basis of men and their actions; her identity as a strong woman is dependent upon men. Her pursuit of career in detection is not determined entirely by her skill or intelligence and this is only reinforced further by Vuohelainen's (2018) comment that 'she is not a

professional investigator' (p. 65). While she might not be as helpless as Marjorie becomes, one cannot help but equate the two characters. Judith Lee becomes associated with the same dependable and weak identity that Marjorie ends *The Beetle* in. In his fiction, Marsh uses the symbol of female hair for his own purposes: it is not only a symbol of femininity, where its removal can cause the blurring of gender boundaries, but it is also used as a symbol of the growing strength of women. It is clear that the removal of female hair is used as a way of restoring the boundaries of gender by placing women into positions of dependency so that their identities as strong women become questionable and subtly undermined. The removal of it in these two narratives exposes how Marsh does not seek to explore crime, or violence towards women, but to reinforce the boundaries of gender and undermine the growing strength of women. Marsh's use of his female detective to subtly undermine female power is also similar to how he uses his male detectives that occupy the four novels selected for this thesis.

The nineteenth century saw an ever-increasing concern around crime and a desire to control it, as suggested by the introduction of the Metropolitan Police Force in 1829 and the later formation of a detective branch in 1842. These branches, therefore, existed as an attempt to prevent the perceived threats crime could have upon societal progression and ultimately control criminal behaviour. As John Harpman (2014) states: 'criminals break the law and disrupt the social order, while detectives repair the damage they have done and work to prevent its recurrence' (p. 133) As the century progressed, the detective figure appeared more frequently in literature, which eventually resulted in a genre of detective fiction. Even though, as Haia Shpayer Makov (2011) states:

The mechanics of detection and figures with an investigatory function appeared in fictional texts in Britain before the mid-nineteenth century...it was approximately from this period onwards that the detective in the modern sense gradually became a recognized figure (p. 165).

Some critics, particularly Clare Clarke (2014), have mentioned that crime fiction of the late-nineteenth century often portrays detectives who, despite their social position as elements of control, are inadequate or corrupt. The fourth chapter of this thesis will explore how Marsh's male detectives exemplify this insufficiency through

their preoccupations with gender. I argue that Marsh's male detective figures do not function, truly, as agents of the law but instead their purpose is to detect and control the boundaries of gender. This chapter will explore how the detective figures who investigate transgressive women and seek to restore the differentiation of the sexes are glorified, whilst those that have the potential to disrupt these conventional restorations of gender, either through their detection of the "wrong" women or their exposure of flaws in patriarchal institutions, are undermined, removed from the text, or portrayed to be corrupt.

By exploring Marsh's representations of crime and the criminal investigation, this thesis will highlight a new way of interpreting his *fin-de-siècle* texts. From a review of the research that analyses Marsh's fiction, it becomes clear that the majority of critics (with some notable exceptions) focus mainly on Marsh's most popular novel *The Beetle*. It is also evident that even though there are extensive discussions of his textual treatments of gender, these rarely extend to acknowledge the significant relationship between gender and crime in the novels. As the following analysis will show, Marsh's preoccupations with gender when discussing issues of crime deserves much more attention than it is currently receiving. The extent to which Marsh engages with the *fin de siècle*, particularly the 1888 Whitechapel murders, is effectively evidenced through his method of using crime to communicate an anxiety around the changes in middle-class women's role in society and the characteristics that were believed to define their gender.

## Chapter 1

### The 1888 Whitechapel murders and the rhetoric of victim blaming: prostitution, masculinity and gender-biased police investigations

From their initial occurrence to their subsequent historical examination, the Whitechapel murders have become a significant aspect of late-nineteenth-century history. Over the years, historians have analysed various aspects of the crimes, including: the stereotypes that dictated the potential identity of Jack the Ripper, the sensationalisation of the newspaper reports, how the murders deepened the class and cultural divisions between the East and the West End, and the ways these murders have influenced and have been incorporated into late-nineteenth and twentieth-century literature<sup>17</sup>. Furthermore, another aspect that receives significant attention is how the Whitechapel murders intensified anxieties over female transgression. The lifestyles of the female victims, meaning their *occasional* engagement with prostitution, normally to pay their rent, seemed to preoccupy the newspaper accounts and journalists often used the murder as a way to criticise these women for challenging ideals of female passivity and domesticity.

Elyssa Warkentin (2011), for example, in an exploration of *fin-de-siècle* novels that focus entirely on the Whitechapel murders<sup>18</sup>, states that in the newspaper accounts of the murders – which she argues were created through a male perspective - ‘the Ripper narrative is one means of controlling potentially subversive female behaviour’ due to the ‘warning’ it dictated to women who ‘transgressed the margins of traditional, domestic femininity’ (p. 5). This idea that the press expressed a warning of female deviance is also mentioned by Judith Walkowitz (1992), who states that the narrative of the murder became ‘a cautionary tale for women, a warning that the city was a dangerous place when they transgressed the narrow boundary of home and hearth to enter public space’ (p. 3). Similarly, L. P. Curtis (2001) mentions that the sensational rhetoric used through countless ‘graphic images of the Ripper's victims at the crime scene or in the morgue reinforced their utter lack of power and also their objectification by the male gaze’ (p. 213). These examples highlight how research

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<sup>17</sup> See: Christopher Frayling (2007), Alexandra Warwick (2007), Linda Dryden (2003), L.P Curtis (2001), and others.

<sup>18</sup> These novels being: J. F Brewer's *The Curse upon Mitre Square* (1888) and W. B Lawson's *Jack the Ripper in New York* (1891)

often interprets the murders through the treatment of the female victims. They establish an argument that the *fin-de-siècle* response to this serious crime is concerned more with conveying these victims as instigators of their own murder due to their deviance from the conventional expectations of the female gender and sexuality.

This chapter will explore further the newspapers' preoccupations with gender issues through an analysis of the Gothic terminology used to describe the female victims, the desire to displace the crimes away from masculine values, and the various gender-biased investigations, reflecting upon the reports' narrative method of using the crime to explore issues of the female gender. I argue that the actual crime exists on the surface of the newspaper narratives and instead reporters are using the murders as a tool to emphasise boundaries of gender and to 'control potentially subversive female behaviour' (Warkentin, 2011: p. 5). This, thus, provides crucial context of how a crime that occupied *fin-de-siècle* thought is represented in a particularly criminologically redundant manner that focuses more on the consequences of gender transgression than crime; this is a background that Marsh's late-nineteenth-century novels should be read against in order to establish the true significance of his representations of crime and the extent to which his fictions respond to *fin-de-siècle* culture.

### **Female victims and the language of the Gothic**

The victims of the Whitechapel murders were part of a collective of women that were often condemned within *fin-de-siècle* discourse, as they, to varying degrees, engaged in acts of prostitution. Even though prostitution was not a crime during the century (Walkowitz, 1980: p. 14), society was keen to control its presence. A clear example of this is the Contagious Diseases Acts of the 1860s, which attempted to prevent the increasing 'spread of venereal disease' by allowing the invasive 'internal examinations' of 'common prostitutes' in 'garrison towns and ports' (Walkowitz, 1980: p. 2). The acts sparked controversy amongst feminists at the time due to the period's 'double standard of sexual morality', as the male counterparts that facilitated prostitution were not controlled in the same manner (p. 2). They portrayed '...the prostitute [as] the conduit of infection to respectable society' (p. 4) rather than acknowledging prostitution as the plight of the working-class woman 'trying to survive



in towns that offered them few employment opportunities' (p. 9). Instead, the acts represented them, in line with some Victorian perceptions of sex outside marriage as a 'dangerous form of sexuality' (p. 3). This societal perception of the female prostitute is reinforced in the newspaper accounts of the Ripper's murders. The press's criticism of the female victims as threatening transgressors of their gender is expressed through the use of Gothic language to describe these women. The associations between the Gothic and these crimes have been previously explored in significant detail. For instance, Andrew Smith (2007) explores the murders through the 'medical profession', looking at how the mutilations inflicted by the Ripper often associated him with a 'mad doctor' and also analysing the autopsy reports of the victims, where a 'pathological' Gothic discourse 'operates alongside' the 'account of the reality of terrible crime' (p. 121). Smith states that the autopsies highlight how 'the victims themselves were responsible, at least potentially, for their plights' (p. 117). However, something that could use more analysis is the specific Gothic terminology used to describe these victims, which highlights Smith's claim further that '...the victims are reduced to a series of objects, things and internal organs' (p. 121).

In her article, Leila May (1998) explores how Bram Stoker's *Dracula* (1897) shows a 'displacement of Victorian dread onto a fetishised creature, a metonymical composite producing a metaphorical monster' (p. 22). One particular Victorian 'dread' that May studies is the 'anxiety' of 'moral or social decomposition' (p. 16) that is often represented through the figure of the Victorian prostitute. May states that '...to the Victorian mind, the prostitute represented the decay whose potential was the contamination of the social body' (p. 16). May draws upon the theories of Alain Corbin to highlight the potential connections between the female prostitute and the Gothic vampire, through the idea that both convey 'dangers of [society] being corroded by internal disease' (p. 16), where both figures are potential threats to the Victorian 'obsession with the maintaining of clear and distinct boundaries' (p. 16). This connection between the prostitute and ideas of Gothic infection is evident within the newspaper reports of the Whitechapel murders. An article published in *Lloyd's Weekly Newspaper* on the 9<sup>th</sup> September 1888 documents the murder of the Ripper's second victim, Annie Chapman, where the journalist describes her as 'one of the hideous women infesting Whitechapel'. Equating these women with a 'hideous' infection not only reinforces the societal perceptions of prostitutes as catalysts for disease but displaces internal disease onto external extremities, whilst the term 'hideous'

Gothicises her. She becomes associated with physical degeneration and monstrosity, where the believed ability for her transgressive lifestyle to spread disease becomes physically indicated upon her person. The term 'infesting' also suggests that Whitechapel is overrun with prostitutes, alluding that they are a burden to the district and that a level of control would be necessary. Rather than focusing on the brutality of the violence committed *against* them, the newspapers seems to suggest that *they* are committing an offence to the district of Whitechapel and equates them to *fin-de-siècle* grotesque monsters of the Gothic, in order to demonise female sexuality.

In Gothic literature of the *fin de siècle*, the theme of duality, usually between the monster figures and the hero/heroine, is common. This theme can be seen in Richard Marsh's *The Beetle*, as Leslie Allin (2015) points out that Sydney Atherton, the suggested British 'hero' (p. 121) of the text, is 'associated with the East' and the 'practices' of the monstrous Beetle character (p. 123). Furthermore, this duality can be seen in the Gothic novella *The Strange Case of Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde* (Stevenson, 1886). Many critics<sup>19</sup> have highlighted how Stevenson's character was similar to the newspaper representations of Jack the Ripper. For instance, Linda Dryden (2003) states that many journalists 'invoke[d] Stevenson's Jekyll and Hyde as a possible model for the murderer's behaviour' (Dryden, 2003: p. 50). However, the newspapers also convey, not just the potential double nature of the murderer, but also a duality between the Ripper and the victims. This duality is evidenced in two ways: the first is through the continuous use of the term 'creature'. From London central newspapers such as the *Pall Mall Gazette* or *Lloyd's Weekly Newspaper*, to newspapers operating outside London such as the *Birmingham Daily Post* or the *Sheffield and Rotherham Independent*, the term 'creature' was utilised in various formats to describe the victims, for instance: 'dead creature', 'poor creature' or 'unfortunate creature'. By comparison, as pointed out by Andrew Smith (2007), in an article published on the 8<sup>th</sup> September 1888 in the *Star*, the Ripper is described as a 'ghoul-like creature'. Similarly, L. P Curtis (2001) presents an editorial from the *East London Advertiser* where the Ripper is described as a 'creature mad with thirst of blood' (p. 122). The use of the term 'creature' to define both the Ripper and his victims makes them alike in character; they both become associated with animalistic reference which renders them in-human, mythical and supernatural.

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<sup>19</sup> See: Clive Bloom (2007), Andrew Smith (2007) or Judith Walkowitz (1992).

The second way this duality is suggested in the newspaper accounts is through supernatural reference. The Ripper is frequently described as haunting, or 'stalking through the streets of London' (*Star*, 8<sup>th</sup> September 1888). Yet, this terminology of the supernatural is also employed to discuss the victims, especially in the *Bristol Mercury and Daily Post*, where an article on the 15<sup>th</sup> September states:

The vestry authorities all over London have been so active lately in *putting down immoral houses* that the *unfortunate women who haunt the streets* carry on their *dreadful calling* in the passages and yards which are open to the public throughout the night; and horrible though this admission may be, and how ever *repugnant* to the feelings of the public it is impossible for us to blink the fact – '*Dark Annie*' went to the rear of 20 Hanbury street for that purpose and was murdered by a madman, who lured her to her death (italics my own).

The use of the phrase 'unfortunate women' highlights how the above extract is discussing the female victims as the term is a label commonly denoted to female prostitutes in the Victorian era (Luddy, 2006: p. 500). These victims are associated, not with sympathy as one might expect, but with the paranormal as they 'haunt the streets' to 'carry on their dreadful calling'. They not only become ghost-like entities, insubstantial, unnatural and inhuman, but their 'haunt[ing]' is depicted as something pestering and burdening society. Even though the phrase 'madman who lured her to her death' appears sympathetic towards the victims, the way the passage is laid out places it as an afterthought and suggests that if Annie Chapman was not carrying out her 'repugnant' life then she would not have been 'lured to her death'. In both expressions of duality, the supernatural and the use of the term 'creature', the killer becomes associated with the innocent and the victimised, whilst the victim becomes connected to criminality. They both become a Gothic monster, unnatural within Victorian civilisation. Through the Gothic language employed to describe these women, the newspapers are more concerned with condemning prostitution, or female transgressive sexuality that existed outside marriage. These women become monsters, animalistic, unnatural and likened to their own killer; these women become instigators of their own victimisation. The extent to which these newspapers analyse the murders through any criminological framework becomes questionable as the reports focus more on victim blaming than exploring the crime itself.

## Jack the Ripper suspects: displacing the crime onto the 'feminine within'<sup>20</sup>

The supposed *male* identity of Jack the Ripper has been referred to by many historians of the Whitechapel murders<sup>21</sup>, either through the use of male pronouns to describe the killer or by suggesting that the crime portrays male violence against women. However, what seems to be forgotten is that the identity of the killer was never discovered and, by consequence, neither was their gender. This modern stereotype has, potentially, stemmed from the *fin-de-siècle* newspaper representations which frequently categorise the Ripper as male. This stereotype becomes more significant when realising that the news reports sought to disassociate the Ripper crimes from masculinity. Instead, the newspapers seem to displace the murders onto a *feminine side* of men. John Tosh (2005) outlines how, throughout the nineteenth century, part of masculinity meant men had 'to disown their feminine side' and 'in the process setting very rigid boundaries of the self' (p. 47). In order to be considered masculine, men had to 'repress the feminine within' (p. 49) and deny any attributes that might be preconceived to be feminine. In the newspaper reports of the murders the crimes are depicted as being instigated by this 'feminine side' and the male inability to suppress it. This is done through the portrayals of the two of the main suspects of the murders: the Jewish man and the Mr Hyde character. By doing this, the crimes are not truly masculine within the news reports' representations of the murders. Instead, the responsibility is placed on a version of transgressive femininity that has the potential to disrupt the boundaries of masculinity. The murders are displaced onto the male failure to conform to the expected societal constructions of gender, but specifically their failure to challenge and suppress their inner femininity; it is blamed upon men's inability to secure 'rigid boundaries of the self' (Tosh, 2005: p. 47).

