LADY DETECTIVES AND MARRIAGE: GRANT ALLEN’S MODEL FOR LIBERATION

A Dissertation
submitted to the Faculty of the
Graduate School of Arts and Sciences
of Georgetown University
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the
degree of
Master of Arts
in English

By

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Washington, DC

April 20, 2010
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ABSTRACT

This thesis addresses the issue of whether late nineteenth-century female detectives are subversive figures, or if they are—as many critics claim—examples of potentially transgressive women who conform to gender norms. While reading female detectives as a maligned is a relatively popular critical undertaking, taken on in Michele Slung’s *Crime on Her Mind* and Kathleen Gregory Klein’s *The Woman Detective*, the ways in which these novels did contribute to a feminist activity is often ignored. By looking at the Victorian lady detective novel through a historical lens, rather than a more modern feminist perspective, it is possible to understand the ways in which the genre’s writers did revolutionary work in their creation of empowered, professional women. In texts like Grant Allen’s *Miss Cayley’s Adventures* (1899) and *Hilda Wade: A Woman with Tenacity of Purpose* (1900), the lady detective becomes integral to the feminist movement because she, alone, finds a way to use her observation and intelligence—both abilities associated with female detection—in a manner that helps her navigate the complicated waters of nineteenth-century marriage. An examination of the ways in which lady detective heroines, particularly Grant Allen’s Lois Cayley and Hilda Wade, manage to resist confinement provides insight into the ways in which nineteenth-century women could find independence and liberation by using strategic, but subtle methods to rewrite their position in society as something that was at once progressive and acceptable.
The research and writing of this thesis is dedicated to everyone who helped along the way. Many thanks,

Luisa T. Cole
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INTRODUCTION

Although frequently considered to have introduced the first male detective, Charles Dickens’s *Bleak House* (1852) also introduced an even more progressive figure into literature. Interestingly enough, *Bleak House* includes a critically overlooked reference to what is potentially the first female detective in Mrs. Bucket—a “lady of a natural detective genius, which if it had been improved by professional exercise, might have done great things, but which has paused at the level of a clever amateur” (743). Despite her detective-like “observations and suspicions” (773), Mrs. Bucket is both limited within the text to a role as her husband’s assistant, and also is largely lost in the critical conversation about the detective genre. Her amateur status becomes synonymous with stunted potential, an inability to actually do the “great things” a true detective would. This problem is one that would plague a great number of the female detectives found in Victorian fiction, many of whom also found themselves bound by gender roles. A large number of novels from this period do feature female detectives, although their numbers still pale in comparison to the novels that center on male detectives. They range from the amateur sleuths of Wilkie Collins in “The Diary of Anne Rodway” (1856) and *The Law and the Lady* (1875) to professional detectives of Catherine L. Pirkis’s *The Experiences of Loveday Brooke* (1893) and George Sims’s *Dorcas Dene, Lady Detective* (1897), and also include the Grant Allen stories featuring popular sleuths in *Miss Cayley’s Adventures* (1899) and *Hilda Wade: A Woman with Tenacity of Purpose* (1900). By looking through a historical lens at these novels, it is possible to see the ways in which these heroines—and extrapolating from that all potentially subversive women—were restricted by society that was troubled by the notion of female detectives. While reading female detectives as maligned is a relatively popular critical undertaking, the ways in which these novels did contribute to feminist activity is often ignored. An examination of the
ways in which these heroines, particularly Grant Allen’s Lois Cayley and Hilda Wade, manage to resist confinement provides insight into the ways in which nineteenth century women could find independence and liberation by using strategic, but subtle methods—which often required detective skills—to rewrite their position in society as something that was at once progressive and acceptable.

In his essay “Detection in the Victorian Novel,” Ronald Thomas cites the detection of crime as the overarching theme of nineteenth century literature, saying that “almost every Victorian novel has at its heart some crime that must be uncovered, some false identity that must be unmasked, some secret the must be revealed, or some clandestine plot that must be exposed” (169.) In this world of complicated, secretive crimes, the detective came to function as a way to impose order on a troubled society. In part, the popularity of the detective novel grew out of a specific social atmosphere that forced Victorians to reevaluate their understandings of crime in the context of a more modern, urban world. The rise in nineteenth-century detective fiction is generally accounted for by social preoccupation with epistemological order. A number of legal provisions were introduced in order to combat crime and ensure order, including the first use of real detectives in the police force. In 1829, the Metropolitan Police Force was restructured in order to create a more centralized resistance to crime; and in 1842, the Detective Branch hired its first two full-time inspectors. As the developments suggest, Victorians were deeply invested in their efforts to weed out crime. The increased popularity of the detective figure, too, grew out of this same fascination with crime. For Victorians, the detective functioned as a trustworthy social guardian; the detective was the keeper of order, as well as the prime opponent of crime. As society experienced a “shift in law-enforcement methods from public exhibitions of punishment to private surveillance and arrest” (Rzepka 117), the detective came to represent more effective
modes of private surveillance.

Despite the social focus on unveiling truths, the detective figure did not appear in literature until the second half of the nineteenth century. In fact, the first actual detective character did not appear until the publishing of *Bleak House*, which was revolutionary in its featuring of the first popularly recognized detective in the character of Inspector Bucket, a professional employee of Scotland Yard who solves the novel’s central crime. By the time Collins’s *The Moonstone* was published, in 1867, the detective novel had taken on a series of defined characteristics. The novels featured eccentric, but brilliant detectives who outsmarted criminals and policemen, alike. They relied on characters with shrew observation and deduction skills to solve their crimes. And, they often featured twisted plots that called into question society’s ability to operate normally.

In *The Moonstone*, a novel literally littered with detectives, Wilkie Collins speaks of the “detective fever” that was sweeping nineteenth century England. Indeed, the same fascination with detectives had started to manifest itself in the second half of the nineteenth-century. The detective novel rose to prominence in the interval between *Bleak House* and *The Moonstone*, with novels like *The Woman in White*, *East Lynne*, and *Lady Audley’s Secret* falling in between. As the diversity of these texts suggests, the detective genre was one that drew from numerous earlier forms, becoming a complicated pastiche; these books were “tales of murder, sexual betrayal, and double identity [that] combined elements from gothic fiction, the Newgate novel, and Victorian stage melodrama” (Thomas 179). In these few texts, alone, the reader finds detective plots that are intertwined with stories about immigration, sexuality, and urbanization. While interest in crime certainly contributed to the popularity of detective novels, many of these novels have more at work than just cultural concerns over crime and order. In her essay
“Victorian Detective Fiction,” Lillian Nayder points to the detective novel as an essentially complex genre that “takes crime and policing as its theme but uses this theme to investigate a number of broader social issues: the origins and construction of social identity, for example, the integrity and violation of social boundaries, and the status of women” (Nayder 178). In her reading of the detective novel as a sociological text, Nayder aptly calls to attention the genre’s ability to reflect on feminist concerns. The inclusion of women’s issues in the detective novel was not a particularly new device, although it was traditionally broached through the appearance of deviant or criminal women. A particularly popular example, Mary Elizabeth Braddon’s Lady Audley’s Secret questioned gender norms by casting a criminal woman in an idealized “wax-doll” (263) shell. In her novel, Braddon draws attention to the artificial nature of gender protocol through a negative vision of femininity. Although focused on criminals in such novels, the interest in women’s social positions started a path within the detective genre towards another sort of potentially feminist text—the lady detective novel.

Unlike the female criminal, the lady detective was a rare character, both in history and in fiction. According to Maureen Reddy, Victorian “sensation fiction…includes few female detectives in comparison with its vast number of female victims and villains” (191-192). Though eventually popular with readers, the genre was one to which Victorian society had very little exposure. Even the number of female detective novels that exist are still anomalies within the broader canon of detective novels with male protagonists, which features literally thousands of examples (Klein 8). Yet, because the detective novel was in a genre that already had started to examine what Nayder calls the “status of women” (178), the shift away from criminal women to female heroes was a natural one. It was quite appropriate for the detective novel to take on questions of gender power through the character of the female detective. And even though the
female detective was on the fringes of the genre and society, examining these women provides insight into a society that was attempting to balance new needs for women outside the household with traditional, comfortable gender assumptions. The popularity of this relatively uncommon genre provides insight into a world that was interested not only in crime, but also in seeing female protagonists in the spotlight. It signals a cultural interest in understanding how female detection, and on a broader scale female professional work in general, would play out in their society.

As an extension of the sensation novel, the detective story provided quite a bit of excitement, especially when the detective was female. For some, the opportunity alone to read about women’s adventures was sensational, in that it offered a perspective that went dramatically against the familiar concept of women as creatures of the home. A “female engaged in a male profession…must have been regarded as a titillation to predominantly male readers” (Blake 33). However, the female detective novel was not only exciting; for the Victorians, it was also intensely problematic in that it threatened to deconstruct gender norms. Unlike Lady Audley’s Secret, in which the brunt of social capital is invested in the hands of a male detective, the female detective novel hinges on the concept of a powerful female. As in Lady Audley’s Secret, in which a male detective deems the title character mad, the female detective’s power rests in her ability to cast others as criminals. A particularly striking example of this occurs in Catherine L. Perkis’s The Experiences of Loveday Brooke, in which the title detective solves her first case by identifying a male criminal. In what must have been a satisfying reading experience for Victorian woman, she also is able to “give the evidence that will shut old Mr. Craven in an asylum for the rest of his life” (66). The moment is one in which the pattern of male authority is disrupted, casting the detective—who is especially powerful because she is backed by the entire
social institution of the law—in the dominant role.

In earlier novels, the deviant woman was often categorized as criminal. In a society that was highly suspect of even slightly abnormal women, most “Women criminals were judged against a highly artificial notion of the ideal woman—an exemplary moral being. Women’s crimes not only broke the criminal law but were viewed as acts of deviance from the ‘norm’ of femininity” (Trodd 308). The detective novel lent itself to a probing of this notion, especially because the detective—even when male—was already an eccentric character. The genre itself was therefore a revolutionary one in that it shifted women into a more authoritative role that was still not criminal. With Loveday Brooke, for example, the potentially uncomfortable way in which she breaks the “wax-doll” (Braddon 263) mold is tempered by the fact that she is a detective. If the detective novel is primarily concerned with maintaining social order, then “the literary detective provides a new kind of hero, dramatizing the powerful and productive role of the social order” (Thomas 176). As a detective, therefore, Brooke’s deviant work is done in order to maintain peace, rather than as a criminal violation of society’s laws. The detective novel operates on this complicated schema in which a female contributes to social order that she simultaneously deconstructs.

