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Exploring the Shifting Dynamics of Female Victimhood and Vocality in Poe and Pirkis

By Eva Burke¹

Abstract

This essay will examine the detective fiction of Edgar Allan Poe (published between 1841 and 1844) in conjunction with Catherine Louisa Pirkis' 1894 work *The Experiences of Loveday Brooke, Lady Detective* in terms of their diverging authorial approaches to narratives of detection. While Poe, writing in the years preceding the first significant mobilisation of American women towards the attainment of civil liberties, is credited with creating the figure of the male detective, Auguste Dupin, for whom the paradigms of detection rested on a gendered dichotomy between the actively logical masculine and the passive (and usually dead) feminine, Pirkis' seminal collection introduces a female investigator, Loveday Brooke, whose successful appropriation of the detective role challenged these same paradigms. Although the temporal distance between Dupin and Brooke is considerable, both texts are significant in terms of the degree to which they establish or reinscribe the gendered parameters of canonical detective fiction.

Key Words: Victorian Detective Fiction, Female Vocality, Victimhood

“The recurring crime in [... many of Poe's] tales is that one or more women have been criminally silenced; the speech that would allow them self-expression has been denied or usurped by male agents. Poe was especially prolific in creating images of violently silenced women, their vocal apparatus the apparent target of their attackers, who, in the earlier stories, are the storytellers themselves.”
(Jordan 2)

The Todorovian assertion that the traditional detective narrative is comprised of two stories, the story of the crime and the story of the investigation², may be extended to posit a gendered duality: one in which the “crime” portion is often reliant on the absent or silenced woman (physically present but unable to assert agency) and the “investigation” is dominated by the male logician whose ability to interpret her silence and restore order signifies his structural dominance. Edgar Allan Poe asserts in his 1846 essay “The Philosophy of Composition” that “death [is most melancholy] when it most closely allies itself to Beauty: the death then of a beautiful woman is unquestionably the most poetical topic in the world” (Poe 179). In the context of the Dupin tales, it may be argued that the death of the beautiful woman is as catalytic as it is poetic – her end is his beginning, her silence a conduit for the triumph of masculine rationality. Catherine Louisa Pirkis'

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² “This [narrative] contains not one but two stories: the story of the crime and the story of the investigation [...] the first story, that of the crime, ends before the second begins [...] the characters of this second story, the story of the investigation, do not act, they learn” (Todorov 139).

stories, by comparison, feature a female detective who is unapologetically vocal and frequently encroaches on male discursive spaces; her work allows her to move in the public sphere and engage with male peers, many of whom are “[territorial] and [exert] pressure to keep her detective work ‘inside the house’” (Miller 47). The transition from the masculine abstraction of Dupin to the actively feminine method of detection employed by Brooke is one which involves a profound re-gendering of these discursive spaces. The purpose of this essay is to examine this re-gendering and the extent to which it signified (or did not signify) an enduring genre shift; although a considerable critical body of work has accrued in the wake of Poe’s detective fiction, the contribution of Pirkis has drawn little scholarly attention. The following comparative analysis has been undertaken in the hopes of determining the degree to which the gender dynamics of canonical detective fiction have been shaped by the distinctive early efforts of Poe and Pirkis.