Throughout the Ripper murders there was a belief that 'no Englishman could have perpetrated such horrible crimes' (*East London Observer*, 15<sup>th</sup> September 1888). Instead, the figure of the European Jewish male was often under speculation within the newspaper accounts of the murders, in accordance with the public concerns at the

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<sup>20</sup> John Tosh, 2005: p. 49

<sup>21</sup> See, for example: Christopher Frayling (2007), Gary Colville and Patrick Lucanio (2007) or Deborah Cameron (1994). It is also touched upon by L.P Curtis (2001) and Judith Walkowitz (1992).

time<sup>22</sup>. The discovery of the Ripper's message on the wall in Mitre Square, following the murder of Catharine Eddows, which stated: 'the Juwes are the men that will not be blamed for nothing', and the significance placed upon the spelling of 'Juwes' as an indicator of the Jewish identity of the killer by the police, sparked a public speculation and hostility against the Jewish community (see: *Manchester Guardian*, 13<sup>th</sup> October 1888). As L. P Curtis (2001) outlines, the *East London Observer*, on the 15<sup>th</sup> September 1888, reported that a 'threatening attitude' was directed at the 'Hebrew population' (p. 260). However, whilst this might immediately come across as a race issue, it cannot be ignored that the Victorian period believed in a direct association between the male Jewish identity and femininity – particularly through the concept of hysteria. Hysteria, which was 'constructed as a woman's disease' (Gilman, 1993: p. 286), was also attributed to the Jewish man. Gilman states that 'at the close of the nineteenth century the idea of seeing the hysteric was closely bound to the idea of seeing the Jew – and very specifically the male Jew' (p. 405) and that it created a vision of 'feminized males' (p. 405). This notion of hysteria is subtly evident within the descriptions of the main Jewish suspect: 'Leather Apron', or John Piser. The *Birmingham Daily Post*, on the 10<sup>th</sup> September 1888, states:

His *expression is sinister* and seems to be *full of terror* for the women who describe it. His *eyes are small and glittering*. His lips are usually *parted in a grin* which is not only not reassuring but *excessively repellent* (italics my own).

The descriptions of his facial characteristics as 'sinister' and the description of his eyes as 'glittering' suggest an inner chaos and instability: a hysteria. As Gilman states, 'the face of the Jew became the face of the hysteric' (p. 405). Therefore, this hysteria seems to be associated with the violence of the Ripper murders; it associates the crimes 'Leather Apron' is suspected of with the 'feminine within', and a male inability to suppress it.

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<sup>22</sup> During the *fin-de-siècle* the East End of London, especially Whitechapel, 'housed a large immigrant...community of poor Jews who, in the 1880s, were fleeing the Eastern European pogroms' (Dryden, 2003: p. 47). This increase in the Jewish population was met with prejudice which only intensified during the Whitechapel murders.

The second suspected identity of the Ripper, as a real-life version of Stevenson's Jekyll and Hyde character or the 'mad doctor', also displaces the crime onto a feminine side of men. At the time many newspapers were drawing attention to the connection between the Ripper and Stevenson's character. For instance, in the *Bristol Mercury and Daily Post*, on the 13<sup>th</sup> September 1888, Dr Forbes Winslow states that 'the whole affair is that of a lunatic'; he believed that the crimes were committed by a person of 'the upper class of society' who had escaped from an 'asylum'. However, there was also the belief that, due to the bodily mutilations inflicted upon the victims, the killer had to possess 'considerable anatomical skill and knowledge' (*Pall Mall Gazette*, 27<sup>th</sup> September 1888). This initiated the theory that the Ripper was, like Stevenson's character, a respectable doctor with an inner insanity. When looking at this comparison it is important to consider Janice Doane and Devon Hodges's (1989) analysis of Stevenson's novella. They state that the 'violence' within Jekyll is actually the 'feminine from within' that the masculine identity battles to control (p. 66). This idea is also outlined by Christopher Frayling (2007) who states that the Jekyll and Hyde theory provided 'an 'explanation' which had as its subtext 'the female principle' battling it out with 'the male principle'' (p. 18). This creates the suggestion that by linking the Ripper to Stevenson's literary character, the murder is displaced onto the inner femininity of the killer and disassociates it from 'the male principle'. These suspects, therefore, can be interpreted as another way the newspapers convey a particular ideology of gender. In both instances, the responsibility of the crime is displaced onto the potentially feminine qualities within the male suspects. The newspapers, therefore, suggest that the crimes are caused by a male inability to suppress their feminine side that threatens to take over their masculinity. The crime representation becomes superficial as it functions to condemn transgressive femininity and protect the boundaries of gender.

### **Police, media and the public: the gender-biased investigation**

During the investigation of the murders, the newspaper reports often conveyed the police force as incompetent in apprehending the criminal. Not only does the crime remain unsolved, but the Ripper murders resulted in 'the debased reputation of the police following their botched investigations' (Clarke, 2014: p. 11). However, the main reason for their shortcomings seems to be due to their gender-biased investigation.

This is evidenced, however, not just by the police investigations but also the detective abilities of the media and the public. Dominique Kalifa and Margaret Jean Flynn (2005) highlight how the media operates as a kind of investigatory platform, as by exposing 'the event to the public consciousness, is to make it visible and construct it as a social event' (p. 36). While, in the case of Whitechapel, Judith Walkowitz (1992) outlines how the public became a potential amateur detective figure, as 'respectable citizens of Whitechapel responded to the invasion of West Enders by organizing their own night patrols' (p. 213). However, the investigatory practices of these platforms are dominated by a stereotyped perspective of gender, where they both detect the transgressive woman and deny female ability to commit serious crime.

In accordance with Kalifa and Flynn's interpretation, the newspaper reports can be interpreted as a type of amateur detective force. However, it is not just the murders the press is investigating but also the deviant lives of the female victims. As the above analysis has shown, the newspapers were consumed with cautioning against female sexual deviance and placing blame for the murders onto the victims. Another way this can be seen is through the journalists' invasions upon the privacy of the victims. One of the primary concerns, at the time, regarding the Victorian detective figure was their potential invasions of privacy. For instance, Haia Shpayer Makov (2011) states that 'the presence of the police detective, and his equal treatment of all suspects, threatened the predominant social order, while his systematic spying on members of the household violated their sacred sense of privacy' (p. 190). Similarly, Anthea Trodd (1984) points out that mid-Victorian literature often portrayed 'the encounter between the detective policeman, intruder into the sanctuary of the home, and a young lady, representative of the home's sanctities' (p. 435); these novels show a 'deep fear about the threat to the world of domestic innocence posed by the new police world of subterfuge and surveillance' (p. 436). Interpreting the news reports through these societal perceptions expressed by Shpayer Makov and Trodd, highlights how the investigation by the press was influenced by stereotypes of gender. The lives of these working-class women are laid bare for public scrutiny: their engagements in prostitution are condemned, their drinking habits are slandered, their previous relationships are scrutinised and their bodily mutilations are described in excessively

graphic detail<sup>23</sup>. Their privacy is invaded and their lives thoroughly detected. However, unlike the societal interpretations of detection, the scrutiny of these female victims seems to have been acceptable and justified. As L.P Curtis (2001) states, the Victorian reader often 'relished' the sensational and 'gruesome detail' of murders, and the Ripper crimes were no exception as 'most readers were at least willing to tolerate the thrills arising out of the lurid accounts of knife wounds' (p. 15). This exposes the influence ideologies of gender have upon the investigations of the crime as it suggests that detectives were allowed to invade the privacy of the "right" type of women, meaning those who are working-class, female and transgressive. It suggests that whilst middle-class and upper-class women should not be detected, these women deserved to be under scrutiny. This exposes how the media, as an investigatory tool, is inefficient: their detection was heavily influenced by societal perceptions of gender as the detective is *allowed* to humiliate and condemn transgressive women.

This rhetoric of victim blaming is also evident in the petitions set up by members of the public. Residents of the East End were adamant to discover the killer's identity and, therefore, organised night searches to inspect the streets of the district. As Walkowitz (1992) states, members of the public set up a 'vigilance committee' but, by using this title 'the male patrols in Whitechapel explicitly modeled themselves on similarly named social purity organizations already active in the area' (p. 213). As Christopher Pittard (2011) states: 'vigilance committees founded in the nineteenth century' had 'the aim of policing sexual purity and morality' (p. 8). This suggests, however, that the objective of these patrols is to detect prostitution, not the killer. This allusion to a public preoccupation with controlling prostitution in order to solve the crime is also evidenced through a particular petition raised in the midst of the crimes. In an article published in the *Bristol Mercury and Post* on the 27<sup>th</sup> October 1888, rather than setting up petitions to apprehend the killer, some members of the public wrote a plea to Queen Victoria, asking for further prevention and regulation of prostitution within the East End. As the newspaper outlines, the petition states:

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<sup>23</sup> See newspapers such as: *Bristol Mercury and Daily Post*, 15<sup>th</sup> September 1888; *Bristol Mercury and Daily Post*, 22<sup>nd</sup> September 1888; *Daily News*, 24<sup>th</sup> September 1888; *Sheffield and Rotherham Independent*, 27<sup>th</sup> September 1888; *Pall Mall Gazette*, 10<sup>th</sup> November 1888; *Bristol Mercury and Post*, 19<sup>th</sup> October 1888.



By the facts that have come out at the inquests we have learnt much of the lives of those of our sisters who have lost a firm hold on goodness and who are living sad and degraded lives. While each woman of us will do all she can to make men feel with horror the sins of impurity which cause such wicked lives...we would also beg that your Majesty...put the law which already exists in motion to close bad houses within which walls such wickedness is done.

This newspaper article suggests that the public, rather than initiating a petition to help catch the killer, believed that these crimes were caused by prostitution and its existence within the East End. The shortcomings of the ability of the public to detect the criminal are exposed through this petition as it suggests that prostitution caused the crime and by removing its presence in the district it will prevent further murders. They become investigators of transgressive women and not the Ripper.

In addition, the newspapers often conveyed instances when members of the public were arrested by police following their confessions of being the Ripper. On the 22<sup>nd</sup> November 1888 the *Star* presented an article that documented the story of a woman called Louiza Bexender. The article states 'the police man...who apprehended her [said] that she chased a number of children with a knife in her hand crying out that she was a female Jack the Ripper'. In other newspaper accounts, when men claim to be the Ripper they are arrested and placed under genuine suspicion. However, Louiza was not investigated as being the Ripper but 'sentenced to ten days imprisonment' for disorderly behaviour. This lack of punishment for female suspects is also evident in an article published by the *Sheffield and Rotherham Independent* on the 22<sup>nd</sup> October 1888. This article outlines how a woman called Maria Coroner was 'arrested...on the charge of sending letters signed "Jack the Ripper" to the local press and the chief constable'. However, she is not suspected to be the perpetrator and instead is 'remanded on a charge for inciting to a breach of the peace'. Here, in line with the societal stereotype that women were 'innately non-criminal' (Zedner, 1991: p. 23), there is an obvious prejudice around the ability of women to commit serious crime. The police investigation and their apparent denial of the idea of a female Ripper highlight the prejudiced conduct of their investigation. In these instances, platforms of detection failed to sufficiently inspect these murders. Instead, the investigations are conducted through a perspective of Victorian gender beliefs, which conveyed the female victims to be the aspect of the crime worth investigating.

Even though it would be wrong to claim that the newspapers had no investment in catching the killer or serving the investigations of the police force, it is clear that there is a subtle undertone to the reports that focuses more on condemning the lives of the female victims than actually analysing the crime. It seems to be that the crime exists on the surface of these press narratives and instead they seek to condemn those that deviate or have the potential to erode the boundaries of gender. The narrative strategy of using crime to discuss gender imposed in these reports is remarkably similar to Marsh's treatment of crime. While it is important to note that the ways these two narratives – the newspapers and Marsh's novels – represent the crimes are very different the ways in which the reports and Marsh's writing convey anxieties around gender are similar. This establishes important contextual information that can aid the following analysis of Marsh's novels. As the next chapters will show, his preoccupation with using crime as a strategy to discuss the changing societal thoughts around gender is a crucial engagement with the culture at the time as it is significantly similar to the reporting of factual crime at the *fin de siècle*.

## Chapter 2

### **'The Angel of the House' vs 'The Odd Woman': the polarisations of the female criminal**

Throughout the nineteenth century, representations and treatments of criminality were often influenced by gender. As stated in the introduction of this thesis, women were frequently perceived to be 'innately non-criminal' (Zedner, 1991: p. 23), and 'late Victorian writers argued that women's lack of physical strength and her natural passivity kept her from criminal activity' (p. 24). This stereotype that women were incompatible with criminality due to the biological make-up of their gender is reinforced by a suggestion that criminal justice systems often treated female criminals with a level of leniency during the Victorian period. For instance, Meda Chesney-Lind (1986) states that 'the criminal justice system' played an active role 'in the maintenance of modern patriarchy' (p. 78). If 'a female offender is apprehended, her behaviour is scrutinised for evidence that she is beyond the control of the patriarchy and if this can be found she is harshly punished', whereas 'certain types of female defendants receive preferential treatment' (p. 91). Chesney-Lind seems to suggest that if a woman does not threaten the gender structures of the period, if she embodied society's role of women in the home and the attribution of characteristics such as passivity to her gender, then she was treated with a level of compassion and her criminal responsibility was reduced. However, if a female who commits a crime has already challenged these structures, or has the potential to, then she receives more severe punishment.

While Chesney-Lind's analysis is conducted through an American perspective, this treatment of Victorian female criminals is also suggested from a British perspective as Mary Hartman (2014) highlights. Hartman analyses 'thirteen, nineteenth-century, English and French women of *'respectable'* middle-class status' (p. 1, italics my own). Her study of these various criminal cases illuminates how the legal punishments for these female criminals were not as severe as one might expect. She states that 'only six were convicted and none were made to suffer the death penalty' (p. 1) while 'five of the six who went to prison were freed before their full sentences were served' (p. 1). She suggests that it is significant that all of these women 'had apparently conformed to expected standards of behaviour' (p. 4) for middle-class women at the time. Hartman states: 'it is possible to conclude that it was wise to be female and

*respectable* if one intended to dispose of somebody in the nineteenth century' (p. 1, italics my own). From these two sources, there seems to be a suggestion that if a female criminal has the potential to uphold the boundaries of gender propagated in the nineteenth century then her punishment for the crime is mild, while women who already transgressed their gender expectations were treated in the opposite manner.

This Victorian perception of the female criminal is reiterated within Marsh's novels. In this chapter, I will explore how Marsh's representation of the female criminal exposes the superficial nature of his theme of crime, as the crimes committed by these women are not truly depicted as criminal actions. I argue that Marsh portrays two types of female criminal and that analysing these together illuminates how he uses crime as a way to express concern over the changing characterisations and roles of middle-class women in *fin-de-siècle* society. On one hand, Marsh introduces female criminals – Bessie Moore and Ethel Musgrave – who embody the values and stereotypes of Victorian women that existed prior to the *fin de siècle*; the novels portray them to be committed to duties of motherhood and marriage, whilst being categorised as vulnerable women, who contain attributes of passivity and innocence. These female criminals are treated with a level of sympathy in the narrative. They are conveyed as 'innately non-criminal' (Zedner, 1991: p. 24) or are portrayed under consistently positive rhetoric that defines them as pure, beautiful heroines of the texts. In comparison, Marsh also introduces three other female criminals – the beetle, the goddess and Ellen Howth<sup>24</sup> – who are portrayed entirely differently. These women, to varying degrees, symbolise the increasing societal freedoms of middle-class women at the end of the century. They are associated with the public space, environments of professional work or education, and embody characteristics of female agency and independence. These women also fall under literary interpretations of the 'odd woman', unmarried and uncommitted to motherhood. However, these female criminals are demonised, characterised as monster figures, who use their sexuality to threaten the Victorian boundaries of gender; as 'odd women' their inherent danger to society through sexual independence is thoroughly exaggerated in these novels. This remarkable difference in representation exposes the lack of criminological purpose of Marsh's crime narratives and demonstrates his ideological stance in regards to the cultural shifts in perceptions of middle-class women at the *fin de siècle*.

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<sup>24</sup> In the text, she also goes by the names of Nelly and Mrs Carruth.