According to D.A. Miller, the detective’s fundamental role is “that of a patrol which…stands guard over a border fated to be transgressed” (2). But can someone who is transgressive also patrol potentially subversive factions? In other words, can the female detective both maintain order and violate norms? The core of the female detective’s existence is rooted in this paradox, as she is at once a lady expected to be domestic and a public figure whose success relies on outdoor activity. Like her male counterpart, the lady detective functions as the keeper of social order; but ironically, she also undercuts the rigid Victorian hierarchy with her
subversive, unfeminine behavior. In nearly every case, the lady detective’s narrative was wrapped up in “gender politics,” and therefore “betrays a noticeable unease with this subversion of established gender roles” (Willis 143). The problem with the lady detective, then, novel hinges on the question of how to make sense of a heroine who simultaneously subverts and regulates the social order.

Many critics solve this problem by reading the lady detective’s potential for subversion as restricted, arguing that her transgressive voice is buried beneath social conventions. In *The Woman Detective: Gender and Genre*, Kathleen Klein reads lady detective novels as primarily conservative ones, arguing that “thematically, they reinforced a capitalistic, traditional, moralistic, and nostalgic world view” (57); she argues that while the novels present the illusion of a liberal attitude towards women in the public sphere, ultimately convention triumphs over progress, as the lady detectives are “put in their proper, secondary places” (1). To a large extent, the lady detective’s restricted potential rests in the central heroine’s divisive character, itself. In fact, Klein argues that the success of the creator of the lady detective was wrapped up in his ability to write a sensational character who was ultimately not subversive; she envisions a “three-way tug of war for the author’s loyalties” (57) among the demands of the genre, the push for new opportunities, and nostalgia for traditional roles. As she points out, the question of what to do with these lady detectives was in the forefront of their creators’ minds.

Of course, the simple answer was to reinstate the potentially subversive woman into her preordained social role. Accordingly, the cyclical structure of the genre often demands that lady detectives eliminate the obstacles around their marriages, so that once married they no longer need to be detectives. By marrying off the lady detective, the novelist finds a way to provide a brief look at the promises of female liberation, all the while appeasing readers by sublimating the
liberated woman under the conventional one. Like Klein, Michele Slung poses marriage as the author’s solution to the problem of a rebellious lady detective; she says, “the authors themselves never seem to be quite certain of their creation, intent as they are on playing up the novelty of such a peculiar figure, often abandoning her in mid-career and finishing her off, not at the Reichenbach Falls, but at the matrimonial altar, in order to reassure the Victorian public of her ultimate femaleness” (Slung 17). Many critics read the detective novel’s frequent conclusion with marriage as a symbol of patriarchal dominance. The fact that the apparent “tug of war” is won by marriage, the bulwark of conservatism, supposedly reenacts a triumph of the conventions over feminism.

In this understanding of the lady detective novel, the genre itself becomes a prop used to support patriarchal hegemony. The transgressive act of detection becomes something temporary and isolated, an activity that cannot possibly exist within the confines of a Victorian marriage. The very act of detection is relegated to a girlish activity, a kind of female sowing-of-oats, which is no longer necessary once the girl becomes a woman. Once married, the potentially subversive detectives therefore become “conventional ladies who solve their puzzles as quickly as possible in order to return to the obscurity of their own homes” (Blake 29). Through marriage, they are stripped of their individual desires to enter the public sphere to work, and are forced to remain within their homes as proper wives. In effect, the lady detective’s lack of access to the world outside the home reinforces sphere ideology as an inescapable reality for Victorian women, forcing them into domestic roles associated with “bearing children and…maintaining the household—care of the children, sewing, cooking, and cleaning” (Shanley 5). Their husbands, on the contrary, would continue on to “debate matters of public concern” (Shanley 5). In this structure, the detective—like any other Victorian lady—becomes a normative figure, upholding
the domestic role assigned to women. Despite their initial attempts to resist, the lady detective becomes subject to the hegemonic patriarchal forces in these readings, and literally is confined to the female-appropriate domestic sphere.
CHAPTER I: THE FIRST WAVE, 1850s-1880s

The female detective novel grew into its most developed state in several steps, which can broadly be traced in the evolution from the amateur to the professional status of the detective herself. The first wave of detective novels was written only shortly after Dickens introduced the first detective into fiction; for the most part, though, the early female detectives were amateurs rather than professionals. The amateur, sleuth period had its origins in Gothic precedents, with heroines who mysteriously became entangled in dark situations. Like their predecessors, Victorian amateur detectives often did the majority of the work in their own homes, although they traditionally dealt with serious crimes like murder and robbery. Perhaps the most recognizable examples of this phenomenon are Wilkie Collins’s two contributions to the genre, Anne Rodway and Valeria Woodville, both of whom somewhat accidentally fall into their detective work. With “The Diary of Anne Rodway,” published in 1856, Collins introduced a female heroine who is commonly cited as the first lady detective in fiction. The title character follows a series of clues with the help of her fiancé in order to solve a friend’s murder. In *The Law and The Lady*, from 1875, he offers another example of an amateur female detective in the character of Valeria Woodville, who seeks to disprove allegations that her husband is a murderer. From the start, Collins describes his heroine as a woman with “prodigious tenacity of purpose” (69). In fact, she is the only person willing to actually take action in order to ensure that the true criminal—rather than her husband—is punished. In these novels, Collins started the line of valiant, even purposeful female detectives who were willing to use sleuth skills to right social wrongs.

Although critically neglected, especially in favor of early male detective novels, Collins’s two stories both produced significant advances in the evolution of the detective novel. In his
essay “Wilkie Collins and the Detective Story.” Robert Ashley reads the female detective stories as incredibly important contributions to the genre, perhaps even more so than Collins’s stories of male detectives; he comments,

“Almost as strikingly as The Moonstone, The Law and the Lady employed themes and motifs which were to become stock devices of the detective story. Prominent among these are the courtroom scenes, the attempt of the amateur (Valeria) to succeed where professionals (Eustace’s lawyers) had failed, the endeavor to clear the name of a wrongly suspected person, and the piecing together of the fragments of a torn letter. In two respects, The Law and the Lady comes much closer than The Moonstone to the twentieth-century detective story: the crime is murder, not theft, and the detective is the protagonist, not merely an important character” (54-55).

In addition to its contributions to genre’s form, Collins’s novel had important feminist implications. The positioning of a female character in the lead role, alone, was a landmark moment for detective novel. And as Ashley implies, Valeria provides a particularly effective example of a woman’s ability to perform within the conventions of the detective novel, solving a crime in the same manner a man would. His reading even pushes further by suggesting that her performance is even stronger than a male detective’s because of the violent nature of the case. A woman, rather than a male character like Sergeant Cuff, becomes the quintessential detective prototype in this reading. In the same way, the plot of “The Diary of Anne Rodway” lends itself to a quite similar reading. Like Valeria, Anne performs within the detective novel tradition, and does so in a way that presents her as the central character.

Despite the dominant critical reading of female detective novels as a genre that was ultimately unable to fulfill its feminist ambitions, Collins early novels did manage to make a contribution in that they presented examples of women successfully doing men’s work. In both cases, the characters are intelligent, capable women with the rare ability actually to solve the crimes at hand. Without fail, the detective heroines ensure that the true criminals are found. Therefore, these early female detectives were radical in that they were willing to step outside the
house, and perform traditionally male roles in order to protect the public welfare. The two novels did much to cement the female detective as a real figure, suggesting that she too could actually contribute to maintaining social order. But while he certainly was revolutionary in introducing female detectives, Collins’s heroines’ amateur status becomes a central, and problematic aspect of the two novels. Like Dickens’s Mrs. Bucket, these early amateur detectives found their progress stunted by the limitations of middle-class, married life. Like Bleak House’s Mrs. Buckett, Collins’s detectives find their ability to do “great things” severely circumscribed. By the time the novels end, the heroines are less detectives than they are conventional housewives who are momentarily swept up by “detective fever,” who use their dilettantish skills to solve crimes that are intimately connected to their own lives.

In part, the circumscribed female power in the novels is the result of Collins’s investment in his own career as an author. He wrote his first detective novels, The Moonstone included, because he felt the sensation novel had become hackneyed (Ashley 51). His detective novels provided a way to toy with a new detective character, while still employing the popular conventions of the sensation novel. Because these lady detective novels, especially, were an outgrowth of the sensation novel, they were particularly beholden to public opinion. The first wave of novels must therefore be considered in relation to their status as culturally popular texts, with their seemingly conformist conclusions to be read as concessions to readers who wanted to read exciting mysteries rather than treatises on women’s rights. From a practical standpoint, the lady detective novel simply fell into comfortable patterns that were able to “meet the author’s need for satisfying popular demand and mass imagination while reinforcing a conservative ideology” (Klein 72). If this analysis of his novels as popular texts holds true, then the success of Collins’s novels was also contingent on writing the most subversive elements out of novels in
order to cater to social conventions. Although his approach was a practical one, therefore, it was not consistent with the vision of powerful, capable females found within the novels. His novels are essentially problematic in that they offer as their heroines women who would be viewed by their own society as deviant, and in effect would compromise their status as popular entertainment.

Many critics suggest that he solved this problem by pointing to the ephemeral nature of the lady detective’s work, therefore framing her detection as an extraordinary exception from the rule. In her examination of “The Diary of Anne Rodway,” for example, Nayder reads the novel as a fundamentally conservative one. Even with the presence of a potentially subversive female detective, Collins’s novel reaffirms social norms of women as subservient; she says:

The fate of the female sleuth serves an equally conservative end. Despite her success as a detective—a role that requires her to cross gender boundaries at times—Anne is forced to hand over the investigation to her fiancé Robert upon his return from America…Anne is rewarded for her detective efforts with a marriage that elevates her to the middle class but that leaves her an unwaged woman in the private sphere, wholly dependent on her male provider. As Collins constructs his plotline his heroine simultaneously discovers the identity of Mary’s murderer and finds her own “proper place” as a wife, suppressing her manly capabilities as a detective (180).

As she asserts here, the novel does indeed end with the heroine’s return to the domestic sphere, where her “manly capabilities” are replaced with domestic sensibilities. The narrative, which as a detective story is naturally filled with mystery and unease, concludes in a sentimental manner. In her final moments as narrator, after she finds her friend’s murderer and is reunited with her husband, Anne Rodway tearfully speaks of her family’s reunion, saying, “A little domestic interruption of this kind was all that was wanted to put us at our ease. We drew round the table cheerfully, and set the Queen of Hearts at the head of it, in the character of mistress of the house already” (Collins 163). Once the mystery is solved, Anne Rodway is able to return to a position that puts her family, as well as the readers, completely at “ease” with her as “mistress of the
house.” The potentially threatening lady detective is reabsorbed into a more comfortable social position as a housewife.