The first of Poe’s Dupin tales, “The Murders in the Rue Morgue”, centres on the mysteriously violent murder of two Parisian women, both of whom are described as “fearfully mutilated ... the corpse of the daughter, head downward, [had been] forced up the narrow [chimney] ... upon the face were many severe scratches, and, upon the throat, dark bruises ... [the mother had] her throat so entirely cut that ... the head fell off” (Poe 375-376). Narrated by an unnamed acquaintance of Dupin’s, the story follows the process of ratiocination used to unravel the mystery: Dupin is equipped with the observational skills to determine that the brutal act was carried out by an escaped pet orangutan armed with a straight razor. The unlikely chain of events leading to this murderous conclusion is meticulously reimaged by Dupin, who successfully “reads” the tableau of brutality and subsequently establishes the template of analytic precision most famously embodied in Arthur Conan Doyle’s Sherlock Holmes. In the Dupin stories, this model of detection relies heavily on a victimised female subject; the physical destruction of mother and daughter is the catalyst for Dupin’s triumph. It is worth noting that Poe’s detective operates in the years prior to the proliferation of feminist ideology; the 1848 Seneca Falls Convention may be identified as the first major event of this burgeoning national movement. The brainchild of Elizabeth Cady Stanton, Lucretia Mott and several other prominent female members of the local Quaker community, the gathering “anticipated every demand of nineteenth-century feminism [and] permitted them to state in the clearest possible fashion that they identified the tyranny of men as the cause of women’s grievances”, according to feminist historian Ellen DuBois (23). The positioning of powerless female and authoritative male fosters a binary opposition in which the murdered woman becomes a cipher and the detective her decoder, figuratively deconstructing her through a process of symbolic violence which ironically mirrors her bodily annihilation. Elisabeth Bronfen theorises that this metaphorical dismantling is an attempt to

[explain] the disjunction of her femininity ... the detective story traces the uncovering of hidden facts about an event of death, hidden truths about character’s motivations in relation to death ... the dead woman who remains and in doing so engenders narratives, functions as a body at which death is once again coupled to the other central enigma of western cultural representation – femininity (Bronfen 293).

As a result, the detective is tasked with solving the riddle of death and, implicitly, answering the enigma of womanhood in one fell swoop.³

³ It would be remiss not to mention that many of Poe’s gothic tales are famously problematic in terms of gendered power dynamics and femicide; “Berenice” (1835) features a male narrator whose obsession with his sickly fiancé’s

The ultimate revelation – that this obscene misdeed was carried out by a primitive interloper – is undercut by racial tensions in addition to gendered anxieties. The ape’s infiltration of the domestic space and violation of the (white) female body may be read as an articulation of certain contemporary fears with regard to the urban tumult and potential social disorder. The attacker is misidentified by several witnesses as a human foreigner, based on his muffled intonations: one witness identifies him as French, another as Italian, and yet another as Spanish; each of the witnesses implicitly attributes the murders to a violent foreign other, an indication of the extent to which the idea of a discrete cultural identity had taken hold. The beastly carnage is described in terms which deliberately emphasise the sexual connotation of this violation: the daughter is “forced up the narrow aperture” (Poe 375) of the chimney while her mother is desecrated in such a way that she “scarcely [retains] any semblance of humanity” (Poe 375) – she has been so thoroughly penetrated by the razor that her very personhood is stripped away.

The violation of these women is two-fold; this sadistic interaction with a foreign entity means that their racial purity,⁴ in addition to their bodily integrity, has been compromised. Dupin’s reconstruction-through-deconstruction thus evades sincere engagement with the question of male-on-female violence by consigning blame to the savage intruder. In her analysis of Poe’s work, Joan Dayan asks, “what are we to do with Poe’s bleeding, raped, decapitated, dead and resurrected women, brutalized, buried, cemented in cellars and stuffed up chimneys?” (Dayan 10). In relation to the Rue Morgue tale, the answer may centre on a binary that encompasses race as well as gender: just as the male detective delineates his masculine superiority via overt rationality (thrown into sharp relief by the women, silenced and incapable of ratiocination), so too does he assert his racial superiority in opposition to the (equally incapable) rampaging beast.

The second Dupin story, “The Mystery of Marie Rogêt”, published in 1842, is based on the real-life murder of Mary Rogers, a young American woman whose body was discovered in the Hudson River in July 1841. After a thorough investigation and a blizzard of media scrutiny, the case remained largely unsolved. Promoted as a sequel to the Rue Morgue, this tale was Poe’s (ultimately unsuccessful) attempt to demonstrate the skills of his omniscient detective in the context of an authentic mystery. Dupin’s analysis involves the use of ratiocination and includes a cynical rebuttal of the media’s attempts to glamourize the murder: “we should bear in mind that, in general, it is the object of our newspapers rather to create a sensation – to make a point - than to further the cause of truth. The latter end is only pursued when it seems coincident with the former” (Poe 758). Poe’s narrative arguably indulges in a different brand of exploitation, particularly in regard to the dehumanising descriptions of Marie’s body: “the flesh of the neck was much swollen ... she had been subjected to brutal violence. A piece of lace was found tied so