## How are these women associated with the middle-classes?

Before analysing the ways this difference in representation of the female criminal is evident in Marsh's novels, it is useful to briefly outline how these female characters can be interpreted as being *associated* with different levels of the middle classes. Firstly, Ellen Howth in *The Crime and the Criminal*<sup>25</sup> frequently mentions the wealth she inherited from her deceased husband: a husband who, it is suggested, has a middle-class profession and was a 'business partner' (3.22) with Jack Haines. She states: 'when I left England, though I was poor, I had troops of friends. Now I have come back I am rich' (2.10), and she lived in West Kensington in a 'highly respectable house in this highly respectable street, and furnished it in a highly respectable manner' (3.24). This kind of respectability is also evidenced through Ethel Musgrave, whose apparent wealth is expressed through her surroundings and subsequent travels. The couple begin their honeymoon in the 'popular seaside resort' (Vuohelainen, 2015: p. 41) of Worthing and then the 'new married pair wandered about the continent' visiting places such as Dinant, in Belgium, where their 'apartment almost faced the citadel' (Marsh, 2014: p. 7), for over a year. Their associations with wealth and status are also shown by Hereward's offer of money to Charlecote if he stopped pursuing his wife (p. 28) and, once arriving in Brussels, their hotel room has a 'bedroom and a private salon' (p. 20). Similarly, Bessie Moore, who is introduced in *The Goddess*, was a successful actress before the novel began. At first sight this profession does not indicate class status as 'unlike other professionals, [Victorian actresses] were recruited from all classes of society' (Davis, 1991: p. 3). Instead, her success and wealth that has been accumulated from her acting is expressed through the narrative descriptions of her clothing which is described as something luxurious rather than plain. For example, upon entering Ferguson's room at the beginning of the novel, Bessie was 'covered from head to foot in a voluminous garment' which was 'lined with green silk' and was 'decorated with voluminous green ribbons' (p. 11). Bessie's potential association with a middle-class identity is also expressed through her behaviour. As this chapter will explain in more detail, Bessie is often represented as demure, both in attire through

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<sup>25</sup> The citations for any quotations used from this text are done according to book number and chapter number, as the edition available does not contain page numbers.

her 'voluminous garment' and her relationship to other people as she is often seen as 'helpless' and 'innocent' (p.13/ 69)<sup>26</sup>.

This idea of both luxurious and demure clothing is also attributed to the goddess figure who is continuously connected to Bessie. One example of this is through the extravagant clothing Bessie wears when, before meeting Bessie, Ferguson dreams of Lawrence's murder and states that the 'frenzied figure' which was attacking Lawrence 'appeared to be covered with a flowing robe of some shining, silken stuff' which had 'voluminous skirts' (p. 8). This, therefore, creates a subtle similarity between Bessie and the goddess in terms of wealth. Furthermore, the goddess figure is also situated within middle-class districts of London. As Minna Vuohelainen (2015) states '*The Goddess...* never strays much beyond Piccadilly circus' and the setting of Imperial Mansions seems to be located in 'New Oxford Street' near 'districts of Soho' or 'Fitzrovia' (p. 28). This positioning within the West End of London is also used in relation to the beetle figure. The location of the beetle's home is in suburban London, on the outskirts of the West End; this residence places her within the middle-class districts. As Minna Vuohelainen (2015) states: 'somewhere in the environs of Walham Green, an expanding lower-middle class suburb south of Hammersmith' (p. 22). Furthermore, the beetle is often associated with luxurious 'clothing' and feasts of food (p. 18), as described by Holt at the beginning of the narrative. Even though the beetle and the goddess are both foreign figures, and therefore their wealth would not equate to British class status, they are associated with the characterisations or residences of British middle-class women.

Even though Marsh does not securely fix these female characters within a middle-class identity, they are *associated* with wealth or luxury either through location or physical appearance. All of the female criminals are associated in some way with British middle-class factors, either by location, behaviour or money. While there is a lack of clarity around the class identity of these female criminals, the textual representations *suggest* that they are displaced away from lower-class status or poverty and, potentially, do not fall under an upper-class status as there are no allusions to earning money from land or extensive levels of wealth. However, the lack of clear class structures for these women, arguably, contributes further to Marsh's

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<sup>26</sup> These are attributes that Peterson (1984) has indicated to be associated with middle-class women, as this chapter will explore later on.

concerns around the changes to the role and definitions of middle-class women at the *fin de siècle* as it shows a clear reluctance to securely fix them within a middle-class identity, almost as a way of lessening the potential threat these changes could have.

### **Ethel Musgrave and Bessie Moore: symbols of the domestic space**

When analysing the characters of Ethel Musgrave and Bessie Moore<sup>27</sup> it becomes clear that, despite their criminality, they are associated with ‘the single version of ideal femininity’ (Moran, 2006: p. 35): notably, conforming to the passive stereotype of women and their commitments to the domestic space. Firstly, Bessie Moore, who is introduced to us in *The Goddess*, is represented as an embodiment of the stereotype of the ‘Victorian cult of the Angel in the House’ (Vuohelainen, 2010: p. xxxi). ‘The Angel in the House’ stereotype, in an interconnection between religion (‘Angel’) and domesticity (‘House’) provided a caricatured depiction of women’s lives in Victorian society (Peterson, 1984: p. 677). Even though some have mentioned that this stereotype was not an accurate representation of women’s lives (Peterson, 1984: P. 678), it reinforced an idolised version of what a woman should be; specifically, attesting that women should be solely responsible for ‘the home environment that promoted her husband's and children's well-being in the world’, whilst also associating middle-class women with ‘domesticity, unworldliness, asexuality, innocence, even helplessness in matters outside the domestic sphere’ (Peterson, 1984: p. 667). This stereotype of women essentially fed into the middle-class ideology of the separate spheres.

However, Bessie’s acting career has the potential to contradict an interpretation of her as an ‘Angel of the House’. In theory, Bessie could possess a kind of female agency and independence, as Minna Vuohelainen (2010) states: ‘she is an actress who performs on stage’ where ‘men fall at her feet’ (p. xxxii). This evidently successful career could associate her with the work space and the increasing professional freedoms of middle-class women at the time; however, this is not what the text is doing. Bessie’s acting career exists *externally* to the narrative, as readers we never see it. Instead, readers are first introduced to Bessie as she climbs through Ferguson’s

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<sup>27</sup> Even though Bessie ends up being innocent of the crime, throughout the novel she is the main suspect for the murder. Therefore, the text, in theory, should depict her in this light.

window<sup>28</sup>. In this action, Bessie crosses the threshold between public and private spaces and the reader witnesses a reversal of the early stages of the women's movement. This instance of Bessie crossing the threshold through the window, however, does not work to epitomise the values and principles of the nineteenth-century women's movement but instead symbolically reverses the progress women were making at the time. Before this action Bessie was a successful actress; she was pursuing a career rather than staying within the home. However, once trespassing into the space, Bessie is represented as a female figure of vulnerability, dependability and desperation: all stereotypical characteristics that women were beginning to move away from during the period. Yet Bessie is not moving away from these values, instead, her action exhibits her to be moving towards them. Bessie's crossing of the physical threshold is not perceived in the text as an indication of burglary but is used as a way to re-establish boundaries and define the position of gender. In this instance, Marsh uses the concept of transgression and trespass for his own purposes: the act of transgression actually becomes a movement into conformity rather than an exposure of a character's deviance. He uses the threshold in the opposite way to readers' expectation: he exposes the reversal of transgression. What we initially see as a crime is actually Marsh removing Bessie from her desires of female liberation and professionalism and placing her back into the domestic space. In this act criminal transgression becomes entirely redundant and is instead used as a way to convey ideas about the female gender.

This change is then reinforced by her marriage to Ferguson at the end of the novel and her failure to return to acting. In addition, it is notable that when Bessie tries to recollect her involvements in the crime – her witnessing of the murder seems to cause amnesia where she forgets even her own name (p. 11) - she remembers people 'clapping their hands' (p. 31), referring to the audiences she would perform for at the theatre. Connecting the murder with her acting career, not only condemns her profession but relates it to something she cannot remember; it never really fully exists in the narrative. Therefore, her potential embodiment of female independence is undermined and instead she is associated with the 'angel' of the domestic space.

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<sup>28</sup> The movement of crossing a threshold through a window, or being tempted into a building by sounds coming from a window, is a common feature of Marsh's writing and also appears in *The Beetle*. This theme will be explored in further detail in chapter three of this thesis.



This archetype of Victorian women is also expressed through Ethel Musgrave, in *Mrs Musgrave – and Her Husband*, who embodies similar attributes of domesticity. The novel outlines Hereward Musgrave's progressive realisation that his wife has committed murder whilst travelling the continent on their honeymoon. Even though the murder Ethel has committed is carried out in a hotel, which can be perceived as a public space, it is what the hotel is associated with that determines it to be a space of domesticity. The couple are in the hotel for their honeymoon, showing Ethel's commitments to a key element of the ideology of separate spheres and an aspect of 'the single version of ideal femininity' (Moran, 2006: p. 35): marriage. In relation to this, Mrs Musgrave is the only character in these novels who has a child, and she is described as the 'perfect' woman for child-birth (p. 7). This novel is also the only one to portray female confinement after child birth, which is described by Ethel's 'midwives' as an 'excellent confinement' (p. 7). Ethel becomes associated with the physical identification of the domestic space and also the virtues and traditions of motherhood that accompanies it. However, recent research into the novel suggests that Ethel can be interpreted as a transgressive and seductive female criminal. For instance, Johan Höglund (2018) states that Marsh's representation of Ethel is ambiguous as she is both the self-defender (p. 60) and a woman possessing 'hereditary criminality' with 'a lack of remorse' (p. 55) for her crime. Even though Marsh's text, at times, conveys two ideologies in regards to Ethel, it can be argued, as the following analysis will show, that Marsh supports her as a figure of domesticity. The associations between Mrs Musgrave, marriage and motherhood are stronger than the representations of her as seductive or immoral. In fact, Ethel's crime, much like Bessie's, is justified in the narrative. The crimes of these two female criminals, who are continuously associated with domesticity, are described in a rhetoric of sympathy and praise. Instead of true criminals, the texts portray them as literary heroines or 'damsels in distress', embodying attributes of beauty and innocence.

## **The beautiful and innocent heroine: sympathetic representations of Ethel Musgrave and Bessie Moore**

In regards to the plot structure of these two novels, both Bessie and Ethel are positioned as heroines<sup>29</sup>. With the emergence of the 'New Woman' figure at the *fin de siècle*, literary heroines were becoming 'unconventional', 'daring' and un-interested in the home and marriage (Pykett, 1992: p. 17). However, Bessie and Ethel do not follow this literary trend but instead are similar to the heroines that occupied earlier nineteenth-century texts. For instance, Esther Summerson in *Bleak House* (Dickens, 1853) has been identified as a significant example of a domestic heroine. Martin Danahay (1991) defines her as 'housekeeper' and she becomes associated with the 'construction of the feminine in terms of domesticity' (p. 416). It appears, however, that Ethel and Bessie's placement within the heroine position is slightly varied. Even though there are variations in representation across the century, a heroine is typically defined as: 'a woman distinguished by the performance of courageous or noble actions' (OED, 2018); a female character that, whether she is 'unconventional' or conformist to typical expectations, readers are supposed to relate to and 'admire' (OED, 2018). This definition easily applies to Ethel Musgrave, as her murder of Dr Byam is described in the text as an act of self-defence, a justified response to the unwanted advances from a predatory man. As Hereward states: 'she destroyed, in defence of her purity, both of soul and body, the brute who, in mere brutishness, was bent on her destruction' (p. 28). Her crime actually becomes an act of bravery in order to defend her conformity to Victorian purity, showing a justification of her crime in the narrative.

By comparison, Bessie is also depicted as a heroine figure but from a different perspective. Bessie does not fit the definition of 'noble' and 'courageous', instead her actions are justified through levels of sympathy and pity as she becomes a 'damsel in distress' figure. Bessie's 'fainting' (p. 13) and her substantial loss of memory portray her as a helpless woman in need of a male saviour. She is frequently described as confused and vulnerable, completely 'helpless', and her face is often depicted as showing 'a suggestion of fear and horror', continuously filling Ferguson with 'a sense

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<sup>29</sup> Minna Vuohelainen (2010) mentions this within her analysis of Bessie: she states that 'Bessie is the heroine of Marsh's novel' (p. xxxi).

of pity' (p. 10/13). The narrative states that 'she looked about her with an agony of appeal which it was terrible to witness' (p. 69). She becomes a figure in distress, crippled by fear, dependent upon others, and the narrative wants her to be treated with compassion and not condemnation. The archetype is a significant feature of eighteenth-century Gothic fiction, however, it also has a presence within *fin-de-siècle* literatures, as seen through Bram Stoker's character of Mina Harker in *Dracula*. Mina is portrayed to have conventional views about gender and the duty of women (Senf, 1982: p. 46). However, when Dracula kidnaps her and the male characters have to form an alliance to protect her, she becomes helpless and reliant on men, a 'damsel in distress' figure. In both Mina and Bessie's situation, it seems that the 'damsel in distress' characteristics appear *after* their exposure to criminal activity. For instance, Mina becomes this stereotype once Dracula has committed his crime of kidnap, and, as Minna Vuohelainen (2010) states, Bessie's 'confrontation with the Goddess' sends her 'into a state of semi-imbecility for much of the novel' (p. xxxi). This also ties into Zedner's (1991) theory that nineteenth-century society believed women to be 'innately non-criminal' (p. 23). The crime ignites a weakness in these women, a vulnerability that reduces them to something helpless. It suggests that the female character is not strong enough to deal with criminal behaviour; it alludes to an incompatibility between crime and femininity. By doing this, Bessie is discussed under a rhetoric of sympathy that systematically works to disassociate her from crime.

Amongst these descriptions of Bessie, she is often described through 'child' terminology, by which Marsh seems to challenge the societal view that at the *fin de siècle* 'the image of the submissive 'child-woman' had been vanquished by a strong individual with a voice of her own' (Moran, 2006: p. 39). The narrative states that Bessie 'depicted herself as playing a leading part in a hideous tragedy'. Whilst this would initially suggest a level of control and manipulation within her character, it is followed by: 'with the direct simplicity of a little child who confesses to faults of whose capital importance it has not the faintest notion' (p. 68-69). This description associates Bessie with immaturity, a basic lack of knowledge of the law and, therefore, her confession should be treated as meaningless. This child-like imagery is used throughout the novel: her speech is often 'spoken as a child might speak' (p. 10); she presents herself like 'a timid child who stands in fear of admonition' (p. 15); she was often 'holding out her hands as a child might do' (p. 15). This imagery not only conveys her as immature but also embodying a level of innocence that exempts her from

criminal responsibility. This is furthered by the continuous direct references to her innocent nature. The narrative states that despite the fact that she is covered 'in a crimson stain' (p. 12), Ferguson does not associate her with criminal guilt but rather victimisation. When Ferguson is first introduced to Bessie, with her entering through his bedroom window, despite this action, he states: 'she was at any rate no thief – there was something in the sound of that sustained respiration which was incompatible with the notion of a feminine burglar' (p. 9). This implies that the actual biological make up of Bessie means that she is unable to be determined as criminal, her femininity and crime are 'incompatible'. These notions of innocence are also evident within the representations of Mrs Musgrave as this child-like imagery is also frequently utilised. For instance, Mrs Musgrave is described as having 'the face of a beautiful child' and possessing an 'ethereal purity' (p. 16). Despite their suspected crimes the narratives portray them as innocent and child-like, conveying a perception that they are unable to commit crime.