By this point, of course, Collins’s heroine has already conceded to lay down her pen because there is simply “little, very little, that I have left to say” (163). Her moment of agency, as both narrator and detective, comes to an abrupt end as soon as order is restored. The implications of this scenario run contradictory to the feminist work of creating powerful heroines, in that it suggests that women must abandon their authority as soon they solve their problem. Although she proves herself a diligent and perceptive detective, solving a case which those around her fail even to recognize as murder, Anne’s skills are represented as something she must abandon in order to resituate herself in the domestic sphere.

Similarly in Collins’s The Law and the Lady, the novel ends with the heroine’s return to the domestic sphere. The novel concludes with Valeria’s declaration of silence: “Must I shut up the paper? Yes. There is nothing more for you to read or for me to say” (413.) Once she has vindicated her husband, she has little reason to exercise her own agency, either through detection or narration. Her detective story is quite literally done. Instead of pursing further adventures, Valeria recommits herself to a domestic life. Although they have been separated for the majority of the novel, Valeria’s narrative ends within the literal confines of her own bedroom alongside her husband. Thus, the novel’s conclusion reads as though detection has merely been a prelude into married life, or “as though the detective story was meant to prepare Valeria for her new role as a wife and mother” (Talairach-Vielmas 161). The feminine subversion played out over the novel fades away as soon as Valeria’s husband reappears, despite the fact that her detection has made this very reappearance possible. Once more, her detective work is represented as
something that must be done only when absolutely necessary, and once it is no longer needed, is abandoned in favor of traditional home life.

By the novels’ conclusions, Collins has solved the problem of the woman detective by framing her as someone who—although capable—is not invested in her work. While he did introduce some of the first lady detectives, Collins’s heroines are only the first, and in many ways the least radical, of these figures. Yet by nature, the detective figure operates outside women’s protected, domestic sphere. Thus, the very existence of a female detective at least acknowledged women’s ability to do meaningful work. However, his vision of a lady detective was primarily and ultimately of a domestic detective, someone who left the house only for a brief window of time before she happily returned home. The concept of a female detective as someone who worked outside the home, independently from her husband, had yet to come into existence. As a result, Collins’s detective heroines are inescapably trapped within a domestic tradition that makes subversion all but impossible.
CHAPTER II: THE SECOND WAVE, 1880s-1900s

As the nineteenth century drew to its close, the new concerns about crime created a shift to a different sort of female detective through the replacement of amateurs with professionals. While these women were an extension of Collins’s idea of capable female detections, they also pushed past the limitations of this motif by suggesting that women could do such work outside their own homes. For Victorians, the shift to a woman in the detective novel as a professional—and therefore the novel’s hero, as well as a figure of positive identification—signaled a shift in ideas about women. By the 1880s, the Women’s Freedom League had started to call for women in the police force, although ideas about a potential police woman’s function varied widely (Kungl 12). While some advocates argued that women were more suited to interview female victims and criminals, others suggested that female officers would bring an increased emphasis on integrity and dignity to the police force (Jackson 17). In Sherlock’s Sisters, Joseph Kestner alternatively interprets the call for female detectives as a response to perceived corruption, incompetence, and failure within the all-male force. He cites in particular the police’s inability to solve the Jack the Ripper murders from 1888, arguing that the wave of lady detective novels published in the 1890s suggested that a new type of detective was needed (26). On one level, the female detective novel operated as a way to translate the inchoate idea of a female police officer into reality. The proliferation of lady detectives in literature introduced the concept of professional female crime-solver to the public, much in the same way that Bleak House introduced the figure of the “inspector” shortly after he was historically added to the police’s ranks. In this sense, the professional female detective operated as a new kind of idealized woman—one who made a utilitarian contribution to solving society’s conflicts. The existence and prominence of lady detectives suggested to this extent that women were needed outside the
house.

The second wave of the genre, published in the final decade of the nineteenth century, ushered in a new type of female detective. The professional detective—the most prominent examples being Dorcas Dene, Loveday Brooke, and Dora Myrl—was a different breed from the amateur. Unlike Anne Rodway, who “accomplishes more by chance and perseverance than by the exercise of any particular detective skill” (Ashely 50), these women are highly capable, trained detectives. As legally employed detectives, they also actively seek out detective work, rather than fall into it circumstantially. In fact, Nayder points to these exact women in her discussion of female detectives, juxtaposing them with her reading of Anne Rodway. In an argument that these women signaled a new kind of character she asserts, “Not until the appearance of Catherine L. Pirkis’s *The Experiences of Loveday Brooke* (1894), George R. Sims’s *Dorcas Dene* (1897), and M. McDonnell Bodkin’s *Dora Myrl* (1900) did the female detective receive a more explicit endorsement in Victorian fiction” (180). Indeed, in characters like Loveday Brooke and Dorcas Dene, nineteenth-century readers found examples of successfully employed female detectives who predated by about two decades the hiring of real female detectives. While the men with whom they work often fall short, these two heroines always manage to solve their crimes in a manner that reinforces the utilitarian idea of the female detectives’ work as something necessary for society’s wellbeing.

In Pirkis’ *The Experiences of Loveday Brooke*, for instance, the promising possibilities of female detection come into acute focus. The title character’s detective work allows her to solve a series of crimes, many of which represent larger social problems. In the course of her work, Brooke reunites families, creates marriages, and rescues children. Despite the maternal nature of her detection, however, it is “no conventional women’s work” (Klein 70) if only because she
uses it to avoid the family, home, and leisure; instead, the “detective’s distance from a woman’s ordinary life is clearly implied in this behavior” (Klein 70). Her detective work provides the means by which she “defied convention, and had chosen for herself a career that had cut her off sharply from her former associates and her position in society” (7). While her detective work serves a social function, Brooke is clearly represented as an abnormal woman—someone “cut off” from mainstream society. As an unmarried, professional woman, she is marked as a problematic character. Although her work is essential to the maintenance of social order, Brooke’s very existence also engenders confusion and uneasiness for a readership uncomfortable with the presence of a professional, single female detective.

While presenting a genre-breaking character in the form of the female detective, these texts nonetheless seem to fall short of creating “truly subversive freaks” (Blake 29). On the contrary, they seem to offer the nineteenth century reader a rather familiar woman—the respectable, subordinate housewife—in an unconventional job. These women are still gendered figures who come to represent the problem of reconciling acceptable female agency with conventions. Once more, the mere presence of a professional female detective does little to change the reality of the justice system. As in Collins’s novels, the fantasy of female empowerment through detection is ultimately a short-lived one. At the end of each case, Brooke hands her case over to the police, however incompetent they may be, to make the arrests. The structure of the cases provides a constant reminder that the existence of the female detective is a fantasy, which is disrupted as power is reinvested in the male officers’ hands. At one point, Brooke quite literally is forced to play second fiddle to the male inspectors. While locked in a room with a criminal, she finds “her only chance lay in gaining time for the detectives to reach the house and enter through the window” (63); in her moment of desperation, Brooke is saved by
“three pairs of strong arms” (64) that pull her away from her attacker. The novel returns to a reality that is unquestionably male dominated, placing the “abnormal” heroine back in the traditional role of the damsel-in-distress, and therefore casting her in as someone who is inevitably dependent on men.

In *Dorcas Dene*, Sims similarly employs many of the same conventions found in Collins’s novels, especially in regards to his creation of a respectably domestic heroine. Like Loveday, Dorcas is eminently qualified to be a detective. One police officer with whom she works even remarks “you have plenty of shrewd common sense, you are a keen observer” (27). Despite her qualifications, however, Doracs has little desire to actually be a detective—something which transforms her from a potentially radical character into an acceptable woman.

In *Creating the Fictional Female Detective*, Carla Kungl argues that author female detective novelist “when seeking to establish professional authority for their female detectives…relied primarily upon socially accepted traits as a means of incorporating women into male-dominated spheres, regardless of their own beliefs about those traits” (81). Even the more progressive, second wave authors were not exempt from this tactic. In a sentimental twist that harkens back to Collins’s *The Law and The Lady*, Sims’s heroine is “dipped rather deeply in sentiment” (Panek 108) in the sense that the plot circles around her husband’s ill-fated blindness. Her career, although radical in itself, thus becomes yet another maternal attempt to protect her own family. Of course, Dorcas also presents her own work as anything but radical. From the start, she insists that she will quit detective work if it “involved any sacrifice of my womanly instincts” (35), but fortunately she is able to solve the majority of her cases from the comfort of her own living room. Her detective work is neither appealing nor empowering to her, but instead is an unfortunate task she performs in order to support her husband. Dorcas’s regards detective
work is something that pulls her away from her family, whom she visits “whenever I have been able to spare a day” (118) away from London. Her function as a particularly subversive detective is not undone therefore by the fact that she is steeped in middle-class respectability, but rather by the way in which detection becomes something that stands in the way of her true desire to be a housewife.

In fact, Dorcas is so adverse to detective work that the only cases she chooses to pursue are those that appeal to her on an emotional—and therefore feminine—level. The detective works she pursues is of an equally sentimental nature, normally involving other families that have been unjustly torn apart. In the chapter titled “The Haverstock Hill Murder,” for instance, she consents to take a case only at the pleading of an emotional mother whose son has been wrongly convicted. In one scene, Dorcas describes her own relenting in sentimental terms: “At first I declined to take the matter up—the police had so thoroughly investigated the affair…But she pleaded so earnestly—her faith in her son was so great—and she seemed such a sweet, dear old lady, that at last she conquered my scruples, and I consented to study the case” (119). Her work is very much the same as amateur detectives like Anne Rodway and Valeria Woodville, whose detective work is also performed in the service of a wrong man. Like her amateur detective predecessors, Dorcas conforms to the same patterns of avenging and protecting family members, although her attempts to achieve this are done vicariously through a sympathetic mother figure. The result of her detective activity is not financial solvency, let alone female empowerment, but rather evidence of her ability to reunite a family. Although his detective is a professional, Sims accounts for his heroine’s decision to turn to an unfeminine profession—rather than a traditional middle-class woman’s job like teaching—by framing it as work that is intimately connected to the family. In this sense, the professional detective novel broke from the
earlier novels only in terms of a superficial classification. Once she solves this same case, Dorcas receives a “touching and beautiful” letter from the mother that leaves her “deeply moved” (130). And, in her own words “these are the rewards of my profession…they compensate for everything” (130). Because it is the sentimental aspect of detection that appeals to her, instead of the adventure or economic benefits, her work becomes a seemingly natural extension of her femininity.