teeth leads him to pry them from her seemingly-dead mouth. Examining her disinterred body, he marvels at the “thirty-two small, white and ivory-looking substances that were scattered to and fro about the floor” (Poe 648). The violently silenced woman is thoroughly subjugated throughout his narrative – this objectification reaches its peak with her death, which renders her subject to violation by the protagonist, whose physical obsession is brutally satisfied. Similarly, “The Fall of the House of Usher” (1839) centres on the obsessive psychosis of a male character for whom the maniacal focus on the dying or dead female again leads to a gruesome denouement. This recurring thematic fixation with passive femininity and bodily destruction has been the subject of much feminist scholarship; critics like Judith Fetterley and Cynthia Jordan have observed a degree of ambiguity in his often conflicted gothic articulations of femininity.

⁴ Although the term “miscegenation” did not enter the public discourse until the 1860s, the very notion of an interracial relationship would have been considerably taboo in relation to Poe’s readership, most of whom were living in the wake of an overwhelmingly negative public response to the abolitionist movement. One notable incident, an Anti-Slavery Convention riot in Philadelphia in May of 1838, may have served as an inspiration for Poe, who resided in Philadelphia at the time (Kennedy and Weissberg 179).

tightly around the neck as to be hidden from sight; it was completely buried in the flesh” (Poe 759). Just as with the Rue Morgue victims, Dupin endeavours to solve the mystery through a process of logical incision, reducing the murdered woman to the sum of her parts, “to so much rotting material and a jumble of dismembered, desexed parts” (Frank 173).

The abrupt contrast between Marie as she is described in the newspaper reports that the narrator peruses (a beautiful and famously adored shop-girl who captivated many male customers) and Dupin’s observation of Marie’s corpse (a bloated, livid cadaver, unfamiliar even to her family) is a sharp rejoinder to the “feminized, hysterical bereavement” (Frank 174) of the press, according to Lucy Elizabeth Frank, who reads Dupin’s critique of the popular discourse around Marie’s death as a reassertion of male authority – an attempt to reclaim the narrative of her life and death using a treatise of logic unaffected by the emotive language of the media. This carefully drawn distinction between the obsessive public scrutiny of the murdered woman and the ultra-rational inquiry conducted by the male detective is intended, in part, to justify Poe’s appropriation of the murdered female body as the subject of his mystery while reinforcing the parameters of gendered speech. The result is a rather stilted narrative which retains a clinical distance from the violent destruction of Marie’s body even as he uses the murder as a focal point for Dupin’s condemnation of the press. In addition, the ultimate failure of the inquiry renders much of his elaborate armchair investigation problematic. Although Poe uses his footnotes to assert that real-life events “confirmed, in full, not only the general conclusion [of his tale], but subsequently *all* the chief hypothetical details by which that conclusion was attained” (Poe 748), Dupin’s proposed solution that Marie/Mary Rogers may have fallen victim to a known assailant or assailants, possibly a secret lover, was ultimately contradicted by the deathbed “confession” of a New Jersey innkeeper, Frederika Loss, in November 1842. Loss attributed the mysterious death to a failed abortion attempt: in her dying moments, “Loss [confided] that Rogers came to her house ... with a young doctor who performed an abortion. Rogers died of complications while under the physician’s care, and Loss’ sons dropped the body into the river at night where it would be found” (Katz 7).