The innocent nature of both female criminals is often expressed in relation to their physical beauty. Bessie is described by Ferguson as 'the most beautiful woman' (p. 10) but this beauty is always associated with innocence and child-imagery. As Minna Vuohelainen (2010) states, Bessie's "wondrous beauty" is emphasised alongside her innocence and domestic virtues' (p. xxxi). Similarly, Mrs Musgrave is also described as 'beautiful', with 'the loveliest eyes' (p. 16), but like Bessie this physical beauty is associated with innocence. The narrative states that she had 'purity' in her 'complexion' which was only enhanced by her 'motherhood' (p. 16). These associations between beauty and innocence work for a particular reason: to differentiate these female criminals from the societal connections between criminality and grotesque physical aberrations. Stephan Karschay (2015) highlights how degeneration theorists such as Cesare Lombroso saw 'criminality as an inborn quality' (p. 45). His text *Criminal Man* (1876) conveyed the idea of 'a rigid taxonomy of variegated criminal 'types' based on the identification of physical stigmata' (p. 44). In other words, Lombroso suggested a 'visible stigmata of deviance' (p. 52), specifically that certain, potentially grotesque, irregularities within features could identify an individual's criminality. This kind of theory existed with the Whitechapel murderer as the Ripper often blended into the population; as Andrew Smith (2007) states Jack the Ripper became 'normalised' when the murderer's actions were related to the 'medical profession', something normal and every day (p. 116). However, the representations

of Bessie and Ethel as beautifully innocent and child-like suggests that their criminality is not identifiable by their physical contours. Their beauty, thus, signifies their incompatibility with criminal representation. While this could show that Marsh is engaging with an idea that criminality is not physically observable, there is an ambiguity as it also implies that Marsh is hiding their criminality altogether, potentially, because of their conformity to feminine ideals.

The positive and sympathetic representation of these two criminals is reinforced by their inclusions in plots of romance within the narratives. Both novels, alongside their treatments of crime, have a discourse of courtship, love and marriage that these two women are strongly involved in. Throughout *The Goddess* there is an obvious romantic relationship between Bessie and Ferguson, which ends with their marriage and children. The novel concludes: 'as I sit with her hand in mine, I am sometimes disposed to suspect that our courtship is beginning' (p. 169). Similarly, in *Mrs Musgrave – and Her Husband* the marriage plot frequently highlights Hereward's unconditional love for Ethel despite her engagement with crime. Her criminal behaviour does not alter his affections for her. For example, he states that 'I love you, your body, your flesh and blood, yourself, that of you which I can hold between my fingers...but though you sank to the lowest depth of what the world calls evil, so long as you are good to me, what has that to do with my love for you?' (p. 17). These figures are conveyed to be compatible with love and romantic relationships; they become harmonious with the Victorian heteronormative institutions of marriage, rather than being depicted as female criminals who disrupt, or have the potential to disrupt, the social order.

Similarly to the newspaper reports of Whitechapel murders, crime is used as a way to further reinforce stereotypes and expectations of gender. The representation of these two criminals, thus, presents no true criminological purpose. Instead, their crimes are depicted as sympathetic and justified actions, while they are described as beautiful heroines, dependent on men, and embodying innocence. However, the true significance of this is exposed through a comparison with Marsh's second type of female criminal. The difference in representation exposes how Marsh uses crime to uphold a version of women that conforms to ideologies of female domesticity and passivity.

## **The Beetle, the Goddess and Ellen Howth: the 'odd woman' and associations with the public space**

Alongside Ethel Musgrave and Bessie Moore, Marsh also introduces us to three other female criminals: the beetle, the goddess and Ellen Howth. Each of these three criminals, unlike Ethel and Bessie, are frequently associated with the public spaces that were once denied to women but were becoming more accessible as the century drew to a close; alongside this, they also epitomise notions of female agency and autonomy. The beetle figure is often represented alongside spaces of professional study, such as labs, and public transport. Some of the major instances of the novel where the beetle's identity is confirmed or developed are in spaces of study or work, such as Paul Lessingham's study (p. 39) and Sydney Atherton's science lab (p. 110). This, then, associates the beetle's identity with education and work: spaces that middle-class women were slowly gaining more access to at the *fin de siècle*.

The use of the train within the narratives of these female criminals is a crucial aspect of their characterisation, especially in regards to Ellen Howth. *The Crime and the Criminal* describes how Ellen accidentally falls 'backwards out of the carriage door' (1.1) after arguing with Thomas Tennant in the carriage. The text alludes to Ellen being killed as 'a body of a woman has been found on the up-side of the Brighton line' (1.4). However, she subsequently survives the fall only to witness the murder of another woman whose body is then left in the place where she fell out of the train. Tennant is still arrested and imprisoned for the murder of this woman whom everyone believes to be Ellen Howth. Her crime, compared to the others, is not murder but perverting the course of justice, by not reporting the murder she witnessed or freeing Tennant from prison. Ellen also commits blackmail of the real murderer (3.27); she blackmails him to marry her, as she desires access to upper-class society (3.27). It seems that Ellen exists on a threshold between a conformist version of femininity, as she used to be married, and a deviant woman who entraps men to further her own female advancements. The association with the train, thus, becomes more significant as it metaphorically implies Ellen's own women's movement, away from the spheres of domesticity and marriage and into female autonomy.

In comparison, the goddess figure is also connected to the public space through the narrative characterisation of her. This female figure is portrayed as an extravagant Indian idol who commits the brutal murders of both Phillip and Edwin Lawrence in 'a

strange inversion of the original murders in Whitechapel' (Vuohelainen, 2010: p. xxvi). While the idol is hidden away in the domestic realm for most of the text, her characterisation links her with the public space. Her humanising qualities are ambiguous, instead, in a challenge of the threshold between the inanimate and the living, she is described in relation to a type of machine or object. This characterisation has the potential to identify her as a figure of industrialisation and modernity, connecting her to environments of middle-class employment. In this way, all three of these female criminals, in comparison to Bessie and Ethel, are associated with the developing professional commitments of women at the *fin de siècle*. Unlike Bessie and Ethel's conformity to conventional ideas of domesticity, they are suggested to embody spaces of work and education.

These three criminals, however, are not just associated with the public space but are also conveyed as 'odd women'. Emma Liggins (2014) states that 'odd women' are those 'outside heterosexual marriage', specifically referring to 'lesbians, spinsters and widows' (p. 1). Marsh's three female criminals seem to fall within these categories: Ellen is a widow, the goddess and the beetle are single women; furthermore, the beetle is seen to be significantly older at the beginning of the narrative and is, as this chapter will outline, frequently associated with lesbianism. Liggins states 'in the second half of the century' the odd woman was 'often derided as an abnormality, was variously classified as redundant, superfluous, anomalous, incomplete, odd' (p. 1). Liggins continues: 'she was increasingly seen as a misfit, an outcast, an outsider, a queer presence in a Britain governed by heterosexual norms' (p. 1). These women were able to 'transgress the norms of female behaviour and to stretch the rules governing sexuality which hemmed in conventional wives and mothers' (p. 1). These three female criminals fall under this interpretation of the 'odd woman', however, it seems to be that Marsh exaggerates the societal perceptions of them as 'odd' or 'abnormal'. These women, unlike Bessie and Ethel, are depicted as Gothic monsters or supernatural beings, often challenging the thresholds between various oppositions, and their crimes are not illegal acts but acts of deviant, threatening female sexual appetite. This difference exposes how the crime narrative of female criminality is not conveying ideologies of crime but condemning the transgressive woman and upholding those that conform to expectations of their gender.

## **The Beetle, the Goddess and Ellen Howth: female monstrosity and transgressive sexuality**

In comparison to the portrayal of Ethel and Bessie as beautiful heroines, these three female criminals are depicted as grotesque Gothic monsters. In *The Beetle*, the beetle figure challenges the threshold between male/female and human/animal through its narrative description as an animalistic shape-shifter, whose appearance is presented as something 'other' and frightening, whilst its gender identity is ambiguous. This characterisation is frequently described through terminology of the grotesque. The beetle is described as a 'gigantic spider'; some 'monstrous conception of a dreadful vision' (p. 14). The beetle, similarly to Bram Stoker's character of Dracula<sup>30</sup>, is described as 'omitting an unpleasant, foetid odour', whilst being 'slimy' and 'slightly phosphorescent' (p. 14). This monstrous identification of the beetle has been identified by many critics, including Stephan Karschay (2015), who states that:

The beetle-creature's animalism is no signifier of a shared history of evolutionary descent between humans and earlier life forms; on the contrary, it establishes the Beetle as a true monster, a subhuman entity, which is represented as fundamentally Other to the novel's characters (p. 147).

This is a similar representation to the goddess figure, who is described as something non-human: a type of machine. She is described as a 'thing', a 'creature' whose 'steel frame [was] shaped to resemble a human body' (p. 165). The image of the brutal murder she commits also equates her to some kind of animal. The novel states that the murder of Phillip Lawrence looked like it had been carried out by 'some savage thing' which had 'torn him tooth and nail' to the point where his masculine identity was no longer identifiable (p. 28). It is described as 'some spectacle of supreme horror' which the narrator 'recalled Edgar Allen Poe's story of "The Murders in the Rue Morgue" in which the criminal was proved to have been a huge ape' (p. 36). However, the monstrosity of her brutal crime is furthered by its connections to the Ripper. Minna

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<sup>30</sup> For instance, Stoker's text (2003) states that the Count's 'breath was rank' (p. 25) and that the Count's inhabitants were encumbered by an 'odour' that was 'stagnant and foul' (p. 267). The comparisons between *Dracula* and *The Beetle* have been identified by a number of critics, such as Stephan Karschay (2015), Minna Vuohelainen (2015), Tim Youngs (2013) and David Stuart Davies (2007).



Vuohelainen (2010) points out that the way the goddess's murders are described likens her to Jack the Ripper. She states that '*The Goddess* displaces some of the horror of the murders, with their slashed and disfigured corpses, onto the novel's eponymous mechanical puppet' but with a particular difference in that 'it is a female figure that here slashes men' (p. xxvi). Just like the beetle, the goddess becomes connected with an un-natural animalistic monster, whose crime, much like the Ripper, is described as something mythical and Gothic.

When analysing the figure of the goddess at first light it might seem that Marsh is commenting on Victorian knife crime, especially when considering the murder committed by Ethel in *Mrs Musgrave – and Her Husband*, the references to the Ripper murders and the use of knives to remove Marjorie's hair. Martin Wiener (2006), in exploring 'the judicial treatment of three types of nineteenth-century violence – the duel, knife fighting and the killing of an adulterous spouse by his or her lover' (p. 203), mentions that whilst 'knife fighting' used to be acceptable in Britain 'by the 1830s...the once common use of knives in public combat had come under increasing denunciation as incompatible with public order' (p. 203). He continues to state that a main aim of the justice system in the period was to 'stamp out the use of knives', mentioning that the use of knives within disputes was seen as something 'alien' and un-English (p. 203). In first light, one could argue that this cultural perception of knife crime as something 'alien' is reiterated in Marsh through the foreign nature of the goddess. However, upon further examination of this character alongside Mrs Musgrave, it becomes clear that Marsh does not engage with the use of knife crime to explore it as a specific type of illegal behaviour or to explore its societal perceptions at the time. Instead, the knife crime that appears in these texts is used as a way to further condemn women who deviate from the expectations of their gender.

In *Mrs Musgrave - and Her Husband*, Ethel commits her murder using 'something of the nature of a bodkin', an 'instrument of fine steel, scarcely coarser than a knitting-needle' (p. 7); a weapon that belonged to her father not herself. The narrative states how Dr Byam was 'stabbed to the heart' and that 'there [was] no blood about the place' or 'no sign of a wound' (p. 5). In comparison, the goddess's murder weapon is described as being within her being: 'from its finger tips came knives' and 'from every part of its frame gleaming blades had sprung'; 'even from its eyes, mouth, and nostrils had sprung knives' (p. 164). Additionally, her act of knife crime is described as 'some thing of horror' (p. 23). The murder scene of Phillip Lawrence is

described as 'stained with blood' and the body of the corpse was unrecognisable: 'it was as if some savage thing...had torn him to pieces with tooth and nail. His flesh had ripped and rent so that not one recognisable feature was left' (p. 23). Whilst Ethel's crime was depicted as clean and almost admirable through words such as 'fine steel', the goddess's crime is described as something monstrous and extremely violent. When taking these two descriptions together it becomes clear that Marsh is not using these acts as a way to comment on the knife crime within Victorian society but to use it as a strategy to distinguish the goddess from Ethel. It is used as a way to highlight further the monstrosity of the goddess and the animalistic nature of her being, rather than discussing it through any criminological purpose.

In comparison, Ellen Howth's association with something monstrous and grotesque is of a lesser extent but still significant. After Ellen Howth faked her death, the narrative often ends up describing her under terminology of the supernatural, especially through the narrative of Thomas Tennant. Tennant believes her to be dead, therefore, when he sees her in the street, following the altercation, and his narrative ultimately resorts to describing her as a 'ghost' (1.1), but the description seems pointedly grotesque. She is described as: '*it* looked at me with *wide, staring eyes*' with '*teeth clenched*' and '*strangely white*' skin (1. 5, italics my own). Even though this association with Gothic monsters is not as heightened and extensive as the beetle and the goddess, the use of inhuman pronouns such as 'it' likens her to something abnormal and displaced from the human identity. This characterisation of Ellen is significant when taking Fred Botting's (2014) interpretation of the ghost story into account. He states that 'the ghost story produces gentle tremors along the line separating the supernatural world from that of Victorian empirical and domestic order' (p. 119) and that 'ghosts articulate [both the] past and the present' (p. 162). Even though Ellen Howth's supernatural representation does not equate the novel to a ghost story, this concept can be applied to Ellen to highlight further her potential existence on the threshold between conformity to the values of Victorian femininity and the increasing agency of women. She exhibits both the past, through her marriage to Daniel Howth (2.10), and also the present, through her existence as a single woman and her transgressive nature of *using* men to further herself in society. This association with the supernatural, thus, becomes a way to condemn her ambiguous, but deviant, lifestyle, suggesting that the monstrosity associated with these female figures is an exaggerated condemnation of their female agency. This association between these

female criminals and monsters alludes that the narrative wants to displace their agency onto something unusual, much like the depictions of the Whitechapel murders. It seems that their position as ‘abnormal...odd women’ (Liggins, 2014: p. 1) is exaggerated through these Gothic representations and, thus, shows Marsh’s use of female crime to dictate that transgressive women do not belong within the “normal” female population.

The potential sexual disruption that the ‘odd woman’ was believed to be capable of in the nineteenth century, where they were able to ‘to stretch the rules governing sexuality which hemmed in conventional wives and mothers’ (Liggins, 2014: p. 1), is also exaggerated as something excessively abnormal in these novels. The crimes committed by these female criminals are portrayed as acts of deviant sexuality. For instance, the crimes of the goddess seem to be overshadowed by references to ‘sexual intercourse’ (Vuohelainen, 2010: p. xxv), notably ‘sexual intercourse’ outside of marriage, where the murder is described as a sexual act. The narrative states (to use the quotation identified by Vuohelainen):

The figure rose to its feet...from its finger-tips came knives. Stepping forward it *gripped Lawrence with its steel-clad hands*...From every part of its frame gleaming blades had sprung...*it pressed him again and again...it kept jerking its head backwards and forwards...a sharp pointed blade, more than eighteen inches long, which proceeded from its stomach, had pierced him through and through. The writhing, gibbering puppet held him skewered in a dozen places...pinning him on the floor it continued its extraordinary contortions, lacerating its victim with every movement...it rolled over, lethargically, upon its side, leaving its handiwork exposed – a horrible spectacle* (p. 291-293, italics my own).

In this example the actual crime seems to be overshadowed by allusions to a sexual act<sup>31</sup>, but a sexual act that is demonised and seen as a ‘horrible spectacle’. Marsh is using the murder as a way to portray female sexual pleasure, outside of a marriage

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<sup>31</sup> This seems to operate in a similar way to the Whitechapel murders where the serious crime was overshadowed by a desire to discuss and condemn female sexual relations outside the confines of marriage structures, as evidenced in chapter one by the newspapers’ continuous discussions of their prostitution.

and reproduction, as unhuman and deplorable. The murder is described more as a transgression of female sexuality, a condemnation of the sexual desire of the single woman, than a crime.