Although there is certainly more potential for female subversion in these texts that in Collins’s or Dickens’s, the detective is still on unequal footing. Any other cultural changes seem to have had little effect on the focus on marriage, in particular, in a woman’s life. In her book, Kathleen Klein reads lady detective novels as a product of this historical moment:

As might be expected, with strong signals of approaching change at the end of the century, authors and readers found the old plots for women preferable to possible new ones. Rejecting the implications of the so-called new woman and her role, four of these five authors (M.M. Bodkin, George Sims, Milton Danvers, and Marie Connor Leighton, but not C.L. Pirkis) plot their works’ true conclusions around the marriage plot or its sequel (58).

With the exception of Pirkis’s Loveday Brooke, who is exempt from the marriage plot because as a spinster she is already too far outside the system, the other novels universally end with the lady detectives’ marriages. The pattern of the late nineteenth-century detective novel seems to culminate in marriage, or at the very least the sleuth’s eventual conformity to a preordained social position. In spite of the agency they acquire as detectives, these women—including turn-of-the-century heroines like Loveday Brooke and Dorcas Dene just as much as the earlier Anne Rodway and Valeria Woodville—are ultimately unable to resist the script that society as prewritten for them. All of the women are “reliably ladylike in their behavior” (72), and the detective novel becomes quite domestic as a result. The detective novel, at least when it features a female in the central role, is rewritten as a romance that only ends once the lady detective
reassumes her place as a dependent. Even while she reads these exact characters as evidence of the female detective’s increased status, Nayder reads them as conventional stories in that they too end with the women’s power stunted. These women, as much as their predecessors, “often prove subordinate to their husbands or their male colleagues” (Nadyer 180). Her characterization of these lady detectives as “subordinate” underscores the conventional nature of the texts. While they raise the possibility of female empowerment through detection, they ultimately solve the problems posed by female detection by ruling in favor of a patriarchy that demands domestic women.

Ultimately, however, these early detective stories did contribute to the feminist cause of broadening women’s opportunities. Although their power was certainly limited, both heroines accomplish something radical in the fact they have reached the status of professional, real detectives. If financial stability is their only purpose for becoming detectives, as the novels seem to suggest, then why do they not take up traditional women’s work? By the 1890s, even middle-class women had integrated themselves into the professional world, as teachers, nurses, and typists (Neff 252). The fact that these women instead opt for a masculine line of work, for which they are perfectly suited, seems to imply a revolutionary transgression of gender roles. For all their problems, the novels still hint that it was possible—and even necessary—for women to do detective work that would have been considered unfeminine by earlier generations. Nevertheless, the ways in which the heroines are eventually and universally forced to conform to pre-existing hierarchies suggests that neither detection nor liberation was a reality for women. The problematic conclusions of these novels provide a reminder that Victorian feminists still needed to look to different avenues for independence, especially ones through which female potential—as more than just wives—could be fully realized.
CHAPTER III: GRANT ALLEN’S ALTERNATIVE SOLUTION

Although many detective novels seem unanimously to side with the patriarchy, Grant Allen’s novels alternatively offer a more complex solution to the problem of the female detective. From a chronological standpoint, Allen’s female detective novels fit into the second wave; he published *Miss Cayley’s Adventures* in 1899, and *Hilda Wade: A Woman with Tenacity of Purpose* in 1900. Nevertheless, his novels both structurally follow the paths laid out by earlier writers. He ensures that his female detectives do work that benefits, rather than disrupts, the structure of society. Over and over, Lois Cayley and Hilda Wade find ways to act as the guardians of their culture, ensuring that criminals—especially foreign ones—are kept locked away. And, his novels both end with the heroines’ marriages. Allen’s novels alternatively offer a more complex solution to the problem of the female detective.

Despite his detectives’ amateur status, they do their work exclusively outside the home placing them closer to professionals. How did he achieve what his contemporary novelists did not while working within the same plot frame? The structural similarities only disguise a more radical perspective on female detectives; to a large extent, Grant Allen works against the patterns established by his contemporary detective writers. His novels branched out of the movement to limit female detectives, stepping beyond the boundaries of the “domestic” detective novel. While other writers seem to favor the patriarchy by having their heroines conform, Allen approaches the problem of the female detective from a different angle: rather than chose sides between female empowerment and subordination, he instead looks for a way for the two sides to come together. In his novels, Allen works through the complications of the lady detective paradox to create a world that has room for an empowered, female detective who still manages to please conventional readers.
In part, Allen’s detective novels grew out of his own fascination with feminism, particularly the marriage question. In Victorian England, the institution of marriage was often little more than a financial arrangement in which money and status were traded between families. While many marriages were certainly based on affection, the overarching social structure viewed these relationships as a “business transaction: a man got a housekeeper/companion, and in exchange a woman got a household and children” (Flanders 219). In this business-like structure, premarital relationships were dictated by fixed courtship rules intended to protect the financial interests of each party’s family. The conventions demanded that women be neither forward nor reserved in their dealings with potential suitors. They were expected simultaneously to play the courting game, and to remain uninvolved in the strategy of marriage (Flanders 230). In courting, issues of family, love, and politics all came into play. The individual concerns of the woman, or potential wife, often did not. Even as late as the 1890s, Victorian gender relationships were still complicated by courtship rituals. Many women, as a result, were confused about what exactly marriage entailed. In her discussion of courtship, Joan Perkin calls to attention the complications of the process, asking, “What, then, did an innocent young unmarried woman think marriage would involve? The romantic had a hazy idea of loving and being loved, in a warm glow of cuddles and kisses” (Perkin 52).

This perspective clashes quite dramatically with new understandings of marriage that came into vogue later in the century, especially on the part of educated women. In an essay from 1895, Alice Gorden described marriage as an obstacle in the path of “modern” womanhood, saying:

It is, of course, in these days of progress an open question, that must be decided according to each woman’s individuality, whether marriage is to be considered an achievement or a come-down…But it must be remembered that education has, in most cases, this very valuable result; it does make women more fastidious…and obviates the
necessity of their having to rely on matrimony as a means of support, and therefore prevents many early, un congenial, and improvident marriages…All women would be glad to marry their ideal hero; but heroes are scarce, and the average man who proposes marriage to the average girl can at best offer her no wider prospect than a round of careful housekeeping, motherhood and thrift; and it must be doubted if a university training is adapted for developing these homely and prosaic virtues (113).

In “Why Women Are Ceasing to Marry,” Ella Hepworth Dixon similarly argues for a new, more realistic understanding of marriage. Her essay, published in the same year as Miss Cayley’s Adventures, works against the idealization of marriage. Instead, she says “the reason why women are ceasing to marry must rather be attributed to a shifting feminine point of view, to a more critical attitude towards their masculine contemporaries” (391). Like many contemporary critics, these New Woman writers viewed marriage as a concession to patriarchal norms, in Gorden’s words, a “come-down” for educated, capable women. These writers had a concept of marriage that charted the residual effects of marriage on the individual. They called to attention, for some of the first times, what was lost in the transformation from girl to wife.

As they suggest, marriage did have significant, and often detrimental, effects on women’s status. A woman’s standing was “dramatically altered when she married…once married a woman had no independent legal existence” (Mitchell 103). Even after the establishment of the Married Women’s Property Act in 1882, which for the first time allowed women to control their own property, the law failed to protect women whose husbands wanted access to their wives’ money (Mitchell 104). Most women, conversely, were only able to find some semblance of legal equality before marriage or once widowed. Unlike her married counterpart, the upper-middle-class single woman was allowed complete control over her own property, and was able to earn a reasonable enough income to hold private quarters. Many of these women held scientific jobs, in the medical profession for instance, that were formerly restricted to men. And unlike the married wife, who was expected to care for her family at home, the single woman was able to travel and
explore alone. In some cases, Victorian women who held property were even allowed to vote for local public officials (Mitchell 11)—a right not universally allowed until 1928.

As a writer, Allen was deeply engaged in the public debate about the effects of marriage on women’s liberation. Much of the literature of the nineteenth-century was also occupied with this same “Woman Question”—the question, that is, of whether women were entitled to fundamentally equal rights. In many texts, the “New Woman” offered a possible answer as she came to replace the traditional woman relegated to her domestic sphere. In *Victorian Women*, Perkin calls attention to the ways in which “the heroines of novels changed to reflect new ideas on women’s property rights, the need for better education and jobs, and changed marital relations” (241), referring specifically to novels like Charlotte Bronte’s *Jane Eyre* (1847) and George Eliot’s *Daniel Deronda* (1867). It was out of these earlier feminist novels, which probed women’s place in society, that New Woman texts came into prominence of their own. These novels too grew out of the political drive on the part of feminists for more rights for women, creating a series of empowered female protagonists like those in Victoria Cross’s *Anna Lombard* (1901), Thomas Hardy’s *Tess of the D’Urbervilles* (1891) and *Jude the Obscure* (1896), and George Gissings *The Odd Women* (1896)—all texts which took on marriage and sexuality in an open, honest way. In *The New Woman in Fact and Fiction*, Angelique Richardson and Chris Willis comment on the political origins of the women’s movement: “During the course of the nineteenth century women had increasingly challenged their subordinate social and political position. They had…condemned the sexual double standard and urged women’s right to education, employment and full citizenship” (1). To a large extent, Allen capitalizes on the political moment and literary track in which women were seeking out new ways to realize their potential outside of the static domestic sphere. His novels, in a way that other detective novels
do not, participate in a debunking of myths about marriage that is more honest.

In his own New Woman novel, *The Woman Who Did*, he attacked the institution of marriage through his heroine Herminina Barton. Rather than marry her live-in lover, Barton elects to follow a path of single motherhood. Because she contends that “marriage itself is still an assertion of men’s supremacy over woman” (43), Barton removes herself entirely from the world of marriage. In a particularly philosophical moment, she justifies her own decision with a proto-feminist evaluation of marriage as an oppressive institution, declaring:

> “See, here is the man of my choice, the man I love, truly, and purely, the man any one of you would willingly have seen offering himself in lawful marriage to your own daughters. If I would I might go the beaten way you prescribe and marry him legally. But of my own free will I disdain that degradation; I choose rather to be free” (47).