Poe subsequently altered his version of the tale to include oblique references to various “concealments” Marie may have made, although some critics have read the glaring omission of the abortion rumours (already publicly circulating in the immediate wake of the death) from the original text as an attempt at selective and officious interpretation of Marie’s narrative: Dupin scrupulously engages with each of the favoured theories while skirting this most salacious and popular. Laura Saltz argues that such hesitation is indicative of a desire to preserve the integrity of the male investigative process:

...in 1848, Poe even admitted abortion as the probable cause of Marie’s death in a letter to George Eveleth ... the abortion, which is elliptical in the text, is parenthetical in the letter: Poe is still reluctant to accord it full status in the mystery... [Marie’s] corpse is visible, but the undisclosed content of the crime against her is held in sufferance by Poe. (Saltz 252)

Dupin’s failure or inability to satisfactorily account for the circumstances surrounding Marie’s death and the ambiguous textual revisions signifies a profound struggle for control of this narrative and Marie’s body. For all that Dupin and his accomplice proclaim their desire to uncover the unvarnished truth of the matter, they are reluctant to attribute any social or sexual power to the victim: her body is, above all, a piece of evidence, and she is a silent witness to her own undoing. To acknowledge that her death may have been linked to female sexual knowledge and agency

would be to complicate the ratiocinative “reading” of the female body.⁵ The narrative, as result, struggles to preserve the inviolability of masculine authority while professing to seek the truth of a case in which certain feminine secrets prove impenetrable.

The final Dupin tale, “The Purloined Letter” (1844), again revolves around the spectre of the annihilated woman. Dupin is tasked with retrieving an incriminating letter which has been stolen from an eminent female personage (heavily implied to be the Queen) and subsequently used to blackmail her. Whereas the previous stories had centred on the physical destruction of the female victim, the threat in this tale is entirely psychological – the woman’s reputation, rather than her life, hangs in the balance:

the disclosure of the document to a third person, who shall be nameless [presumably her husband], would bring in question the honour of a personage of most exalted station; and this fact gives the holder of the document an ascendancy over the illustrious personage whose honour and peace are so jeopardised. (Poe 924)

Dupin agrees to recover the letter, largely because the culprit, Minister D----, is a nemesis of old. Visiting the minister at his hotel, Dupin correctly surmises that the letter has been hidden in plain sight, turned inside out and disguised as an insignificant missive in a letter rack on the mantelpiece. He successfully pockets the letter, leaving a decoy (inscribed with “Un desseinsifuneste, S’iln'estdigne'Atree, estdigne de Thyeste” (Poe 936), a reference to mythical brothers Atreus and Thyestes), and returns to his lodgings, content in the knowledge that he has averted a political disaster and, more importantly, bested an arch-rival. Described by Poe as “perhaps, the best of [his] tales of ratiocination” (Carlson 244), this final Dupin mystery has been subject to several structuralist and post-structuralist readings, most notably by Lacan and Derrida, both of whom focus on the letter in terms of its Freudian significance. Lacan’s “Seminar on ‘The Purloined Letter’” theorises that “the displacement of [the subjects] (the police, the victimised woman, and Dupin) is determined by the place which a pure signifier – the purloined letter – comes to occupy in their trio” (Lacan 44). Lacan ultimately asserts that the reaction to the pure signifier/letter, rather than the actual content of the letter, is what determines the symbolic order and renders the story significant. Derrida’s critique of Lacan’s reading conversely emphasises the significance of the letter itself and asserts the importance of the narrative framework. The instances of “uncanny doubling” evident in the text, explicated by Dupin himself when he makes a fraternal allusion to his relationship with Minister D----, are significant, according to Derrida: “[the] duplicitous identification of the brothers ... carries [the tale] off infinitely far away in a labyrinth of doubles without originals, of facsimile without an authentic, an indivisible letter ... imprinting the purloined letter with an incorrigible indirection” (Derrida 193).

The conspicuous parallels between Dupin and his adversary – both possess a fondness for rational deduction and one-upmanship and their shared initial serves as a reminder that there is more than one ‘purloined letter’ guiding the dynamics of their relationship –ultimately de-centre

⁵ The 1840s saw a sharp increase in the number of American women seeking abortion. Whereas it had commonly been acknowledged as the last resort of young women seeking to end an illegitimate pregnancy, mid-century commercialisation of the procedure had made it a viable option for married women seeking to limit the size of their families. A heated debate ensued in the “penny press” – “because it allowed married women a certain latitude of power in the home, abortion threatened the ‘natural’ domestic order, and was perceived as a threat to the patriarchal organisation of the family... abortion [also] signalled the encroachment of women into the economic domain... its most prosperous practitioners were women” (Saltz 242.)

the female subject. There is arguably a process of intertextual “doubling” at work here: just as the Rue Morgue victims and Marie Rogêt acquire their narrative significance through victimhood, violation and the absence of speech, the unnamed female victim of Minister D----- is given no opportunity to vocalise her experience. Even her compromising missive is an appendage to the male rivalry, her words enveloped by the discourse of ratiocination. The tale ends, fittingly, with Poe’s aforementioned reference to the mythical tragedy of Atreus and Thyestes, another narrative in which male enmity is shadowed by the voiceless female.