Similarly, the crimes committed by the beetle figure are sexualised but in a manner that conveys contempt for a particular version of the 'odd woman': the lesbian. Throughout the novel, the homosexual identification of the beetle is frequently alluded to. W. C Harris and Dawn Vernooy (2012) highlight 'the novel's homosexual undercurrent' (p. 352), stating that the beetle's 'body is a site of deviant female-male sexual practices, bestiality, and homosexuality' (p. 353). The authors mention that 'characters who are assaulted by the Beetle (namely Holt, Marjorie and Lessingham) black out before they can consciously experience actual sexual violation' (p. 352). Many of these acts of 'sexual violation', importantly, are not depicted as crimes. The suggestions of rape that occur within the novel are never treated as violations of the law, but issues of sexuality and gender. For instance, when it is suggested that Holt is raped by the beetle, Holt states, when believing the creature to be female, that 'it was impossible for such a creature to be feminine' (p. 16), whilst, when he believed the figure to be male, he states how the beetle is 'a travesty of manhood' (p. 20). As the gender identity at this stage is ambiguous, Holt's statement suggests that if this act is committed by a woman it is not deemed feminine, whilst if it is committed by a man it goes against masculinity.

However, as the novel progresses it does confirm that, biologically, the beetle is female, rendering this act of rape a condemnation of the sexual desire of the 'odd woman' rather than 'a travesty of manhood'. Yet, it seems that throughout the novel, the beetle is also depicted as exhibiting the sexual desire of female homosexuality. What is most significant about Harris and Vernooy's statement is the suggestion that both the male and female victims of the beetle all 'black out' before any description of rape can be made. However, with the male victims this is not the case: while they do eventually lose consciousness some of their narrative does describe the violations committed upon them by the beetle. For instance, Holt's narrative describes how the beetle 'touched [his] lips...enveloped [his] face' and 'embraced [him] with its myriad legs' (p. 15). As well, later on in the narrative, he states that 'fingers were pressed into [his] cheeks, they were thrust into [his] mouth...the blubber lips were pressed against [his]' (p. 20). Even though the description is not obviously graphic, the allusions to rape and sexual assault are there. This, potentially, is because the beetle is actually female,

and, therefore, this particular act is not perceived as an act of homosexuality but female sexual desire which the novel is *not* denying, despite Kelly Hurley's (2004) interpretation, but actually uses the Gothic to define female heteronormative sexuality, outside of marriage, as something grotesque and horrific.

The act that *is* 'blacked out' in the narrative is the suggested rape of Marjorie Lindon by the beetle. In Marjorie's narrative she describes how the beetle follows her into her bedroom. In this instance, the descriptions of the potentially sexual violations committed are not discussed in the same way as Holt's is. Instead, the narrative explains how Marjorie climbs into bed in fear of the beetle and describes how the beetle 'was hovering above the bed' as it 'came nearer and nearer' (p. 163). The figure is described as 'weigh[ing] upon' her 'like a ton of lead' as she 'became conscious that it was progressing, slowly, yet surely, towards the head of the bed' (p. 163). When it 'began to find its way inside' the covers she 'swooned' and 'oblivion' had 'come to [her] aid' (p. 163). Unlike Holt's narrative, the suggestions of sexual assault are lesser and the 'black out' prevents any kind of narrative description. This difference is key as it shows that the narrative uses rape to expose and condemn heterosexual female desire of the single woman, whilst *denying* the possibilities of lesbianism. It ignores the fact that rape is a criminal act, and instead portrays it as a sexual transgression that condemns different variations of female sexual desire and the 'odd woman'. The fact that, as Harris and Vernooy state, homosexuality is 'confined to being experienced, felt, desired only by non-Westerners', that 'homosexual desire' is presented as 'something *out there*' (p. 357), shows a clear use of crime to convey an ideology of female sexuality where heteronormativity is upheld.

The condemnation of these female criminals for being 'outside of marriage' (Liggins, 2014: p. 1) is furthered by their lack of inclusion in any romance plots, unlike Ethel and Bessie. Instead the beetle is associated with revenge and the destruction of love, a 'vengeful fury of a jilted lover' (Karschay, 2015: p. 141). She does not exist within a romance narrative like Bessie or Mrs Musgrave, instead she seeks to end a relationship, under acts of jealousy and manipulation. In the end, the beetle kidnaps Marjorie in order to destroy her relationship with Paul Lessingham. However, the beetle's destruction of Marjorie, during which her femininity is removed by cutting off all her hair and dressing her in rags (p. 220/ 221), actually makes Marjorie more compatible with romance. The reason for this is because Marjorie is transformed from a 'New Woman' type to 'a position of normative femininity' (Margree, 2007: p. 78). The

beetle's only existence within the novel 'can, thus, be read as the compensation for the degenerate woman's frustrated attempts to find herself a sexual mate' (Karschay, 2015: p. 141). Her existence stops being a criminal one and becomes one of revenge over unrequited love. This is similar to the ways Ellen Howth is portrayed. Ellen, before the narrative, is widowed; while she seems to gain attention from Jack Haines she ignores him (3.22) and pressures Townsend to marry her in exchange for her silence about his crime. She states that 'there certainly is a way by which you can constrain me to silence' (3. 27); following with 'according to the law of England, on a capital charge, a wife may give no evidence against her husband' (3.27). She continues to state that she wants this marriage because Townsend has 'the *entrée* to the best society in England' (3.27). She does not have a love narrative but instead one of manipulation where she uses institutions of love in order to gain more status in society. She too, like the beetle, is removed from any true romantic relationship and presented as a transgressive, single woman who is incompatible with love. Their exclusion from any harmonious relationship highlight, unlike Bessie and Ethel, their potential for disruption. Their romantic relationships are seen as corrupt and dangerous, in a way to further condemn the unmarried woman.

To conclude, it becomes clear that Marsh portrays two different versions of the female criminal: one that is associated with the domestic space and traditional Victorian notions of passivity, and one that embodies the single woman's agency and autonomy with associations with the public sphere. While it could be suggested that this highlights Marsh's 'ideological ambivalence' (Margree, et.al, 2018: p. 3), by comparing the representations of these types of criminals it becomes clear that Marsh is siding with one type: upholding the values of Ethel and Bessie and the traditional version of the female gender. The female criminals associated with domesticity are protected and praised, whilst those that embody female independence are demonised and depicted as monsters. The female criminals who conform to notions of femininity are presented as literary heroines, beautiful and innocent with romantic relationships. The female criminals who do not conform and instead challenge various thresholds of conventional femininity through their 'odd woman' status, their lack of commitments to motherhood or marriage, or their expressions of agency, are seen as dangerous forms of female sexuality whilst the texts actively deny the notion of female homosexuality. It seems that throughout these novels, the rhetoric used to discuss his female characters elicits a similarity to the way journalists discussed the female victims of the

Whitechapel murders in that what is focused on more is the transgressive nature of the women rather than the crime itself. His representations of female crime, thus, convey a similar rhetoric to the ways the newspapers portrayed the murders committed by Jack the Ripper, whereby crime is used as a tool to protect the boundaries of gender and condemn those that threaten them. Marsh's representations of the female criminal become a way to uphold a version of femininity that is passive and confined to the domestic space, whilst validating heteronormativity and ideas of marriage and motherhood. This concept, overall, is reinforced by the following analysis of male criminality which is used as a way to differentiate these types of female character even further.

### Chapter 3

#### **‘He had stained his hands for her’<sup>32</sup>: masculinity and the female instigations of male violence**

The relationship between masculinity and male violence has been a key aspect of nineteenth-century gender studies. Violence has often been used as a marker to differentiate the sexes, as violence ‘was simply not seen as a feminine activity, not because women were assumed to be weaker than men, but due to the expectation that women were more passive and submissive’ (Shoemaker, 2001: p. 201). By comparison, before the nineteenth century, ‘violence for men was part of accepted codes of masculine behavior and offered them a means of affirming their gender identity’ (Shoemaker, 2001: p. 200); it became a way for men to ‘physically defend their integrity and reputation’ (p. 193). However, throughout the nineteenth century, male violence was receiving less justification in society and was not considered a prerequisite for manliness. Masculine qualities of ‘bravery, self-assertion [and] physical dominance’ (Wiener, 2004: p. 6) were no longer *vital* parts of male identity and violence was becoming a ‘relic of benighted ages and a practice of barbaric peoples’ (Wiener, 2004: p. 6). The attempt to disassociate the crimes of Jack the Ripper from masculinity fits into this societal perception, according to which the violence enacted became something detestable. Furthermore, this violence, especially by men, was receiving more punishment and regulation during the mid to late-nineteenth century. In political circles, new reforms and acts were introduced to prevent male violence against women, especially within marriages. For example, Lisa Sturridge (1994) mentions how ‘the *Divorce Act* of 1857...permitted judicial separations on the grounds of cruelty’ whilst the 1882 *Wife Beaters’ Act* ‘authorized flogging and public pillory of abusers’ (p. 1).

Despite this societal perception at the *fin de siècle*, Marsh’s novels seem to uphold and support the previous ideas of male violence which equated it to manliness. In Marsh’s texts, I argue that male violence is not portrayed as a criminal act but rather it is seen as justified behaviour that has been instigated, in some way, by female behaviour. However, this is depicted in three different ways, where male violence is either: (1) acts of chivalrous protection towards women who conform to feminine

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<sup>32</sup> Marsh, 2014: p. 32



expectations, (2) justified methods of dispelling the transgressive woman, or (3) acts of victimisation and desperation initiated by deviant women. These three representations of male violence evident in Marsh's novels expose the extent to which he uses crime as a superficial theme to engage with ideologies of gender; in this instance, an ideology that defines how men should act in relation to the transforming boundaries of the female gender. Male crime is used as a way to further condemn the transgressive unmarried woman and demonstrate her potential threat towards masculinity, whilst upholding and glorifying a version of femininity as domestic and passive. Furthermore, it seems that the masculinity of these male criminals is dependent upon how they treat these different types of women. As this chapter will show, these three presentations of crime work in a specific way to exemplify Marsh's claim that if a man uses violence to protect the domestic woman or fight against the transgressive woman then his manliness remains intact, whilst if a male character has the potential to threaten the domestic woman or succumbs to the powers of the transgressive woman then their masculinity becomes questionable. Marsh, thus, is using male violent crime as a way to define masculinity as the prevention of female societal progressions and power.

### **Hereward Musgrave and John Ferguson: male violence as justified acts of protection**

Before the nineteenth century, male violence was often used when 'their female acquaintances were insulted' as 'men felt compelled to affirm their honour and protect their female companions' (Shoemaker, 2001: p. 196). Marsh's novels, at times, seem to reiterate this concept, even though the end of the nineteenth century saw a change in perception of male violence. In his novels, male violence is, at times, portrayed as acts of protection towards the honour and reputation of their 'female acquaintances', women who embody domesticity and the passive, vulnerable ideals of women. In this instance, male violence is used as a way to reinforce a protective masculinity that differentiates the sexes, so that men become chivalrous heroes and women become vulnerable and in need of a saviour.

One example of this is Hereward Musgrave in *Mrs Musgrave – and Her Husband*. As argued in the previous chapter, Ethel Musgrave can be interpreted as a symbol of domesticity who murders Dr Byam out of self-defence. Once Hereward

learns of Ethel's transgression, rather than informing the police, Hereward seeks to guard her from the punishments of the justice system and defend her reputation as the innocent domestic Victorian woman. As Johan Höglund (2018) states, 'Hereward is deeply disturbed by the discovery, but never seems to assume that it is his duty to bring his wife to justice' (p. 52). Hereward shields her from the condemning newspaper reports that highlight the police advancements upon Ethel and disposes of her murder weapon 'while crossing the Channel' (p. 7). In addition, Hereward uses violence to defend Ethel from the advancements of Charlecote, an amateur detective figure who has vowed 'to leave no stone unturned to avenge' Byam's murderer (p. 13). Hereward, in a violent confrontation with Charlecote, ends up murdering him in an attempt to prevent the detective from finding Ethel (p. 31). However, this is not deemed a deplorable crime but an act of protection. Not only does Hereward state that 'he had not meant murder; he had done no murder' (p. 31) but that he had not done it for himself 'he had done it for her', that 'he had stained his hands for her' (p. 32). The narrative seems to justify Hereward's actions by the physical descriptions of both characters. In the conversation that precedes the murder, the narrative seeks to elevate Hereward's character, by establishing that 'the contrast between the appearance of the two men was striking' (p. 27). The narrative describes Hereward as 'a loveable looking man' whose 'face recalled a dog's' (p. 27), portraying a sense of loyalty, whereas Charlecote is described as 'slight, malicious and agile'; 'unless appearances belied him, he was cruel' and looked like he had 'no sentimental side' (p. 27). It seems that the text seeks to represent Hereward as a loveable protector of a woman whose 'life has been a continual tragedy' (p. 28), whilst Charlecote is portrayed as a character to be disliked for pursuing Ethel. As Höglund points out, 'the reader is never encouraged to sympathise with the amateur detective or to be cheered by his pursuit of justice' (p. 57). By setting up this narrative beforehand, that Musgrave was a 'loveable' character and Charlecote was almost unjustifiably cruel to his wife, it portrays the murder as reasonable. The crime becomes an act of masculine protection and chivalry towards a woman that conforms to traditional Victorian standards of femininity, rather than true illegal murder.

Furthermore, at the end of the novel Hereward 'adds infanticide to their list of crimes' (Höglund, 2018: p. 58) in another act of defence towards his wife and daughter. In order to evade the justice system that seeks to condemn and ruin his wife's reputation, Hereward suggests that the family commit suicide together. As the police

were 'knocking at the bedroom door...loud authoritative, threatening...of one who would solicit...one who insists upon an instant entrance' (p. 43), Hereward convinces Ethel to use 'a small collapsible tube' which 'contained the gift of sudden death' (p. 40); yet they also take their new-born child with them. While this is a crime, the ending of the text seems to convey a sense of sympathy for the family. The text ends with: 'when the officers of the law came in they were dead, the husband, the wife, the child, in each other's arms. About them hovered a strong smell of violets. A tiny tube lay close beside the bed upon the floor' (p. 44). In this act, Hereward remains in control of the situation and is able to further protect his wife, and child, from the justice system. The ending elicits a sense of sympathy and we are supposed to feel empathy for their deaths, with the text depicting it as a shame to lose a family that conforms to the ideas of patriarchy. Hereward's crimes, thus, become acceptable but regrettable, in that his protective act that saves Ethel from incarceration in prisons or asylums concludes that death is a better option for her than a ruined reputation. Therefore, when Mr Musgrave commits these crimes they become acts of authoritative, patriarchal masculinity, paramount towards ensuring the reputation of his wife is protected.

The crimes committed by John Ferguson in *The Goddess: a Demon* are portrayed in the same manner: as acts of protection to women associated with the domestic space. Like Hereward, Ferguson's violent acts are portrayed as masculine responses to defend the reputation of his 'female acquaintance' (Shoemaker, 2001: p. 196), Bessie Moore. From the beginning, when Bessie enters Ferguson's bedroom, he is infatuated with her. This infatuation causes Ferguson to commit a series of criminal actions in order to protect her from being seen as a guilty suspect. First, upon discovering Lawrence's body, Ferguson was less interested in his friend's mutilated corpse and more pre-occupied with searching the room for evidence that pointed to Bessie. He finds 'a pair of white kid gloves' that belong to a woman, as well as, a photograph that included 'the face of one [he] knew' (p. 23), supposedly Bessie's. He makes the decision to 'put them in [his] pocket' (p. 23) and hide them from the investigation. Here, much like Hereward Musgrave, he tampers with evidence purely to protect Bessie from suspicion. The narrative does not depict it as a criminal action, in fact it is not really perceived as a negative action at all but one of protecting the innocent child-like woman.