Her understanding of marriage as degradation, and as the opposite of freedom, extends Allen’s critique of the institution as something that is essentially unfriendly to women. His polemical rhetoric underscores his deep dissatisfaction with the treatment of women, all while posing a subversive female who refuses to be “beaten” (47) down as the solution. Unlike someone like Collins, who concedes female authority to patriarchal forces at the end of his detective novels, Allen’s solution here is to confront the problem of how to deal with an independent woman by suggesting that there is no place for her at all in a marriage.

In addition to prompting a response titled *The Woman Who Didn’t*, Allen’s novel was castigated by critics who, perhaps aptly, thought that it failed to present an acceptable alternative to marriage. In a review from *The Saturday Review* from 1895, for instance, H.G. Wells attacked the novel for its lack of resolution:

> And the gospel Mr. Grant Allen—who surely knows that life is one broad battlefield—is preaching: what is it? It is the emancipation of women. He does not propose to emancipate them from the narrowness, the sexual savagery, the want of charity, that are the sole causes of the miseries of the illegitimate and the unfortunate: instead he wishes to emancipate them from monogamy (319).
For Wells, *The Woman Who Did* failed to present a viable way to emancipate women from their “miseries,” presenting death as the only alternative to playing by society’s rules.

In an essay titled “The Girl of the Future” from 1890, Allen started to integrate his vision of new ideals into the discussion, arguing that “what we need indeed, is not more compulsion, more restriction, more artificial unions, more arbitrary interference, but more freedom, more latitude, more readjustment” (51). He uses the article as a platform to tackle what he calls the “Marriage Question,” ultimately concluding that women would be liberated only by partaking in a series of temporary “Free Unions.” Allen posed a sexual relationship that was not tied down by legal resolutions—or a “friendship,” as Barton frequently refers to it—as the solution most feasible for the women of England. Despite her insistence that she will “never be wife or slave” (104), Barton is willing to enter a “free union” because “friendship implied for her no change of existence, merely an addition to the fullness of her living” (89). The goal, as she poses it, is for relationships between the sexes to enhance women’s already full lives. An ideal relationship is one that does not interfere with women’s preexisting lives, but rather recognizes the validity of women’s pre-marital existence, and becomes a supplement to an already rich life.

From this perspective, at least, Allen’s attitude towards marriage was consistent with that of later critics who read the traditional marriages that end many detective novels—including those featuring both amateur and professional detectives—as the end of the heroines’ opportunity for power. It is likely that he would have agreed with critical assessments of Collins’s heroines as constrained by their marriages. Grant’s earlier pieces create a powerful sense of disillusionment with the institution of marriage; he was indeed highly critical of the double standard that virtually enslaved the women of England. Why then do both of his detective novels end with the heroines’ marriages? In *Miss Cayley’s Adventures*, the lady detective of the
title spends much of the novel refusing marriage in order to thwart a jewelry robbery and find a missing letter, all while outsmarting a con-man who plans to steal her future husband’s fortune. In *Hilda Wade: A Woman with Tenacity of Purpose*, the detective heroine similarly moves through a series of adventures on the way to disproving her father’s murder conviction, also refusing to marry until she has completed this task. Allen’s lady detectives are characterized by cleverness and perspicacity, as well as an initial resentment to marriage, that clearly marks them as descendants of Barton. Nevertheless, both women do marry by the end of their respective novels. Despite his declared objections to traditional marriage, Allen’s detective novels end with what seem to be rather traditional couplings. In terms of this plot element, they are quite similar to the patriarchal plotlines of Collins’s novels, which conclude with heroines who are finally able to settle down to enjoy marriage. Are his detective novels, then, proof of Allen’s acceptance of the marriage system? By framing his novels around the marriage plot does he endorse marriage, and all the potentially oppressive effects of the institution?

The question of how to read the detectives’ marriages is one that has garnered quite a bit of critical attention. In their readings of Grant Allen, many critics interpret his texts much in the same way they do Collins’s and Pirkis’s novels. Like popular understandings of earlier detectives, the majority of critical opinion seems to read Allen’s use of the marriage plot as conformity. In his essay on Allen, for example, Chris Willis situates both novels’ endings within a historical context that recognizes the oppressive nature of marriage:

> It would seem that marriage was indeed a fate worse than death for the ‘lady detective,’ at least as far as her career was concerned. However daring and innovative her adventures, the 1890s heroine all too often meets the same end as her predecessors in romantic fiction…The female detective had to prove her virtue and womanliness by marrying (143).
His reading places the lady detective in the line of romantic heroines, rather than as the offspring of a revolutionary New Woman, who would have preferred death to a stifling marriage. For Willis, these heroines elect the figurative “death” of their masculine detective qualities in order to validate their womanhood. At the very least, the heroines’ marriages mark their “death” as detectives. Once married, they presumably fall into the path of normative nineteenth century womanhood, like Collins’s Anne Rodway or Valeria Woodville.

In his biography of Allen, Peter Morton similarly reads both detective heroines as conventional ones. Although he calls attention to Lois Cayley and Hilda Wade’s eccentric, adventurous character, he still says “in the end most are shown tamed by matrimony and maternity” (122). This critical opinion is by far the dominant one, with nearly all critics agreeing that Allen’s texts are ultimately conformist ones. In an extension of his discussion of Allen, for example Willis once more reads the lady detective as someone who is forced to conform to society’s rules through marriage:

The woman detective not only captures the criminal, but proves herself cleverer than her male colleagues in the process. However, the detective fiction of the 1890s and 1900s betrays a noticeable unease with this subversion of established gender roles. However successful she is, the woman detective of the fin de siècle usually gives up detection in favour of marriage in the last chapter of her adventures, stepping firmly back into the domestic role...Novelists writing about women were still searching for a satisfactory alternative to the romance plot’s “happy ending” of marriage and maternity as reward for the heroine’s endeavors (143).

In her reading of *Miss Cayley’s Adventures*, Elizabeth Foxwell similarly calls attention to the “presentation of a smart, independent female detective who turns into a conventional wife” (xiii); she argues that “despite Miss Cayley’s initial resistance, her adventures do end in marriage, a predictable end for most female detectives of the period” (xiii). In these readings, marriage becomes the culturally significant event that displaces rebellion. These critics envision the act of marriage as a potent exchange, of self-reliance for dependency and subversion for conformity.
Essentially, therefore, they argue that marriage provides as a way to contain subversive female activity—in this case detection—within a culturally acceptable form. Once married, the female detective’s work definitively ends, and she is rendered acceptable only because this work terminates.

In order to separate the texts from the twenty-first century critical lens, it is best to consider the lady detective novel as a unique product of a certain context. Because these critics are tempted to consider Allen’s stories from a modern feminist perspective, they offer a rather unproductive reading that does little to account for the ways in which they did do feminist work, although in less radical ways than may be expected. Also lost in the discussion are the ways in which the female detective exemplified women’s increased opportunities for employment, as well as the ways in which these heroines paved the way for later, more obviously radical detectives. The developments of the latter half of the nineteenth century reveal a gradual movement away from the repressed Victorian notion of womanhood, even more significant than a dramatic shift away from the prevailing domestic ideologies. According to Richardson and Willis, “Victorian feminism is not a simple story of a radical break with tradition. For example, even by the fin de siècle, many New Women wanted to achieve social and political power by reinventing rather than rejecting their domestic role” (9). The second half of the nineteenth-century saw a number of reforms that improved women’s everyday life, granting them protections at the workplace, the power to divorce, and custody of their children. By the time the Married Women’s Property Act passed in 1882, only about a decade before Allen started writing his lady detectives, the Victorian woman was for the first time no longer considered mere “chattel.” Nevertheless, the same woman was still expected to conform to the domestic paradigm. The status of the nineteenth-century woman was a complicated one, allowing for only
a limited amount of resistance; and for these Victorians, improvement—although appreciated—
was not synonymous with the achievement of equality. It was possible for a woman to be a
reformer, and even to incite actual change, while still contained within the marital institution.

On the other hand, Klein oppositely argues that “the detective script and the woman
script clash because the necessary conditions for each are the inverse and contradiction of the
other” (57). Her understanding hinges on the idea that it was historically impossible for a
woman to be a feminine detective, because the qualities for required for detective work—like
aggression, courage, and rationality—were considered masculine by nineteenth-century reads.
In effect, the lady detective becomes a character who is torn between her feminine side and her
detective work, because the two cannot coexist. As his answer to the “Woman Question,”
however, Allen alternatively poses a figure who balances these two sides, welding the best of the
modern detective with that of the traditional lady. Rather than a competition between
contradictions, Allen envisions in his heroines a way to balance the “detective script” and the
“woman script” into a more liberated, yet still feminine, whole: at once, they are able to ride
bicycles and solve crimes while courting and nursing. His heroines, for all their subversive
potential, are still “women” in the nineteenth-century sense. While their actions offer a flash of
feminist resistance, they embrace their maternal and feminine sides alongside their transgressive
ones. In particular, they find it possible to marry without abandoning their own lives, especially
their detective work. In this light, Allen’s treatment of his heroines does not chart their
“collapses into conformity” (Walls 236), but rather provides an example of a more gradual
feminism consistent with historical progress.

While the dominant critical opinion seems to recognize the limited potential for
subversion, Allen’s attitude towards his heroines is much more liberal than is suggested by their
eventual marriages. Allen’s detective novels, although less obviously radical than *The Woman Who Did*, still participate actively in the discourse of liberated women; his heroines are educated, employed women who shirk many of the duties assigned to women in nineteenth-century England. His heroines, quite explicitly, are examples of the empowered single woman who exists outside the nineteenth-century gender order. As extensions of the sensation novel, in that they feature what would easily have been regarded as titillating heroines, Allen’s novels certainly were intended to entertain. But the lady detective’s feminist bent—her boldness, professional drive, and noisiness—also places her within a tradition of politically rebellious women. In Lois, for instance, Allen introduces the idea of a “bold, fast, shameless, brazen-faced creature” (109) whose very existence seems to disrupt notions of women’s frailty. Without husbands, both women are able to work in male-dominated professions—Lois alternately works for periods of time as salesman, typist, and journalist, and Hilda as a nurse who actively participates in scientific medical experiments. As political pieces, then, they form part of the collection of turn-of-the-century novels, in particular, that were “innovative in [their] portrayal of strong-minded females”; they show that “women were at last beginning to rebel against their subservient position in society” (Diamond 5).