Although they comprise only a fraction of his considerable oeuvre, Poe’s detective stories have proven hugely influential, providing a model of detection which would continually dominate the genre for the remainder of the century. Even Doyle’s Sherlock Holmes makes a tongue-in-cheek allusion to his Parisian predecessor in his literary debut, *A Study in Scarlet*: “‘You remind me of Edgar Allan Poe’s Dupin. I had no idea that such individuals did exist outside of stories.’ Sherlock Holmes rose and lit his pipe ... ‘Now, in my opinion, Dupin was a very inferior fellow ... he was by no means such a phenomenon as Poe appeared to imagine’” (Doyle 10). The pattern of male analytical genius set by Dupin would be appropriated and modified, to an extent, by certain luminaries of British detective fiction. The work of Arthur Conan Doyle and Wilkie Collins, among others, frequently engaged with the investigative tropes established by Poe over the course of the century. The establishment of the metropolitan police force in 1829 in conjunction with the mid-century popularity of private detective agencies gave rise to a transatlantic fascination with the criminal underworld and the processes of detection. Andrew Forrester’s *The Female Detective* and William Stephens Hayward’s *Revelations of a Lady Detective*, both published in 1864, explored the potential of a professional female detective,⁶ replacing the excessively analytical male amateur with sharply intuitive heroines for whom the domestic intrigue of Victorian England offered little challenge.

Catherine Louisa Pirkis’ work, published in 1894, signified the extent to which the paradigms of detection had shifted, influenced in part by the personal and political upheaval of the suffrage movement. The marginality of the silent, peripheral female, penetrated by the brilliance of Dupin, is thrown into sharp relief by the emergence of such radical female voices as those of Emmeline Pankhurst and Lydia Becker, both of whom were instrumental in the formation of such societies as the Women’s Social and Political Union and the National Society for Women’s Suffrage. The proliferation of such groups, some of which supplemented their argument for suffrage with varying degrees of militancy, engendered a cultural and political milieu in which the model of Victorian womanhood seemed increasingly outmoded. Pirkis had taken an active part in liberal London society through her work with various anti-vivisection societies and began her career as an author in 1877, during the emergence of suffrage as a national movement. *The Experiences of Loveday Brooke*, her final published work, came to public prominence during the rise of the “New Woman” figure. According to Sarah Grand, the Victorian woman “has been sitting apart in silent contemplation all these years, thinking and thinking ... women [are] awaking from their long apathy, and ... like healthy hungry children unable to articulate, they [begin] to whimper for what they know not” (Grand 271).

⁶ Although women would not be officially accepted as part of the Metropolitan Police force until 1919, female private investigators were quite common in the nineteenth century, implicitly valued for their ability to traverse the domestic sphere without obstruction. Hayward’s heroine, Mrs. Paschal, vacillates between progressive and traditional in her methods, frequently employing “intuition” and appropriating feminine archetypes to get the job done even as she transgresses certain gendered social boundaries. Dagni Bredesen describes this ambiguity as an “[exploration] of the instabilities and tensions of the dominant ideologies governing women in nineteenth-century Britain” (Bredesen 31).