Second, throughout the narrative Ferguson seems to engage in numerous acts of violence. For instance, he assaults a police officer, sending him 'spinning down the

passage until the wall brought him to a standstill' (p. 66). He does this to protect Bessie as she tries to confess to the murder. Ferguson's violent streak is also evidenced through his treatment of Tom Moore, Bessie's brother. When trying to clear Bessie's name Ferguson interrogates her brother, who is also a type of criminal figure having 'robbed [Bessie] of hundreds and hundreds of pounds' (p. 60). However, when trying to get information out of Tom, Ferguson resorts to violence and threats in order to get it. When Tom tries to leave the room, Ferguson has 'to give him a gentle hint in order to detain him', so that 'he winced under [Ferguson's] touch like a hound which fears punishment' (p. 61). At the end of their conversation, the narrative states that Ferguson 'shook' Tom Moore in an attempt to frighten him (p. 63). He engages in these displays of violence in order to protect Bessie, the domestic vulnerable woman, from those that wish to ruin her reputation, and by association his honour. Ferguson's actions are not considered to be criminal, instead his violence is seen as chivalrous. They are justified as actions to save and preserve the reputation of women associated with domesticity and validate patriarchal masculine structures suggesting that women are vulnerable figures in need of male protection.

**'One of those creatures who bring shame upon our common manhood'<sup>33</sup>: un-masculine male criminals**

In aiding this interpretation that some of the male crimes in these novels are seen as justified acts of protection towards domestic women, the texts also condemn the crimes of men who seek to threaten these types of women as un-masculine behaviour. For instance, this can be seen through the character of Dr Byam in *Mrs Musgrave*. As Johan Höglund (2018) points out, Byam's position in the text is slightly ambiguous. On the one hand, the text suggests that Byam and Ethel engaged in a consensual relationship. As Höglund states, 'Charlecote maintains that Ethel had been Byam's mistress for an extended period', a statement that 'the novel never debunks' (p. 58). As Charlecote states: 'the chief fault with my friend [Byam] had...was that he should never have suffered himself to be lured into the toils of Ethel (p. 29). However, on the other hand, it is also suggested that Byam manipulated and blackmailed Ethel into having a sexual relationship with him. For instance, Hereward states that:

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<sup>33</sup> Marsh, 2014: p. 27

'suppose she had been Byam's mistress it was because she had been forced to sacrifice her body by what had been practically a not to be resisted pressure...was it not possible for her to atone for involuntary prostitution?' (p. 33). This is furthered by the fact that Ethel murders Byam because he offers to keep silent about her father's crimes if she 'would come to him in his bed one night' (p. 18). The text might not be 'debunking' the suggestion that Ethel was Byam's mistress, but it does convey that her potentially previous transgressions were the cause of Byam's blackmailing her for sex. However, this suggestion of sexual exploitation is never directly stated in the text, and Byam is not described as a criminal in this respect. Instead, he is described as 'bring[ing] shame upon...manhood' (p. 28) for his treatment of Ethel. His suggested sexual blackmail, of a woman that conforms to standards of femininity, is described as unmanly, the act of 'a loathsome brute' who was 'bent on her destruction' (p. 27-28), rather than a crime.

Tom Moore in *The Goddess* is also depicted in a similarly un-masculine aspect but for a different type of crime. The text states that Tom 'robbed [Bessie] of hundreds and hundreds of pounds' (p. 60). His character is described as a 'vagabond', a 'cold-blooded' man who preys on a woman that 'has done all that she possible could for' him (p. 60-63). However, his action is perceived as something un-masculine, rather than a criminal offence. Ferguson's narrative states that Tom, in a fight, would be a 'better match for a woman than a man' (p. 61), placing a question upon his strength, an important Victorian masculine value. In addition, at the end of their encounter, Ferguson is violent towards him but in a 'gentle' manner, however, 'he [Tom] seemed to be under the impression that [Ferguson] had murdered him' (p. 63). This associates Tom with melodrama and the dramatics, whilst actually criticising his ability to engage in violence with another man and to defend himself. Furthermore, Ferguson comments that Tom 'would not be allowed to exist' (p. 62). In the note section of the Valancourt edition of *The Goddess*, written by Minna Vuohelainen (2010), it states that this comment alludes to 'a rhetoric of the eugenic movement' (p. 172), a rhetoric which 'maintained that unworthy members of the human race should not be allowed to reproduce or even to exist' (p. 172). This suggests that Ferguson's belief that Tom is un-manly places him within the characterisation of degeneration. However, rather than his theft and manipulation being seen as purely a crime, it is seen as something unmanly, and presents him as lacking any strength or courage due to his manipulation of a 'young, unprotected girl' (p. 62). This suggests that while male violence that

functions to protect the domestic woman validates masculinity, the opposite, actions that threaten these women, are perceived to be un-masculine behaviour.

### **Weapons of mass destruction and murder clubs: fighting female transgression through male violence**

However, in contrast to this, the selected texts also represent male characters whose violence against women is excused as a fight against or response to the actions of transgressive unmarried women. The selected texts seem to set up the conclusion that male violence towards women is a justified masculine endeavour as long as the woman has deviated from the acceptable codes of femininity. In *The Beetle* Sydney Atherton, 'the closest thing in this novel to a representation of normative masculinity' (Allin, 2015: p. 120), is intent on committing mass murder as throughout the novel he is creating weapons of mass destruction to be used upon colonised subjects. In Atherton's narrative he states that he is building the weapon on 'behalf of [his] native land' (p. 94). Even though this alludes to his future intent to commit a *form of* murder – akin to the crimes of the beetle who commits extreme sacrifices of white women (p. 199-200) – his actions are not perceived as amounting to something illegal but justified acts of heroism for the imperialistic endeavours of his country. Atherton states that he 'goes to plan murder – legalised murder – on the biggest scale...a weapon which will make war not only an affair of a single campaign but of a single half-hour' (p. 63). Atherton describes his experiments as 'sublime', 'splendid murder', by using the 'finest destructive agents' (p. 63). This desire to develop weapons for mass murder is not associated with the potential to be illegal; it is not even depicted as crossing the threshold between what is moral or immoral. Instead a patriotic action, justified as a form of intelligence that we are supposed to admire.

It seems, however, that the text is suggesting this patriotic act of mass murder is to be fixated upon one particular type of colonised subject: the transgressive, foreign woman, as the only character we are introduced to who originates from a colonised space is the beetle figure. It is, therefore, reasonable to argue that Atherton's creation of the weapon of mass destruction is directed at colonised women. This is effectively evidenced through his desire to use a cat to experiment on. Not only have cats 'been associated with women from the beginning' (Rogers, 2006: p. 114) but they are known to be 'god-like' symbols of 'ancient Egypt', the place where the beetle has come from

(p. 16). Katherine Rogers (2006) explains how the cat had a 'high place in ancient Egypt' (p. 63) particularly through the figure of 'Bastet' (p. 15). Bastet was an Egyptian 'goddess of maternity and female sexual allure' (p. 114), who also resembled the appearance of a cat (p. 15). By using the cat to experiment the weapon on, Atherton is symbolically foreshadowing how the weapon will be used upon Egyptian women, particularly sexually transgressive women like the beetle figure. Therefore, his weapon exists not just for imperial enterprise but also for the advancements of the superiority of British masculinity. To further this analysis, Rogers states that 'cats are commonly suspected of complicity with the devil' (p. 9); the beetle is often described as the devil ('she was...rather a devil than a human being' (p. 200)). Also, Rogers states that there has been a lot of superstition around cats in Egypt, where 'at annual ceremonies cats were burned alive to expel evil from the community' (p. 9). This becomes reminiscent of the beetle's 'human sacrifices' but of 'a young and lovely Englishwoman' (p. 199). Therefore, Atherton's desire to commit murder is not seen as intent for criminal action, but a patriotic fight against the colonised, transgressive, unmarried woman; it becomes a justified act to uphold patriarchy that is suggested to be endorsed by his country. His possible future murder is, thus, 'legalised' and presented as a method of removing female deviance and restoring the boundaries of gender.

This idea of male crime being a justified method to "dispose" of deviant women,<sup>34</sup> is also suggested through the character of Reginald Townsend in *The Crime and the Criminal*. As previously stated, the narrative mainly revolves around a crime of misunderstanding. It is not Ellen who is killed in the text but Louise O'Donnell, who was murdered by Reginald Townsend. Reginald's murder of Louise, who was his 'pregnant and troublesome mistress' (Vuohelainen, 2015: p. 61), is portrayed not truly as a criminal act, but rather an act of removing a deviant woman who transgresses the boundaries of gender. In the murder scene, Louise O'Donnell is described as 'unreasonable' and 'too affectionate' towards him (2.10). Townsend states that 'when a man's love does grow less, almost invariably the woman is at fault' (2.10). She is described as an irritation and a burden that deserved to be punished. Townsend's narrative describes the murder as being her 'fault', that she brought it upon herself for

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<sup>34</sup> This concept can be related to the Whitechapel murders, as there have been suggestions that the Ripper's crimes were acts of removing deviant women from the streets of the city. Andrew Smith (2007) highlights this view by presenting a quotation from D. G Halstead, a doctor at the time of the murders, who states that the Ripper's murders 'must have been...an almost moral urge to purify the East End of these plague-bearing harpies' (p. 115)

being too forward. He even insults her dignity through his description of her corpse as an 'ugly heap' (2.10). She becomes the primary cause of her own murder. This conveys a similar rhetoric to the Whitechapel murders, with the newspapers suggested the crimes were a result of the female victims' own transgressions. Townsend's violence towards her is, thus, depicted as being out of his control, as something instigated by female transgression, so that she is the guilty party. The text portrays it as a form of justified violence in a fight to control deviant women.

To further this, Townsend's violent crime was 'in honour of the club': 'the club' being a 'murder club' (2.10). This club seems to exist as an exaggerated version of the men's club that existed in Victorian Britain. Elaine Showalter (1991) states that 'a significant aspect of the construction of masculinity was the institution "Clubland", the network of men's clubs which served all social classes' (p. 11). Showalter also states that 'Clubland reinforced the spatial as well as the social boundaries separating men and women' and was 'aggressively and urbanely heterosexual', so that 'the clubs were the stronghold and headquarters of opposition to women's suffrage' (p. 11). Therefore, in *The Crime and the Criminal*, when a member of the 'murder club' – a club that housed thirteen male members who each draw slips of paper, whoever draws the slip with 'crimson letters', the words 'the honour of the club' is expected to kill someone (2.10) – makes the suggestion that 'it should always be a woman that is killed' (2.16) this club transforms into an exaggerated version of the traditional men's club that sought to challenge the women's movement. With this in mind, when Townsend murders Louise for the 'honour of the club' it becomes a way of dispelling female power. The text seems to justify this club not only through its associations with luxury and privilege but also the fact that the members of the club are never punished by the police or condemned for their behaviour. Furthermore, it also seems that the informant of Townsend's crime, Pedarvon, is criticised by other members of the group for telling the police of Townsend's murder (4. 39/40). The fact that Townsend commits suicide in the end (3.41) gives him ultimate control over his own fate and allows him to escape the justice system; this suggests that the text is approving of his murder of Louise as a justified removal of the deviant woman and affirms an exaggerated segregation of the genders.



**‘He had ceased to be a haunted man’<sup>35</sup>: masculinity and challenging the transgressive woman**

While the crimes of some male characters (Ferguson and Hereward) are seen as acts of protection and others (Townsend and Atherton) are portrayed as the justified destruction of transgressive women, some male crimes in these texts are also depicted as victimised acts at the hands of rebellious women. However, it seems that the men who try and fight against this victimisation and power from the female are still perceived as masculine, whilst those who succumb to the oppression are deemed un-masculine. This is a similar rhetoric to the one conveyed in the reports of the Whitechapel murders, as the representations of the Ripper suspects suggested that part of masculinity involved challenging and suppressing the transgressive powers of femininity.

The crimes of Thomas Tennant in *The Crime and the Criminal*, for instance, are depicted as acts caused by Ellen. As previously mentioned, the text begins with Tennant and Ellen’s argument during which she subsequently falls from the train, resulting in Tennant being imprisoned for her supposed murder. When the narrative describes Tennant’s supposed crime, it is represented as being caused by Ellen’s transgressive, and violent, behaviour. The text sets up before the accident that Ellen was to blame, stating that ‘she had been drinking’ and that she was engaging in ‘violence’ (1.1). Once the accident has happened Tennant states that ‘to the best of [his] knowledge and belief she had brought the fate upon herself’ and that ‘[he] had nothing to do with it’ (1.1). Tennant’s narrative sets up a rhetoric of victim blaming, akin to the newspaper narratives of the Whitechapel murders. In a similar strand to the female victims of the Ripper murders, Ellen is accused of depending upon alcohol and being overly aggressive and unfeminine. The accident is seen to be her fault, rather than Tennant’s. At the beginning, when Tennant believes he has killed Ellen, he becomes an un-masculine figure. He is bed-ridden and reduced to illness (1.6), because Ellen has made him believe he committed murder. However, as he begins to realise the victim is not Ellen he starts to fight back. He speaks up for himself and asserts that he is innocent; a change that seems to associate him with masculinity, as the text states:

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<sup>35</sup> Marsh, 2007: p. 274

Certainly Mr. Tennant had become on a sudden a different man. He had lost his awkwardness. He was no longer ill at ease. He held himself erect. His eyes were clear, his glance unwavering. His bearing was simple--the simplicity of the man was what struck one first of all--yet assured (4. 33).

As soon as he begins to challenge the control Ellen has placed over him and fight against her ability to cause him to believe he has committed crimes, he becomes masculine again. In this instance, Tennant's crime is perceived to be a victimised act, however, when he fights against this female power he is repositioned as something manly.

This seems to be a similar case to the representations of Paul Lessingham in *The Beetle*. Throughout the novel Lessingham's relationship to the beetle 'remains shrouded in mystery' (Karschay, 2015: p. 153). However, the beetle seems to have an extreme effect upon Lessingham, in that he 'is sapped of his masculine traits of leadership and will power' (Karschay, 2015: p. 150). As the novel progresses, we learn more about the mysterious relationship between the beetle figure and Lessingham, and why she wishes to inflict revenge upon him. In the narrative of the detective figure, Augustus Champnell, Lessingham explains how he met the beetle and suffered literal and mental 'imprisonment' under her supernatural powers (p. 193-201). Lessingham states that during his travels to Cairo in Egypt, he is enchanted by a woman's singing (p. 195). In the presence of a character he called the 'Woman of Songs' (p. 196), he drank 'some poisonous concoction' (p. 195) and was 'robbed' of his 'consciousness' (p. 196). He explains how this figure had some kind of 'magnetic influence' over him and he 'felt powerless in her grasp' (p. 196). Lessingham is then 'imprisoned' and it is suggested that she sexually assaults him, as he describes her 'kisses' as 'nauseous' to him (p. 197). He states that during his imprisonment he witnesses an 'orgie of nameless horrors' (p. 199). Under this 'cult of the obscene deity', they offer 'human sacrifices' of what is suggested to be white women (p. 199). Lessingham states that from witnessing this horror it enabled him to 'burst the bonds which bound' (p. 199) him and fight the beetle until he was able to escape. He ends up defending himself against the manipulative female figure. However, throughout the novel Lessingham's masculinity is still in question. He is described as embodying a 'weakness', a 'childish-fury', a 'frenzied' voice often 'struggling for mastery' (p. 39) whenever the beetle is

mentioned. One could argue that this is because he never reported the beetle's crimes. He fails to ever report the crimes to another person, detective or not. He keeps these murderers, and suggested rapes, to himself. While he states that after the trauma he lost his memory and seemed to have severe mental health issues (p. 201/202), throughout his life, as the memories return, he never reports it, essentially placing a question on the extent of his involvement in the crimes. Yet, at the end of the novel, *after* Lessingham reports his experiences to a detective figure and he helps in destroying the beetle, his masculinity is restored. As the text states, he 'has not since been troubled by his old tormentor. He has ceased to be a haunted man' (p. 274). This, along with Tennant's representation, seems to suggest that Marsh depicts some male crimes as an act of victimisation caused by deviant unmarried women, where the men are required to fight against in order to restore their masculinity.