Of course, both stories do end in their heroines’ marriages; and, Allen does even seem to offer marriage as the reward for lady detectives who solve their cases. While they are legally entitled to their moment of orphaned singleness, Allen’s heroines eventually cede their independent states of being to marriage—a compromise that women like Barton are unwilling to make. But the lady detectives’ eventual marriages, alone, do not provide enough evidence that the “conventional sex/gender bias dominates over the generic conventions” (Klein 2) in these novels. Instead, Allen finds a way to rewrite marriage as an institution that allowed for female
activity and speech, thus ensuring that marriage was not actually a compromise of feminist ideals. In both texts, Allen constructs pre-marital relationships based on shared responsibility and friendship, and provides no reason to believe that equal status will not continue into marriage. In fact, he seems to show quite the opposite, with both Lois Cayley and Hilda Wade continuing to do their detective work up until the final pages. For instance, Hilda Wade’s final words seem to suggest that she will continue working; she declares, after finding justice for her father, “And now, I can live. Actual life comes next. We have much to do, Hubert” (224). The active stance in these final moments suggests that these heroines will not transform into passive wives, but rather that they still “have much to do” in the public, outdoor world as working detectives. The fact that his lady detectives do not abandon their work altogether once married, but instead continue to practice potentially disruptive behavior, undercuts the critical argument that these texts are conformist ones.

Unlike the other female detectives, Allen’s heroines are not relegated to an abject state once married. Instead, his lady detectives seem to find space for resistance and transgression as wives. In part, he attributes this phenomenon to the very character of their marriages. Rather than have his heroines simply marry, he only allows them to do so after a rather lengthy courtship period that proves that they are marrying men who accept—and even seem to desire—active women. Like Harold Tillington, the proto-feminist fiancé of Lois Cayley, Allen privileges the potentially subversive adventuress over the housewife or the “wax-doll” (Braddon 263). In these marriages, Allen envisions a type of coupling based on companionship and collaboration, rather than on male domination. In *The Subjection of Women*, published only two decades before Allen wrote his lady detective novels, John Stuart Mill makes a similar argument for woman as partner to her husband; he asserts:
It is not true that in all voluntary association between two people, one of them must be absolute master: still less that the law must determine which of them it shall be. The most frequent case of voluntary association, next to marriage, is partnership in business: and it is not found or thought necessary to enact that in every partnership, one partner shall have entire control over the concern, and the others shall be bound to obey his orders (37).

And later, he says:

What marriage may be in the case of two persons of cultivated faculties, identical in opinions and purposes, between whom there exists that best kind of equality, similarity of powers and reciprocal superiority in them—so that each can enjoy the luxury of looking up to the other, and can have alternately the pleasure of leading and of being led in the path of development—I will not attempt to describe. To those who can conceive it, there is no need; to those who cannot, it would appear the dream of an enthusiast (92).

Allen seems to adopt the ideological framework, especially the concept of partnership, defined here by Mill. As seen in his earlier novel *The Woman Who Did*, Allen already was the sort of “enthusiast” who would subscribe to revolutionary ideas about marriage. Much in the same vein as Mill, Allen rewrites the marriage institution as a collaborative, voluntary process that does not have a dominant partner; in effect, Hilda Wade and Lois Cayley are both able to work with their prospective husbands, not under them. His marriages are not ones in which the woman is swallowed whole, and her thoughts subjugated to her husband’s, but instead ones that function as an intellectual partnership. This new understanding of marriage, therefore, provides room for a reading of Allen’s novels that is not limited by nineteenth-century ideas of marriage as a patriarchal institution, or by twentieth-century critical readings of feminism as an all-or-nothing progression. In his creation of a new marriage ideology, Allen instead contributes to a joining of the gendered separate spheres, finding ways for the sexes to coexist equally and happily, at once progressive and conventional in a manner that is truly radical.

While his earlier pieces established a path for social criticism, Allen also reworks the formula in order to satisfy both his feminist leanings and social demands. In his view, the institution of marriage is rife with problems, but they are not necessarily unsolvable ones.
Instead, the problems inherent in marriage are ones that must be solved by capable, intelligent women, with assistance and teamwork from their husbands. And fortunately, his detective novels feature women who are already adept at working through society’s puzzling situations. It takes someone with profound detective skills, both social and moral, to root out the problems with marriage. According to Thomas, the “detective is most effective when he…can recognize the hidden truths beneath those social constructions” (189). Because understanding “social constructions” cuts to the heart of the detective’s work, Allen’s heroines are vocationally suited for the task of rewriting marriage into a more female-friendly institution. It is therefore quite fitting that his detectives are able to actively participate in the creation of their own marriages, while also contributing to a broader definition of marriage as something that recognizes female potential. The detective is integral to his concept of marriage because she, alone, has the ability to represent women’s interests while still participating in a traditional marriage. Essentially, she finds a subtle but strategic way to satisfy her concerns, as well as her husband’s. Unlike Collins, Allen finds a way to preserve his detectives’ personal lives once they are married. They do not suffer from the all-encompassing “change” (89) that Barton fears will strip away her freedom. Like the traditional male detective, who used his position as someone on the fringes of society to ascertain justice, Allen’s heroines become the poster-women for innovative forms of feminist reform. This reading, which fundamentally clashes with the dominant critical consensus, opens up a new understanding of the female detective as a figure who has the power to alter the fabric of society, framing this character as an essentially subversive figure.
CHAPTER IV: LOIS CAYLEY’S FASHIONING A BETTER MARRIAGE

In *Miss Cayley’s Adventures*, Allen works in a somewhat underhanded way to create a heroine who is both respectable and empowered. Like his contemporary detective writers, including everyone from Collins to Perkis, he faced the problem of how to appeal to a readership that was likely to frown upon female activity. According to Morton, Allen’s “stories, in particular, were very lucrative…These adventures were so popular that Newnes paid him £1,000 down for the serial rights to *Miss Cayley*” (Morton 178). On a superficial level, Allen used many of the same devices, like the marriage plot, to appeal to his wide readership. For Allen, the adoption of the marriage plot was key to his popularity. In a review of *Miss Cayley’s Adventures* from 1899, one periodical described it as an “agreeable book” in which “the heroine, a keen-witted girl of good birth, serves as a ladies’ maid, and as agent for a novel bicycle, by way of diversion detecting impostors, winning the hearts of eligible young gentlemen, and shooting a tiger, and ending as the happy wife of a rich man” (Harper 27). In traditional nineteenth-century fashion, the adventures of the title are deemed important only because they predate the single woman’s marriage. The movement from girl adventuress into submissive wife is summed up as a “happy ending” simply because it conforms to the hegemonic order. More importantly, though, the review’s endorsement of her adventures signals Allen’s success at appealing to his audience. Unlike the harsh criticism levied at *The Woman Who Did*, *Miss Cayley’s Adventures*’ reviews were much more favorable because the titular adventure ended in marriage.

Despite his novel’s outwardly “happy ending,” however, Allen did not abandon his interest in the marriage crisis raised by the generation of New Women. He too reads marriage as a potentially problematic institution, not as a romantic ideal of “cuddles and kisses” (Perkin 52). In *Miss Cayley’s Adventures*, Allen’s sensitivity to modern women’s concerns about marriage
still comes into focus. He portrays the marriage system itself as a seriously flawed one, although he uses much more subtle tactics than the overt philosophical speeches of The Woman Who Did. In Miss Cayley’s Adventures, the novel starts with the literal breakdown of the marriage between Lois’s parents, ending in the heroine’s pennilessness and homelessness. Her predicament—the moment in which she finds herself only “with twopence in my pocket” (3)—is the result of an ill-advised marriage, in which her stepfather wasted her mother’s fortune. In fact, Lois goes so far as to describe the ill-fated marriage as the cause of her mother’s death, claiming that “the climate between them had succeeded in killing her” (3). From the start, Allen seems to recognize marriage as a potential catastrophe—one which certainly fits Gorden’s standards of “improvident” marriages. He shares a sense that marriage poses a potentially lethal threat to women’s independent lives, becoming a form of symbolic female castration. The sentiment expressed here is not at all different from that of The Woman Who Did, in which the heroine literally chooses to die rather than marry. By introducing a novel that supposedly endorses marriage through the description of a problematic marriage, Allen complicates one-dimensional readings of Miss Cayley’s Adventures by reminding his readers that marriage was not a simple affair, but instead one that was troubled by the tendency to suppress women’s desires for their own lives.

But while he understands the concerns about marriage from a feminist point of view, Allen creates an alternative vision of marriage that is far more positive. The marriage he constructs over the course of the novel, in stark opposition to the marriage of Lois’s parents, is not founded on wealth or status. Rather, Allen’s marriages are sustainable ones because they seem to work outside the traditional monetary system. In large part, Allen’s success at recreating marriage as something more than mere business rests in his creation of a financially solvent
female. He effectively dissolves the tension of money as a pawn in marriage, as it becomes quite clear that Lois is fully able to support herself. While the heroines of professional detective stories see their masculine work become increasingly feminine and emotional, Lois’s work instead transforms from jobs that would be acceptable for single women of her status—like being a companion or stenographer—into something that is more radical.

Although it was not uncommon for middle-class women to work by the 1890s, especially if unmarried, Lois work entitles her to much more power than the average late nineteenth-century woman would have seen in the workplace. For these women, the potential for success in the business world had important implications. Many middle-class women, who were previously confined to their households, found an opportunity to liberate themselves from their stifling domestic roles by working. Lois’s work as a typist, in particular, likely carried specific meaning for an audience of Victorians. The advent of the typewriter “opened an opportunity for women to gain employment during the later part of the century” (Kestner 122), and in this sense operated as a symbol of feminine self-reliance. One particular article from The Young Woman, from 1892, calls for women journalists to “trample under foot that most dishonouring conception of their work as mere women’s work” (Stead 12). And to do so, they must “Learn shorthand, and having learnt it, keep up and don’t forget it and lose speed. And whatever else you do or don’t do, get to write a neat, legible hand, or if that is beyond your reach make yourself proficient on the type-writer. Remember that if your copy is difficult to read it simply won’t get read at all” (13). In Victorian Working Women, Wanda Neff also comments on the status of the middle-class working woman: “The feminine stenographer has seldom advanced to a secretarial position of confidential trust. Banks have not given openings to women, nor have they been sufficiently employed in various investigating economic capacities for which their training has fitted them”
(Neff 253). For Lois, though, the ability to type opens up potential opportunities for success. On the most obvious level, her typing ability provides yet another level of financial stability because it allows her to open her own stenography and typewriting business, as well as a change for her to become a journalist. And therefore, Lois answers the call to do more than “mere women’s work” set forth by her contemporaries, by taking on an immense amount of business responsibility. Neff’s description of the disempowered working woman clashes dramatically with the successful, even entrepreneurial Lois. What, then, separates the far more successful Lois from her working women contemporaries?