Many of these early articulations offer a challenge to the literary representation of femininity popularised by the likes of Poe.⁷ Pirkis' seminal female-authored lady detective successfully destabilizes the conventional power dynamics of the detective genre. Contemporary reviewers were optimistic but concerned that "Miss Brooke [may be] too clever in catching criminals to ever catch a husband."⁸ Loveday Brooke is "best described in a series of negations ... she was not tall, she was not short; she was not dark, she was not fair; she was neither handsome nor ugly. Her features were altogether nondescript ... and she appeared to be looking out at the world through a slit, instead of through a window" (Pirkis 3). Such a deliberately vague physical description immediately undercuts the typical mode of exposition in such tales: whereas the narrators of Dupin and Holmes' tales are at pains to expound on the strikingly vulpine features and preternatural incisiveness of the male detective, the omniscient narrator of the Loveday Brooke tales draws the attention of the reader to her apparent ordinariness and the ease with which she appropriates and experiments with certain gendered roles in her investigative endeavours. She is also distinct in terms of her career status: Brooke is not an armchair detective in pursuit of some theoretical ideal of justice, but a skilled professional investigator⁹ for whom the business of investigation offers a financial life-buoy after she has been "thrown upon the world penniless and all but friendless" (Pirkis 3). Therie Hendrey-Seabrook asserts that

unlike Holmes [or Dupin], Loveday does not take it on herself to reconcile the public demands of the law with those of a personally conceived justice that allow certain "criminals" to escape the penalties fixed by the state. Rather, she is a representative figure in whom the legal constraints on women can be played out and explored alongside the growing speculation about the justice of their taking up professional positions in society. (Seabrook 77)

Pirkis' seven tales focus on Brooke's professional exploits; although she is one of many female detectives in the employ of the Ebenezer Dyer detective agency, she is described by him as "the most sensible and practical woman I ever met ... she has a clear, shrewd brain, unhampered by any hard-and-fast theories, [and] she has so much common sense that it amounts to genius" (Pirkis 4). Unlike Dupin, whose genius is grounded in abstraction and theoretical observation, Brooke solves her cases using a combination of dynamic insight and "common sense". The first of her cases, "The Black Bag Left on a Door-Step", revolves around the stolen jewellery of Lady Cathrow. Brooke is tasked with recovering the jewellery and absolving Stephanie Delcroix, the lady's maid accused of the crime. Over the course of her investigation, Brooke establishes a link between the robbery and a seemingly unrelated incident involving an abandoned black leather bag, a clerical costume and a suicide note. The story concludes with her successful apprehension of the culprit and a declaration (from Dyer) that she has "surpassed [herself] this time!" (Pirkis 24).

⁷ The demise of the "angel in the house" facilitated a profound re-conception of femininity for many Victorian writers; Grant Allen's *Miss Cayley's Adventures* (1899) encapsulates a comprehensive deconstruction of regressive female archetypes – his heroine is an active, defiant adventuress who chooses to live in the public sphere. Nina Auerbach describes this "New Woman" as "a powerful evolutionary type, harbinger of new worlds, new futures, and, in her most radical implications, new forms of the human species" (Auerbach 43).

⁸ *Glasgow Herald*, "The May Magazines", 11 May 1893, 11.

⁹ Elizabeth Carolyn Miller emphasises the fact that Loveday Brooke is "truly a *professional* woman detective, not a woman forced into amateur detection [nor] a helpful sidekick. Brooke is paid for what she does, and though she may find pleasure in the thrill of her occupation, the primary motivation behind her detective work is to be paid" (Miller 47).

While Pirkis' denouement adheres to Poe's formula in terms of its methodical exposition (Brooke describes her process of detection and is hailed as a genius), her analysis is informed by an active engagement with the household in question and its domestic staff: her interview with the housekeeper, Mrs. Williams, is a source of vital information. The success of Dupin is contingent on the absence of female vocalicity: his genius is frequently stimulated by the silence of the victimized woman, and as Therie Hendrey-Seabrook explains, "[the dead muse] inspired because her vocal submission furthered male performativity" (Seabrook 76). Yet Brooke unravels these mysteries through the employment of female speech. Over the course of her investigations, she uses her voice to interrogate and elucidate while frequently drawing on the lived experience of the women she encounters in order to illuminate her findings. Her capacity for speech marks her out as an inversion of Dupin in many ways: where he is a reclusive mastermind, cultivating an intellectual mystique often at the expense of female autonomy, she establishes her reputation for brilliance by engaging with, and occasionally subverting, the gendered discourses of Victorian England. She also enjoys a relationship with her (male) superior which includes much verbal sparring: Brooke and Dyer repeatedly "[take up], as if by design, diametrically opposite points of view" (Pirkis 92). One of the longer tales, "Missing!", features a young woman "found drowned". In a scene reminiscent of Marie Rogêt, the body is recovered from the river and returned to her devastated family. Unlike Poe, however, Pirkis refrains from a detailed description of the corpse, focusing instead on the reaction of the household – in this instance, the female body is not objectified in death.