In *The Beetle*, both Paul Lessingham and Robert Holt are victimised by the Beetle by either hearing her singing through an open window or physically crossing the threshold of a window into the monster's lair. In the case of Paul Lessingham, during a trip to Cairo he is 'saluted by sounds' from 'an open window'; 'sounds of music and singing' (p. 194) which eventually tempts him to enter the building and eventually succumb to the seductions of the beetle figure. Similarly, Robert Holt, who opens the narrative in a particular state of 'overpowering giddiness' (p. 9) where he wanders the streets of London seeking shelter in order to escape 'a rain like mist' (p. 8). During his desperation, he stumbles upon an empty suburban house with the ground floor window 'raised about six inches' (p. 10). He makes the decision to climb through the window and trespass into the domestic space; a space we soon learn belongs to the beetle. However, Holt's act is not treated as burglary or a crime, instead it becomes an issue of gender. The window threshold becomes a pinnacle point where gender status is determined, as it is not just a barrier between the inside and outside worlds but also a barrier between acceptable and challenging gender behaviour. For Bessie, in *The Goddess*, the window, and the movement over its threshold, exposes her to ideas of conformity, whilst with Lessingham and Holt this same movement exposes them to deviant women that they are required to fight against to restore their masculinity. Marsh uses the window and his characters movement across its boundary as a way to further highlight what is expected of the genders. It is used to convey that women should not follow the feminist movement that occupies the end of the century and instead conform to notions of domesticity and vulnerability, whilst men are

required to fight back against transgressive women in order to uphold the power of their masculinity. Both Lessingham and Holt are exposed to the victimisations of the beetle figure once they cross the threshold of the open window. They are both assaulted and emasculated by the beetle. However, in the end, these two male characters have different outcomes: Lessingham succeeds in fighting back, as mentioned above, and is able to remain in the narrative whilst restoring his masculinity. On the other hand, Holt does not succeed in fighting back and therefore has a very different ending to Lessingham.

Minna Vuohelainen (2006) highlights the extent to which the beetle manages to “un-man” many of the male characters in *The Beetle* through mesmerism. Vuohelainen states that through the ‘hypnotic influence’ of the beetle ‘lower-middle-class clerks become burglars, retiring young ladies don male costumes in public and are subjected to implied sexual acts on trains...eminent politicians are reduced to unmanned sex toys’ (p. 96). Characters like Robert Holt for instance are transformed into un-masculinised victims forced to commit somewhat violent crimes by a transgressive woman. The beetle figure forces Holt to break into Paul Lessingham’s home, by way of mesmerism. Not only is he told to ‘practice the arts of being a thief’ (p. 29), belittling the severity of the crime and associating it with entertainment, but, Holt is placed under a ‘spell’ (p. 32) or bewitchment to commit the crime. The text states that Holt existed under a kind of ‘dual personality’ (p. 32), being both himself and someone else. It states that he was under the ‘spell’ of his ‘tyrannical oppressor’ (p. 32), and that he was ‘not only incapable of resistance’ but was ‘incapable of distinctly formulating the desire to offer resistance’ (p. 31). When committing the crime Holt is under the complete control of the beetle figure. He is forced into the crime by the transgressive female character; running parallel to the rhetoric suggested by the newspaper narratives of the Whitechapel murders that male crime is caused by the female gender. In this, his criminal guilt becomes ambiguous as the crime is not portrayed as his but hers. She uses transgressive methods of manipulation and the supernatural to cause him to commit crimes.

Yet, unlike Lessingham, Holt’s masculinity is never restored as he portrays an inability to defend himself against this female power. Holt’s masculinity is already questioned at the beginning of the novel when he is searching for a place to shelter from the rain: the narrative describes him as akin to a ‘drunken man’ (p. 9), with an ‘overpowering giddiness’ who was acting in ‘a kind of frenzy’ (p.9). Holt states that he

'had neither strength nor courage left' (p. 9), two key elements of masculinity as outlined by John Tosh (2005). But this lack of manliness seems to become intensified as the novel progresses and Holt's victimisation worsens. Holt does not succeed in fighting back and, therefore, the text has to remove him. In the end, Holt 'finally expir[es] in a squalid East End lodging house' (Vuohelainen, 2015: p. 20), and the narrative describes him as:

A...deplorable spectacle...I doubt if there was an ounce of flesh on the whole of his body. His cheeks and the sockets of his eyes were hollow. The skin was drawn tightly over his cheek bones,—the bones themselves were staring through. Even his nose was wasted, so that nothing but a ridge of cartilage remained. I put my arm beneath his shoulder and raised him from the floor; no resistance was offered by the body's gravity,—he was as light as a little child (p. 257/258).

In comparison to Lessingham, Holt's inability to challenge the beetle's powers renders him un-masculine and unfit to remain in the text. This suggests that while some male crimes are acts of oppression caused by deviant women, masculinity is dependent upon their ability to prevent these societal female powers and advancements.

This is a similar representation to Edwin Lawrence in *The Goddess*, who like Holt is mesmerised by a transgressive woman to commit crimes. Once the text reveals Edwin Lawrence's involvements in the murder, the extent of his responsibility is ambiguous. At the end of the text Lawrence admits to killing his brother, stating:

I see things – I hear things...There's a face which looks into mine – a face all cut and slashed and sliced into ribbons; and as the blood streams down the cheek bones which are laid all bare, its teeth grin at me...I strike at it with both my fists...but I can't knock it away; it won't go, it keeps on being there (p. 149).

Even though it is never directly stated, it does suggest that he murdered Phillip Lawrence, but the narrative strongly emphasises the control the goddess has over him. The sentence 'I can't knock it away; it won't go, it keeps on being there', suggests a presence that has a persistent control over him, arguably the goddess. This is reinforced by his later statement that the goddess has 'got [him] by the throat; bought

[him] body and soul' (p. 149). The narrative is never fully clear as to whether it was Edwin or the goddess that killed Phillip; however, the above quotation and the allusions to the goddess's strong control, suggests that it was Edwin under the manipulation of the goddess. The male criminal, thus, becomes a victim to the strong manipulations of transgressive women. His responsibility for the crime is entirely ambiguous, whilst placing blame on the deviant female figure for being seductive and controlling, forcing men to commit acts of violence. Yet, the fact that Lawrence gives into the Goddess – "Suddenly throwing out his arms he cried, in a loud voice, ' Take me, for I am yours, O thou Goddess of the Scarlet Hands.'" (p. 164) – renders him un-masculine as his actions 'could hardly have been perfectly sane...it was not a possession' of 'a perfectly healthy-minded man' (p. 166). This mental instability of Lawrence is mentioned by Minna Vuohelainen (2010), who states that Lawrence 'associates his condition with psychic persecution by the Goddess and is haunted by auditory hallucinations' (p. xxix). In these instances, it becomes clear that at times Marsh depicts male crime as not criminal acts, but behaviour caused and controlled by transgressive female characters. While this oppression would initially suggest a lack of manliness, this is only the case if the men do not defend themselves. Instead, characters like Lessingham and Tennant, who battle against the powers of these women, are allowed to remain in the text and restore their masculinity, whilst those that do not are removed from the text and rendered un-masculine.

In conclusion, Marsh's male crime narratives in these four texts become superficial as they convey no criminological purpose. Instead, much like the ways he represents female criminals, crime becomes a tool to express concerns over transgressions of gender and highlight a particular ideological stance in regards to how men should respond to the advancing powers of middle-class women at the *fin de siècle*. Crimes committed by male characters in these novels are predominantly depicted to be instigated by women. It creates a noteworthy similarity to the newspaper reports of the Whitechapel murders, in that both seem to demonstrate that masculinity involves the suppression of female power and transgression. In these four novels, male violence becomes a justified action to either protect the reputations of domestic and passive women or destroy the women who transgress these notions and exhibit agency. However, Marsh seems to be suggesting that men who threaten women that embody conventional femininity or male characters who fail to fight against the over-bearing powers of deviant women are defined as un-masculine. This shows that the

dominant theme of crime in his novels is actually redundant as Marsh is using it as a way to claim that the prevention of the increasing female freedom outside of the home should be a vital part of masculinity, rather than discussing the nature of crime in the *fin de siècle*.

## Chapter 4

### **'The police are famous for their blunders'<sup>36</sup>: the inadequacies of male detective figures and their control of gender boundaries**

Clare Clarke (2014), in her explorations of nineteenth-century detective fiction outside of the canon, states that 'it has long since been a critical orthodoxy to assert that the late-Victorian detective...emerges as a new kind of hero invented to assuage the types of fears common to the predominately middle-class urban readership' (p. 7). The detective figure, thus, existed as an emblem of reassurance, who sought to restore chaos back to conservative and conventional norms. However, Clarke outlines how 'the fictional detective was a more ambiguous figure...' (p. 8) than this view conveys. In her study Clarke outlines how the detective figure has often been represented in the opposite manner, as an inadequate figure that fails, in various ways, to fully restore traditionalist notions. Clarke explores texts of the late-nineteenth century that:

demonstrate that even investigation-centred stories from this period often offer partial, problematic or failed resolutions to the crimes that they portray, where the stories questions remain unanswered, where detectives are implicated in the crime, are unsuccessful or even criminal (p. 10).

The literary representations of the failures of the detective to restore conventional order, or resolve the crime, are exhibited through the Whitechapel murders. This case became notorious for the inability of the police to solve the crime and apprehend the murderer; because of this the police force and detective branches were criticised as incompetent (see: Clarke, 2014: p. 11). While Clarke outlines this connection to the Ripper murders, she does not discuss in detail the significance of *Marsh's* representations of the male detective figure towards her theory.

In this chapter, I will argue that *Marsh's* crime discourse becomes redundant through the primary inadequacy of the male detectives that occupy these four novels: their lack of focus upon apprehending the criminal and their preoccupation with monitoring and restoring the boundaries of gender. By comparing five male detectives:

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<sup>36</sup> Marsh, 2010: p. 79



Augustus Champnell, Mr Holman, Ferguson, Stewart Trevannion and Mr Charlecote, it becomes clear that Marsh uses these figures as a way to control gender definitions even further as their positions within criminal law become superficial. Some of these figures exist to investigate the actions of the transgressive woman; they exist to detect her ability to disrupt the boundaries of gender and prevent her from succeeding in this action. Whereas the detective characters who seek to apprehend women of conventional femininity or the investigatory figures who have the potential to expose instabilities within patriarchal structures are undermined, condemned or entirely removed from the texts. In a similar strand of thought to the representations of the detectives of the Whitechapel murders – where gender stereotypes often governed their investigations - Marsh's male detectives expose further the inherent preoccupation with gender at the heart of his crime narratives.

**'The Great Augustus Champnell'<sup>37</sup>: preventing the Beetle's disruptions to gender boundaries**

During the *fin de siècle* there was an increase in the use of private detective figures within crime fiction. Haia Shpayer Makov (2011) highlights this, stating that not only did the private detective 'far outnumber' police detectives in fiction 'but that these texts accorded private sleuths a much greater role in society' (p. 165). Marsh conforms to this literary frequency as his most popular novel *The Beetle* introduces us to Augustus Champnell, a private detective figure that seems to express a level of power in the narrative. As Paul Lessingham states: 'if there is a man who can be backed to find a needle in any amount of haystacks it is the great Augustus' (p. 214). Champnell seems to portray the powerful skills detectives of this period were equated with; his strong observation skills and his control over the entire narrative (as we learn in the final chapter that Champnell has had the authority of organising the entire narrative) seem to accentuate his position as 'the great Augustus'.

However, in reality, these descriptions are superficial as his true power lies not in the world of criminal law but in the restoration of gender boundaries, as his main purpose in the novel is to restore order to the disruptions of gender that are being caused by the beetle. His main function is to apprehend this beetle figure and bring

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<sup>37</sup> Marsh, 2007: p. 214

the novel to a conventional end. The beetle is portrayed in the text as a threat to the British Victorian ideals of masculinity and femininity. This threat seems to come to a peak through two instances: the reduction of Paul Lessingham's manliness and the transformation of Marjorie from feminine to masculine. The character of Augustus Champnell is introduced to control these two particular threats to gender and apprehend the female, foreign transgressor of gender. In relation to the former instance, throughout the novel Lessingham is reduced to a 'hysterical' (p. 249), essentially feminine, character whenever the beetle is in his presence. When Lessingham recruits Champnell's help he states that his guidance is needed to ensure that he does not lose his manhood. For instance, Lessingham states 'I want you to effectually protect me from the terrorism which threatens once more to overwhelm my mental and my physical powers – which bids fair to destroy my intellect, my career, my life, my all' (p. 207). Here, Lessingham's focus is on the potential destruction of his own manliness due to this female transgressor. His plea for Champnell to help him stabilise his 'mental and physical powers' suggests that the beetle has the potential to reduce him to an instable and hysterical mentality, whilst also reducing him to weakness – probably alluding to the beetle's powers of mental and physical control. Furthermore, his direct reference to the masculine attributes of 'intellect' and 'career' suggests that part of his fear is that the beetle could affect his reputation as a masculine man and reduce him to something feminine. By recruiting Champnell, not to apprehend a crime but, to help and 'protect' his manliness Marsh suggests that Champnell's purpose is to 'protect' Lessingham's masculinity by destroying the 'terrorism', or the female transgressor, that could cause the downfall of his manliness. He functions as a protector, not of the law, but of masculinity.

This idea that Champnell is in the narrative to prevent the transgressive woman's ability to disrupt boundaries of gender is reinforced through the nature of Marjorie's abduction. In the novel, this beetle figure – in a revenge plot against Lessingham – abducts Marjorie with the aim of sacrificing her. However, in order to abduct her and escape unnoticed the beetle removes Marjorie's hair and dresses her in rags to, successfully, pass her off as a man. The beetle's success in doing this suggests that she has the potential to make gender superficial. It suggests that the beetle figure can turn something feminine into masculine. She can completely disrupt British notions of gender. In this respect Champnell's purpose is to save Marjorie and restore her "proper" gender. This is highlighted in the following quotation:

The notion of a gently-nurtured girl being at the mercy of that fiend incarnate, possessed...of all the paraphernalia of horror and of dread, was one which caused me tangible shrinking's of the body...the helpless girl who had already endured so much, endured, perhaps, that to which death would have been preferred – shut up in that rattling, jolting box on wheels, along with that diabolical Asiatic, with the enormous bundle, which was but the lurking place of nameless terrors... The blood in my veins tingled at the thought of such a woman as Miss Lindon being in the power of such a monster... To have had a share in rescuing the unfortunate girl, and in the destruction of her noxious persecutor, would have been reward enough for me (p. 248).

In this quotation, Champnell's description of events shows that he is not focusing on the crime of abduction or assault, but how the beetle has challenged the markers of gender. This is evident through his constant repetition of the term 'girl', which suggests a particular anxiety within his narrative. It suggests that he wants to reinforce the female gender of Marjorie in an attempt to disassociate her from the masculine nature that the beetle has given to her. Furthermore, the associations between the term 'girl' and words like 'helpless', 'gently-nurtured' and 'unfortunate' are foreshadowing Marjorie's change in identity at the end of the novel as the trauma causes her to become a figure of vulnerability conforming to expectations at the time. It becomes clear that Champnell functions to reverse the gender disruption the beetle has caused and stabilise the British Victorian notions of gender.

Therefore, Champnell functions not only to protect gender boundaries but to control and subdue the transgressive woman that has the potential to disrupt them. Champnell's role is to ensure that the text reaches a conventional ending in regards to the differentiations of the genders. Even though, in the end, the beetle is destroyed *by accident* and the actual destruction of the figure remains ambiguous, he succeeded in removing the transgressive female and keeping Marjorie within the framework of marriage (p. 273-276).