Unlike her contemporaries, Lois is able to apply her detective skills in the workplace in a way that enables her professional success. But, she does not accomplish this merely through practicing her proficiency on the type-writer; instead, Lois finds a way to make capital gains because she understands human nature. In the chapter titled “The Adventure of the Inquisitive American,” for instance, she earns her first fifty-dollars by winning a bicycle riding constant, despite the rules not allowing women to participate. Rather than admit that she is ineligible, Lois argues that “unless any clause be anywhere to the contrary inserted, the word ‘rider,’ in the masculine gender put, shall here the word ‘rideress’ in the feminine to embrace be considered” (76). It is not shrewd intellect alone that allows her to make a convincing, effective argument, although her intellect does certainly come to attention here; instead, Lois’s uses her observation skills to predict that the judges will not let a woman participate simply by observing their “supercilious” (75) demeanors. In her own words, she responds: “anticipating this objection, I had taken the precaution to look the legal question up beforehand” (76). Her ability to analyze critically the situations around her through close observation provides avenues of success that are not traditionally available for women.
And, it is a pattern that continues as she becomes a salesman, typist, and journalist. Rather than just another typist, Lois actually owns her own typing business, which is successful precisely because she understands how to attract customers. In each profession, Lois finds a way to capitalize financially by understanding how to read employers and customers just as she would clues. Her business sense is universally praised by her employers; she is equally excellent as a salesman, typist, and journalist. In short, she is a consummate “woman of business” (62), as her fellow bicycle salesman says, and a “lady of intelligence, of initiative” (63). For Lois, the ability to put her detective skills to use provides a sort of fulfillment that other women—especially women who are not detectives—are unable to find. Because she has detective skills, the work that is traditionally female becomes radical in her hands as it transforms from the “women’s work” of typing into owning businesses. In this sense, Allen illustrates the ways in which detection could lead to the promise of more possibilities for female success, and suggest a more sweeping movement towards women’s inclusion in any professional career.

Although there were more opportunities for women’s professional development, the working world was still a complicated place for Victorian women, who were expected to remain feminine within their careers—a troubling fact considering that femininity also demanded submission to male superiors, and therefore made success in the business world into a masculine trait. In his construction of Lois, Allen reveals the ways in which his female detective had the ability to navigate the murky waters of the working world, and therefore found success that was on par with the men of her time. Of course, Lois manages to achieve her success while performing a traditionally female job of typing. Her achieve becomes particularly powerful when compared to someone like Loveday Brook, who despite her status a professional detective in a conventionally male job, finds herself reduced to a sentimental role. In the process, Allen
draws attention to the ways in which detective-like skills were highly important qualities for Victorian women who wanted to lead more liberated, independent lives. His heroine’s shrewd ability to interpret and manipulate situations—both skills found in the detective—provide her with subtle ways to translate her social position into a more favorable one. Thus, Allen implies that success for women disadvantaged in the workplace because of their gender was contingent on using detective-like modes of observation and creativity.

Throughout the novel, Allen takes pains to ensure that his heroine is a successful businesswoman because women’s work did have important implications for their marriages. The respectably employed middle-class women found that work offered a way to renegotiate their position as wives. Once she was financially self-sufficient, the Victorian woman was found ways to transgress this business arrangement. The potential change in women’s work lives promised to transform marriage from a business relationship—which often occurred through a business transfer of the women from father to husband—into something that accounted for their own desires. Of course, Lois fits clearly into this tradition of women. Although she starts the novel penniless, Lois becomes “a woman of means” (57) as the result of her own work. Despite her initial reliance on another woman’s support, she is able to fund her own travels throughout Europe for several years before she marries. If nineteenth-century marriage was essentially based on economic decisions, then Lois’s universal success in the business world implies that she will be successful in marriage, too. With seemingly masculine business success also came the opportunity to assume a more authoritative—and also masculine—role within the marriage.

The cumulative effect of her multiple successes provides ample evidence that Lois is not at all dependent on a husband for financial security, allowing for a richer reading of her marriage as something more than a compromising of her female power. Because her detective success
leads to financial success, Lois’s marriage takes on a different character than the traditional one. It cannot be read as a financial bargain, a “come-down” in which independence is traded for a secure, stable existence. Although money concerns certainly are involved, the couple’s attraction to one another has little to do with status; in fact, Harold’s money represents an obstacle more than as asset. The traditional marriage—represented by her mother—“played a central role in mobilizing wealth and power” (Perkin 52), essentially providing a trade between coupling for status and money. Although she too has the opportunity to marry for money, Lois refuses to play by the rules of the traditional system. In a transgressive moment that harkens back to Herminia Barton, although for entirely different reasons, she refuses to marry the man she loves because as a self-declared “penniless girl—an adventuress” she “would stand in [his] way” (37); and similarly, Lois later reiterates that she is a “penniless adventuress” while he is, in her own words, “rich” (91). Her decision not only rejects the idea of marriage as a financial transaction between business partners, but also provides the woman with an active role in the relationship from the start. In refusing Harold, and doing so specifically because he is wealthy, she ensures that her own voice is heard. Their relationship is stripped of its economic codes in this moment, because Lois’s shrew business sense has informed her that marriage should be between financial equals. In order to court her, he must satisfy something more, something deeper than her need to survive and prosper.

Allen’s construction of the pre-marital courtship, once stripped of its business aspects, continues to work against the rituals common in late nineteenth-century England. From the start, his heroines possess more than a hazy vision of marriage as romance without implications for their everyday lives. Instead, she leans towards a more rational understanding of marriage as a life decision with real consequences. Unlike many other nineteenth-century women, Lois
envisions her marriage as one that falls outside traditions, in that she follows her own moral compass rather than social rules. For instance, she says: “The old-fashioned girl, the mediaeval girl, would have held that because she saved your life…she was bound to marry you. But I am modern, and I see things differently” (91). In this moment, Lois deliberately casts herself in a progressive role, asserting her own vision over the “old-fashioned” one. A marriage, in her understanding, should be based on more than the same traditional rules that applied centuries before. Her courtship is especially radical because it is individual and independent, free from the interference of parents. As an orphan, Lois is particularly free from concerns about whom she is “bound” to marry. While contemporary rules dictated that parents provide “appropriately modified chaperonage” (Flanders 226), they also were responsible for vetting prospective husbands; and while women historically had the right of refusal, Flanders cites several cases in which parents overruled their daughters’ rejections, often for these same money and class reasons. The idea of a woman “bound to marry” a particular man, in this sense, had very real implications. By rejecting the man to whom she is bound, Lois is rather effectively undoing the social order. And, she does so not only because it alleviates her from the pressures of the social order, but also because it provides room to pursue a path based on her own desire.

While it is perhaps easy to read her abandonment of the freedoms of single life as conformity to social mores that demanded a woman remain subordinate to a man, Lois enters a relationship with a man who rejects the same norms that she does. In the discussion over women’s behavior, Tillington quite adamantly falls on the same side as the modern woman. In his discussion of women, Tillington remarks that “You can't think how one admires English girls after living a year or two in Italy—where women are dolls, except for a brief period of intrigue, before they settle down to be contented frumps with an outline like a barrel” (34). His ideal
woman has nothing in common with contemporary ideals that called for passive women:

It is a word for Germans, “housewife.” Our English ideal is something immeasurably higher and better. A companion, a complement! Do you know, Miss Cayley, it always sickens me when I hear German students sentimentalizing over their madchen: their beautiful, pure, insipid, yellow-haired, blue-eyed madchen; her, so fair, so innocent, so unapproachably vacuous—so like a wax doll—and then think of how they design her in days to come to cook sausages for their dinner, and knit them endless stockings through a placid middle age, till the needles drop from her paralysed fingers, and she retires into frilled caps and Teutonic senility (34).

His rejection of the “wax-doll” clashes with the popular Victorian desire for women who were silent, fragile objects. Simultaneously, he weaves feminist and national ideals into his definition of an ideal woman, referring to both Germans and Italians as dolls. Unlike these women, his ideal wife is a “wholesome athletic English girl” (33)—someone who is too vital to settle down as a housewife. In the process, Allen suggests that the desire for a doll-like woman is backward, at once both primitive and medieval.

In a chapter titled “The Adventure of the Unobtrusive Oasis,” Allen picks up a similar nationalistic theme, as his heroine rescues a stranded English woman in Africa who has been forced to marry. In a particularly interesting scene, the English woman declares: “I live here—married. I was with Gordon’s force at Khartoum. They carried me off. A mere girl then. Now I am thirty…I was sold to a man at Dongola. He passed me on again to the chief of this oasis. I don’t know where it is; but I have been here ever sense. I hate this life” (191). Although she is in Africa, the women’s description of being trapped within marriage was not an unfamiliar one, albeit a more extreme case than most English women were likely to face. The reading of married women as “slaves” was a common one in Victorian feminist circles, with writers like John Stuart Mill declaring that “the wife is the actual bond-servant of her husband: no less so, as far as the legal obligation goes, than slaves commonly so-called” (29). In The Woman Who Did, Allen’s own heroine even refers to marriage as “a vile slavery” (41). Because marriage was at least
perceived as slavery for many women, the English woman’s desperation was likely to have struck a chord. And through this woman, Allen clearly weighs in against modes of marriage that are blind to the wife’s desires. But in a more subtle maneuver than he uses in his radical feminist texts, Allen roots his argument for female liberation in the nationalistic idea that English men should treat their women better than Africans, or even Germans and Italians. The representation of marriage as a process over which women had little control, or often no control at all, is represented as savage. The implication is that to abide by these same rules, forcing women to marry against their will, would be primitive. In England, the ideal marriage should not be one in which the woman is trapped, but rather one that is above the primitive practice of treating women like chattel.

Through Tillington, Allen goes on to characterize his ideal woman, who is a far departure from the inanimate doll or abused slave:

“I think…a man ought to wish the woman he loves to be a free agent, his equal in point of action, even as she is nobler and better than he in all spiritual points. I think he ought to desire for her a life as high as she is capable of leading, with full scope for every faculty of her intellect or her emotional nature. She should be beautiful, with a vigorous, wholesome, many-sided beauty, moral, intellectual, physical; yet with soul in her, too; and the soul and the mind lighting up her eyes” (35).