Another of her tales, "Drawn Daggers", centres on a seemingly inscrutable domestic mystery. Approached by the Reverend Anthony Hawke, whose guardianship of a wealthy friend's daughter, Miss Monroe, has coincided with the receipt of many implicitly threatening missives ("on the sheet of paper were roughly drawn, in ink, two daggers, about six inches in length, with remarkably pointed blades" (Pirkis 93)), Brooke is obliged to enter the home undercover, posing as a "lady house decorator" in order to solve the mystery. She promptly determines that the real Miss Monroe has eloped with a lover, obliging a maid-servant to take her place in the Hawke household. By the end of the tale, Brooke has successfully restored order to the home and solved the puzzle of the drawn daggers. As before, much of the investigation centers on her incursion into the domestic sphere and exploration of the dynamics of the home. She reflects that the décor "bore unmistakably the impress of those early Victorian days when aesthetic surroundings were not deemed a necessity of existence ... the knick-knacks of a past generation were scattered about on tables and mantelpiece" (Pirkis 102).

This unintentional allusion to the Dupin era underscores the comparative significance of Loveday Brooke. This is a tale in which the female subject is credited with the authority to actively guide the narrative: the principle characters are female and the ultimate revelation, that the role of Miss Monroe has been appropriated by a lower-class woman, is illuminated by the gender and class dynamics of the domestic sphere. Brooke is able to identify the imposter purely through observation of the home: "the orderliness of [Miss Monroe's bedroom] was something remarkable. Now, there is the orderliness of a lady in the arrangement of her room, and the orderliness of a maid, and the two things, believe me, are widely different" (Pirkis 109). The social status Brooke enjoys, though, is something Hendrey-Seabrook draws attention to: her ability to move freely in the public sphere and employ her voice is connected to her position in society – she is not just a female detective, she is a "lady" detective, and so the ease with which she transgresses the gendered norms of the Victorian cultural milieu is supported by her relative class privilege. While

this tempers the radicalness of her role to an extent, she remains a significant figure in canonical detective fiction in terms of the reconfiguration of gender paradigms therein.

In conclusion, both Poe and Pirkis may be credited with helping to irrevocably shape the prototype of the popular literary detective in the nineteenth century and beyond; the work of Poe, whose original conception favoured a male investigator charged with decoding the silence of the subjugated female, is complemented and challenged by that of Pirkis, whose work reflected the extent to which perceptions of femininity had shifted in the intervening years. Both authors exerted considerable influence through their interpretations of the detective figure: Loveday Brooke proved to be a forerunner for a legion of twentieth-century female detectives, including Agatha Christie's Miss Marple, Patricia Wentworth's Maud Silver and even Nancy Drew. But only Poe and Dupin have retained their position in the cultural consciousness, while Pirkis' work has fallen into obscurity, despite her contemporary success and innovative characterization. Perhaps, as Lucy Sussex asserts, "the masculinist *history* [of canonical detective fiction... is invested in] a genealogy with no apparent maternal input" (Sussex 2). A revision of this genealogy is crucial, and it may be an indication of how much is left to do that, although both authors offer narratives of detection which implicitly critique the subversive power of female vocality (both repressed and uninhibited), Poe's voice is the one privileged in the public domain. With regard to contemporary crime fiction, the increased ubiquity of female authorship and popular narratives which seek to reposition the feminine in this violent milieu, by writers like Val McDermid, Gillian Flynn and Sophie Hannah who have achieved extraordinary commercial and critical success with their contributions to the canon, it could be argued that a gendered reclamation of the genre, and its conventions, is underway.

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