## Mr Holman and his opinions of the female prostitute

Even though Mr Holman – introduced to readers in *The Crime and the Criminal* – is different to Champnell as he is a police detective, their similarities emerge as Marsh uses both to detect deviant women, rather than for any criminological purpose. Throughout the text, Mr Holman is depicted as an insufficient detective figure through his focus on policing gender. Like Champnell, Holman never captures the criminal figure. Instead, even though he repeatedly states ‘I am a detective. You are my prisoner’ (1.9), this authority is superficial as no character is ever truly his prisoner: Tennant is innocent of the crime he is accused of and Townsend commits suicide. Holman, therefore, never restores justice. Furthermore, during the pursuit of Townsend, after an altercation between Pendarvon and Townsend, the latter ends up falling out of the window and into the arms of police officers (4.42). Holman subsequently ‘shouts his instructions through the shattered pane’ (4.42). The association between his detective skill and authority with ‘shattered pane’ equates his detective skill to mess, destruction and disorder, connecting his detective abilities with failure. This detective incompetence is further shown through a significant double standard that his pursuit of crime illuminates. When Tennant professes that the supposed victim is actually alive Holman seeks to confirm this man’s innocence. He states that he will ‘leave no stone unturned to find the woman of whom he [Tennant] speaks’ and that ‘I’m not going to have a man hung for a woman that’s alive if I can help it’ (4.34). He becomes adamant to protect this man and ensure he is not punished for a crime he did not commit. However, in comparison, when Haines comes to Holman for help in finding his daughter Holman refuses because he believes she has fled to become a prostitute. Holman states that ‘Thousands of girls are missing; they leave home because they’re sick of it, and they set up their own *hook*. How do you think you’re going to find ‘em if they don’t mean to be found?’ (4.34, my own italics). Not only is his disinterest evident, but the term ‘hook’ actually means ‘to solicit as a prostitute’ (OED, 2018). This suggests that he refuses to try and find her because she has chosen a transgressive life. This is reinforced through Holman’s statement that ‘you girls can see anything. That’s how it is so many of you come to grief – you think you see so much’ (4.34). Here Holman’s inadequacy highlights a double standard in that he is eager to prove the innocence of a man if he has been tricked by a woman,

but he is quick to accuse a woman of prostitution and not help her. This suggests that his perceptions of crime are influenced by gender issues.

This double standard, and the references to prostitution, equates Holman to the detectives of the Whitechapel murders in 1888. As previously stated, many critics and the contemporary newspapers at the time highlight how the female victims were blamed for their own murders. For instance, Megha Anwer (2014), highlights how the detectives used photographs of the female corpses to figure out why this crime happened. Anwer analyses how these photographs indicate that Victorian society believed that 'the crime is somehow resting immanently within the physiological contours of the victim herself' (p. 434). She states that the discourse of the crimes attempted to suggest that it was the victim's lifestyle and 'appearance that led to her victimization' (p. 434). This idea is reinforced through the character of Mr Holman in *The Crime and the Criminal*. In the narrative, Holman, like the Whitechapel detectives, is constantly gazing at 'photographs...of the victim' that 'were taken after death' (4.35); as if the reason, or understanding, of the crime is identifiable in the 'physiological contours of the victim herself' (Anwer, 2014: p. 434). He stares at it as if he can figure the crime out by looking at her face. The fact that this female victim, Louise O'Donnell, is actually Jack Haines's daughter is significant in highlighting how Holman is conveying a message about the female gender that is relatable to the rhetoric around the Whitechapel murders. Louise, subtly, becomes equated to the victims of these killings and the detective is portrayed as blaming the victim for male crimes and refusing to help women who may have been forced into prostitution. His detection, thus, exists to observe gender and not crime and his role is to expose what truly happens when women cross the boundary.

### **The comparisons between John Ferguson and the police detectives**

Haia Shpayer Makov (2011) notes that in Victorian literature 'a tradition emerged depicting the police detectives as not very perceptive or discerning, and often as simply inept, while the private detective shone' (p. 173). This tradition seems to be reiterated in Marsh's *The Goddess* through the comparative representations of the police detectives and John Ferguson, a potential amateur detective; a comparison that exposes how Marsh uses these detective figures to reinforce further his ideological stance on gender. Throughout the text the superfluous nature of the *police* detectives

is apparent as they never really detect any crime or apprehend any criminals. Their incompetence is often mentioned in the narrative, usually by Ferguson, which states that 'the police don't always move so fast as you appear to think' (p. 112) and 'the police are famous for their blunders' (p. 79). It seems that throughout the text Ferguson has a significant level of authority and control over these police figures. This desire to control the police investigation seems to be a tactic to prevent them arresting Bessie, as when she is trying to remember the crime and the officers move to arrest her however Ferguson 'placed [himself] in front of them' (p. 73). Ferguson even goes as far to threaten Inspector Symonds saying: 'You will doubt the lady's word, Mr Symonds, at your peril' (p. 74). Despite his lack of detective experience or professional association with the police he seems to have significant control over their investigation.

However, by the physical representations of the police investigators in comparison with Ferguson, it is clear that Marsh seems to be approving of this control. The police are often weak figures, easily controlled and flustered; they do not seem to fit with the societal perceptions of these figures as embodying a 'heightened masculinity...capable of sustained physical exertion' (Shpayer Makov, 2012: p. 142). Yet, Ferguson is represented in relation to this perception. Makov points out how the detective figure, especially the police, were perceived at the time as masculine men, often 'focus[ing] on their powerful physique' and 'their superior height' (p. 147), while also depicting them as 'brave warriors, willing to take risks and even sacrifice their lives' (p. 148). In *The Goddess*, Ferguson is characterised under these definitions. In the court scene, the narrative describes how he was seen as 'a sort of raree-show' because of his tall 'height' (p. 117). In addition, Miss Adair describes him as a 'big' man who was 'strong awfully strong' (p. 56), which is also evidenced by his frequent desire to use violence as a mechanism to solve problems. He is also depicted as 'brave' through his continuous desire to save Bessie from the police. It seems that, in comparison to the police, Ferguson is conveyed within the Victorian notion of detective manliness. This suggests that his attempts at preventing the course of justice and interfering with the investigation are approved in the text as he is upheld as an emblem of detective masculinity. Therefore, the fact that Ferguson is portrayed as heroic and justified in his disruptions of the law is because the text wants to protect the domestic woman, whereas the police detectives who would 'lock up every one they could lay their hands on' (p. 79) are seen to be weak, inferior and inadequate. By giving Ferguson an unrealistic control over the investigation and the actions of the police

Marsh is ensuring that Bessie is not apprehended for the crime. Ferguson's detective instincts become, not just an infatuation but a narrative tool to make sure that the domestic woman is not punished for the crime and that the concept of women as 'innately non-criminal' (Zedner, 1991: p. 42) is not disrupted.

### **'Men who consider women to be natural prey'<sup>38</sup>: Mr Charlecote's detection of Ethel Musgrave**

This notion, expressed through the police detectives in *The Goddess*, that detectives who pursue the "wrong" women, meaning women who conform to domestic ideals of femininity, are condemned in the narrative is also evident through the character of Charlecote. Charlecote - who is introduced to us in *Mrs Musgrave, and her Husband* - is portrayed as one of the most negative detective figures across the four texts because he seeks to apprehend and punish a woman who potentially conforms to the ideals of patriarchy. Charlecote embodies the societal perceptions of detective figures as violating the privacy of the middle-class woman (Shpayer Makov, 2011: p. 190). For instance, when following Hereward Musgrave, in the hope that he will go to his wife, not only is his tactic mocked, as the narrative states: 'Mr Charlecote, after a second's pause, walked after him...with the idea of preventing Mr Musgrave from knowing he was being followed, he chose the opposite side of the way' (p. 25), but he is also described as a 'spy' (p. 23). He is portrayed as a burden, an irritancy, that is invading the privacy of their marriage, reinforcing this societal perception of detective figures as intruders. Charlecote's job to apprehend the criminal is condemned and reduced to a burden. The fact that he is presented as a 'spy' suggests that he also 'threatened the predominant social order' (Shpayer Makov, 2011: p. 190) because he threatens to disrupt a marriage by apprehending Ethel. Therefore, the narrative condemns him and prevents this justice, as the text portrays the suicide of the couple as a better outcome than a breakdown of a marriage and family.

His detection of Mrs Musgrave is not carried out purely as an issue of crime but an act of revenge against what he sees to be Mrs Musgrave's threat against masculinity. From the perspective of Charlecote he sees her crimes as an act of female transgression, the seduction and entrapment of men. He states that 'the chief

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<sup>38</sup> Marsh, 2014: p. 30

fault which my friend had, in my eyes, was, that he should have suffered himself to be lured into the toils of the woman whom you have made your wife' (p. 29). From his perspective, Ethel is seen as a sexually deviant woman who threatens the power of masculinity. His pursuit of her, therefore, is not solely about her crime but the fact that she murdered a man and caused the ambiguity of his manliness. However, the narrative condemns his actions, stating that 'the world is largely composed of men like Byam, like you; men who consider women to be natural prey; who will commit themselves to any lie rather than confess that a woman's simple purity proved more than a match for their cunning salacity' (p. 30). This, therefore, suggests that his revenge is not justified and is instead an exploitative act that seeks to 'threaten the social order' of marriage and femininity. His detection seeks to suggest that an innocent and "properly" feminine woman has the potential to be sexually transgressive and, therefore, he has to be removed from the narrative and condemned as something deplorable. Charlecote is, thus, criticised for his ability to threaten the perception of domestic women as incapable of crime, rather than due to his inability to apprehend the criminal.

### **Private Detective Stewart Trevannion: bigamy and the criminal detective**

Alongside Mr Holman, *The Crime and the Criminal* also introduces us to Stewart Trevannion, a private detective. It can be argued that Trevannion is the most corrupt and inefficient detective presented by Marsh in these four novels due to the crimes he commits and their potential to undermine Victorian patriarchy. Within the narrative he is associated with acts of blackmail and fraud, whilst outside the confines of the narrative it is said that he committed 'bigamous intermarriage' (3.30). The association between detectives and criminality has been pointed out as a common aspect in nineteenth-century detective fiction. For instance, John Harpman (2014) states that the 'criminal and detective share a common fascination with crime' (p. 134), whilst Peter Thoms (1998) states that 'although the detective often emerges as a heroic figure...his desire for authorial mastery disturbingly resembles the oppressive deeds of the criminal' (p. 2). Yet it is the relationship between Trevannion and his crime of bigamy that is significant and deserves more attention than current research provides.



Maia McAleavey (2015) mentions that 'stories of bigamy abounded in Victorian culture' (p. 1), illuminating its common occurrence within literature of the century by outlining '270 Victorian novels featuring a bigamy *plot*' (p. 2) including novels written by Ellen Wood, such as *East Lynne* (1861). Bigamy's frequent occurrence in Victorian literature, then, makes it remarkable that Marsh only explores this crime once in these four novels: through the character of Trevannion. It is important to ask why it is so limited, since it occupied Victorian culture, and why he portrays it through this particularly corrupt detective figure. McAleavey states that a significance of the bigamy plot lies in its implications upon the importance of marriage in Victorian fiction, stating that:

In terms of narrative, the bigamy plot undermines the security of a wedding as the nineteenth-century novel's inescapable ending...because marriage served as a cultural marker of stability and sociality, any disruption to its structure suggested a possible free-fall (p. 7-8).

The concept of bigamy, thus, challenges marriage as an indicator of order and social stability, but, as marriage was a key symbol of heteronormativity, it also has the potential to undermine the strength of patriarchy. It is not unreasonable then to argue that Trevannion has the potential to disrupt the order of patriarchy, as he exposes the instability of marriage and its ability to be manipulated for his own purposes, particularly purposes of manipulating women. The fact that this is embodied in a 'private detective' (3.30) not only exposes a corruptness within detective figures but highlights how Trevannion functions to expose fundamental flaws within the marriage structure. The detective is a source of observation, who was often regarded as 'a threat to social order' due to their invasions of privacy (Shpayer Makov, 2011: p. 190), as previously stated. The fact that he is associated with detection merely works to reinforce his ability to provide a potentially threatening observation of society. However, as Trevannion has the potential to undermine the strength of patriarchy he is condemned. Trevannion's position in regards to crime is entirely superfluous as he does not detect crime and is completely dispensable to the narrative. He, instead, exists to expose this flaw within marriage, and therefore, he has to be corrupt, potentially un-masculine, and an unimportant character to the successful conventional ending of the text.

Overall, the use of male detectives in these four novels functions to monitor and secure the boundaries of gender rather than controlling criminality. Much like the newspaper accounts of the Whitechapel murders, the various investigatory platforms do not exhibit a purely criminological purpose, instead they seem to be either warning or dispelling the transgressive woman. The detective figures that fail to do this, or expose a flaw within the need to separate the sexes, are condemned, removed from the text or portrayed to be redundant to the entire narrative. It seems that Marsh's novels can be interpreted under Clare Clarke's (2014) perceptions of detective fiction, in that they are inadequate because they fail to detect any kind of crime. Instead, they are preoccupied with observing and policing the definitions of gender. Therefore, the detective figure, a figure that exists at the heart of crime and became a popular symbol during the period, exposes further the redundancy of Marsh's representations of crime and the criminal investigation as they convey no criminological purpose.

## Conclusion

This thesis has aimed to contribute to research on the significance of Marsh as a *fin-de-siècle* writer and highlight another way his discourses of crimes could be interpreted. I have aimed to contribute to discussions on this author by exploring his representations of crime and the criminal investigation and also how his novels engage with the 1888 Whitechapel murders. From my analysis, it is clear that Marsh's portrayals of crime are inherently superficial as they are used as tools to engage with the issues of gender that occupied the *fin de siècle*, where he specifically expresses concern over the changing positions and characterisations of middle-class women within society. In exploring his depictions of female criminals, male criminals and detective figures, his preoccupation with these anxieties of gender is evident, a preoccupation that ends up overshadowing any criminological purpose to his narratives. Through his use of crime, he clearly expresses a particular ideological stance. His texts seek to uphold female characters that embody the traditional Victorian stereotypes of middle-class women as passive, vulnerable, reliant on men and belonging to the domestic space. Alongside this they also demonise and challenge female characters that symbolise the increasing societal freedoms being offered to middle-class women through associations with the public space and the potential sexual threats of unmarried women. As part of this, Marsh also seems to suggest that the capability for a male character to be perceived as masculine relies upon his ability to defend himself against transgressive women and suppress the growing independent agency, outside of the home, of middle-class women.

This interpretation of his crime discourse highlights the extent to which his texts mirror the narrative technique of the newspapers that reported on the 1888 Whitechapel murders. The representations of these murders at the *fin de siècle* are heavily imbued with the ideology of gender. The way the journalists discussed the Ripper's crimes seemed to focus more on condemning the sexually transgressive lives of the female victims and disassociating the murders from values of masculinity than actually analysing the crime. While it is important to note that the newspaper reports of these murders did condemn the brutality of the crimes and the killer, it is difficult to ignore the preoccupations with securing gender boundaries within these narratives. While these reports and Marsh's novels represent crime differently, it is clear that their method of using crime as an avenue to further define gender and express concerns

over potential disruptions to the differentiation of the sexes is similar. The similarity in regards to this use of crime contributes to current research as it highlights further how Marsh's novels are engaging with the reports of the Ripper crimes of 1888 and exposes how he is an important author of the *fin de siècle* through his clear ideological response to the culture at the time.

This interpretation of Marsh's fictions can be extended further, and in different ways, within future research. For instance, this thesis focuses on his, arguably, most popular and well-known novels. More research could be carried out into whether this idea occupies his other, less analysed, novels and short stories, such as *The Adventures of Judith Lee*, so that a more in-depth comparison between Marsh's female detective and the male detectives could be carried out. In addition, this research only compares Marsh's novels to the Whitechapel murders; more crimes of the *fin de siècle* could be explored to establish if this was a prevalent strategy of the time. Furthermore, literature written by other authors at the time, such as Oscar Wilde or Bram Stoker, or even earlier on in the century to include sensation novels, such as *Lady Audley's Secret* (1862) or *The Woman in White* (1860), which focused significantly on crime, could be analysed through this interpretation of the function of crime and the criminal investigation.

Therefore, this thesis has outlined how these four novels by Richard Marsh use crime narrative as a redundant tool to engage with *fin-de-siècle* issues of gender, specifically the increasing freedoms for middle-class women. It becomes clear that Marsh's ideological stance towards these changes is one of concern, and that he seeks to define the female gender as passive and belonging to the home. By doing this, it is clear that the use of crime in Marsh's novels significantly engages with *fin-de-siècle* culture, especially with the rhetoric that arose in response to the Whitechapel murders.

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