His understanding of marriage, as something that leaves room for both “intellect” and “emotion,” reframes the novel’s ending as something more positive than most critics claim. On the surface, Tillington’s statement does seem to perpetuate some myths about nineteenth-century gender ideas, in particular the notion of women as more spiritual than men. The idea of women as “nobler and better” feeds into the notion of gender binaries that supported the idea that the sexes were inherently unequal. In an essay on nineteenth-century gender psychology, Sally Shuttleworth discusses these binaries as a series of “oppositional formulations of masculine/feminine, bourgeois/aristocrat, plebian/patrician, power/powerless, self-made
man/son, female pollution/purity, working-class female sexuality/upper-class angel, animal/spiritual” (125). At the very least, Tillington’s statement does feminist work in that it undercuts these binaries, calling for women to be physical as well as spiritual. His endorsement of gender ideologies of women as spiritual is particularly ironic when read in conjunction with his simultaneous declarations that women should be vigorous and athletic. These qualities, in his understanding, are not mutually exclusive. And, he insists that even while women may be more spiritual than men, they nevertheless are still entitled to be treated “equally” by their husbands. A woman’s spirituality, in his understanding, does not disqualify her from sharing in all her husband’s opportunities. In this reading of marriage, Lois’s decision to wed takes on a character that is deeply sensitive to feminist concerns. The marriage into which she enters is not an oppressive one, but rather one that leaves room for women’s continued activity.

Although women of the time “were expected to be delicate” (Mitchell 189), Tillington’s instead calls for a “vigorous” woman with “plentiful energy.” It is this vigorous energy that attracts him to Lois, although it simultaneously marks her as an unusual woman. In effect, Allen shapes together a new ideal, albeit unconventional, woman. And in this case, the ideal is something informed by ideas of women as active and smart, rather than pious, domestic, and silent. Lois’s empowered, vigorous spirit—which forms the trademark of the new ideal woman—perhaps best comes into focus in her apparent contrast with her more conventional friend Elise. Rather than a “fragile little flower” (67) like Elise, Lois is a self-declared “great, strong, healthy thing, fit to fight the battle of life and take care of myself” (67). For Lois, female vigor becomes synonymous with self-sufficiency. While many women led “circumscribed lives” (Flanders 220), before marriage as much as after, Lois’s relentless attempts to find adventure make her life anything but “circumscribed.” The novel is constructed around a series of
adventures that allow Lois to “demonstrate her ability at mountaineering, hunting and above all cycling” (Kestner 125), proving that she is indeed the “vigorous” female. While she spends time traveling through Africa and Egypt, which alone would have been more adventurous that domestic life, she also does so in a highly active way. On each of her trips, she spends her time exploring the outdoors, which leads to episodes killing tigers and rescuing tourists. In particular, Allen’s use of the bicycle motif evokes the image of the liberated woman, rather than the delicate, parlor-room female. According to Perkin, the bicycle functioned as a symbol of women’s evolving status: “it was the bicycle, which also arrived in the 1890s, that most emancipated women and made courtship easier, since they rode bicycles without chaperones” (Perkin 56). For Lois, the bicycle becomes a talisman—and literally, a concrete vehicle—of her liberation; and in the process, Allen cements her status as the ideally active woman, rather than merely another delicate housewife.

At the same time, Lois’s marriage is based on intellectual equality as much as physical vigor, or even economic equality. Because of their intellectual compatibility, the two find equal footing that contradicts conventional ideas about gender differentials in intellectual capacity. As they bond over shared Oxbridge backgrounds, she says: “Thenceforth we were friends—‘two Varsity men,’ he said. And indeed it does make a queer sort of link—a freemasonry to which even women are admitted” (31). The “queer” nature of their relationship, which is founded on a friendship that seems to work outside traditional gender definitions, hints at a new sort of marriage. More specifically, Allen’s suggests a marriage in which the woman is rendered an equal to her husband—a friend, varsity man, and freemason—rather than a subordinate. Because their relationship is stripped of traditional gender roles, Lois finds her suitor “in spite of his studiously languid and supercilious air, a most agreeable companion” (28) to whom she is able to
continue “talking with frank ease of manner” (29). And similarly, Lois is attracted to his ability to speak frankly to her, saying: “Whenever he spoke to me, indeed, it was without the superciliousness which marked his manner toward others; in point of fact, it was with graceful deference” (32). Rather than talk to her like a conquest, Harold’s “deference” implies that he treats her as he would another male, instead of a supposedly subordinate female. The couple’s relationship is based on respectful, frank conversation rather than subtle courting rituals. And it is one that grows out of friendship, rather than financial considerations. Therefore, while his novels end with marriage, Allen ensures that these marriages are the extensions of a courtship process that favors nontraditional gender roles. The fact that his depiction of women is not a concession to patriarchal norms is evident, from the start, in Allen’s depiction of courtship as something more akin to the development of cross-gender friendships. He creates gender relationships that are realistic but still romantic, based on friendship but also with room for erotic love. Although these relationships culminate in marriage, rather than in Herminia Barton’s “free unions,” they nevertheless are based on a friendship that provides all the promises of a “free union”—including room for women to continue speaking freely and openly.

However, Harold’s own use of the term “free agent” signals a return to the same kind of rhetoric that appears in the *The Woman Who Did*, with its constant championing of “free unions.” But unlike Barton, Tillington qualifies his notion of women as “free agents” with a reminder that they still have souls—a popular target in reviews of his earlier novel. Millicent Fawcett, in an article from 1895, remarked that there was nothing “real or human” (631) about Herminia Barton. And in the same breath, Fawcett ironically calls attention to how “we are perpetually told that she sat on a height of superiority above the rest of humanity” (631). But in Lois, Harold finds someone who does have a soul. Lois’s capacity as a detective, and therefore
someone who is “moral, intellectual, physical” (35), is precisely what attracts Harold. His vision of an ideal wife fits perfectly with the characteristics of the female detective, who elects to follow a higher path rather than stay at home to knit. In detection, she is able to use her intellect and boldness to lead a rewarding personal life, while also contributing to the social welfare. Like a traditional male detective’s, Lois’s success hinges on her ability to move through different circles of society, all while directing her perspicacious gaze at potential criminals. Indeed, Lois cements her status as an effective detective who is able to identify criminals at a glance simply by reading their demeanor. And like a successful detective, she solves crimes involving robberies, mistaken identities, and forgeries—all of which help weed out crime, as well as establishing the fact that her subversive, modern behavior has not made her into a soulless villain. While in line with feminist views about equality, Tillington’s statement is also a suggestion that radical women can have souls, and that he has found one of these women in Lois.

But while her future husband clearly sympathizes with feminist causes, Lois is the one who does the heavy lifting in terms of creating a better marriage. In the chapter titled “The Adventure of the Unobtrusive Oasis,” Allen’s detective heroine literally liberates another woman from a hostile marriage. Although accompanied by men, Lois is the one responsible for orchestrating the woman’s “rescue” (191). Immediately, she realizes that the other woman’s “agitation” (190) is a sign that something is amiss; and, Lois is fully committed to stepping into the help when another woman’s “life and liberty were at stake” (192). Just as she is able to spot criminals, Lois’s detective skills allow her to notice when others are being victimized. While her male traveling companions resist rescuing the other woman’s children, arguing that they are her husband’s property, Lois adamantly insists that refusing to assist is morally wrong. To her companions’ declarations that “we can’t deprive any man of his own children” (191), she
defiantly responds in a “firm, and categorical” voice: “‘Yes we can…if he has forced a woman to bear them to him whether she would or not. That’s common justice. I have no respect for the Mohammedan gentleman’s rights. Let her bring them with her’” (191). It is her confident, decisive behavior—as well as her ability to notice something amiss in the first place—that enables the woman’s rescue. Furthermore, Lois is the one who orchestrates the plan to rescue the woman, creating a distraction while the English woman escapes with her children.

Lois’s detective skills—her foresight, courage, and creativity—come into acute focus in this episode; and, these skills are the ones that allow her to solve a social problem, that of the woman trapped in marriage, that had continued to trouble nineteenth-century England. According to Thomas, the “special talent of the Victorian literary detective is his capacity to resist seeing the person primarily as a public character with a certain status in society, a moral reputation in the community, a knowable history of accomplishment, or a complex self-consciousness” (189); and, he insists that “the detective is most effective when he is most suspicious of those qualities and can recognize the hidden truths beneath those social constructions” (189). As becomes evident in her relationship with Southminster, Lois clearly exists within this tradition of detectives who are able to see through social constructions. In her case, though, the social construction through which she is able to see is broadened to include the nineteenth-century marriage institution as a whole. It is fitting, therefore, that the rescue is from a tyrannous husband who wields power over his impotent wife. Rather than read the other woman as a wife who under law should be submissive to her husband, Lois instead sees the problematic nature of an oppressive marriage; and more importantly, she uses her detective skills to correct it. Unlike her detective predecessors—including women like Dorcas Dene who reunite families—she works to break down a marriage with an unstable power balance. By utilizing her
detective skills, Lois is able to find a way to free this other woman from an oppressive marriage. In the process, the female detective becomes instrumental in solving the marriage problem, because she has the skills to distinguish between liberated and oppressive relationships. As in his representation of Lois’s parents equally ill-fated marriage, Allen qualifies the endorsement of marriage that occurs with his heroine’s final decision to wed by providing a constant reminder that only a certain kind of marriage—one based on equality, rather than tyranny—is acceptable.

These same detective skills also enable her to make a positive marriage for herself, especially as she chooses a suitor. Lois, who has an opportunity to marry a “wax-doll” of her own in Southminster, shares an opinion similar to Harold’s. From the start, she describes him an “exceptionally uninteresting; a pallid, anemic, indefinite hobbledeholy, with a high, narrow forehead, and sketchy features” (131). Whereas she wants a companion, he is merely a piece of “moist clay” (202)—malleable and tedious both. Her desire for a husband who respects, rather than dominates or demeans, her is evident as she says “he looked me over as if I were a horse for sale” (131)—a quality that she clearly disdains. The role reversal here, in which the man becomes the seemingly ideal but actually villainous criminal, does feminist work in two ways: first, it deconstructs the gender norms that defined women as dolls by representing the man as a pale, sickly figure; and second, it allows Lois to take on a more aggressive role within their relationship. Rather than marry the dull, but rich Lord Southminster, she elects to remain by herself even though this marriage would provide a comfortable life. Her rejection of another potential suitor casts her acceptance of Harold in a different light than is recognized by most critics. Rather than simply settle for a husband—and a wealthy one who would make her a countess, at that—she elects to marry a man with whom she is in love. In this context, her marriage is an act of defiance in itself. By refusing to play by courting rules, Lois asserts her
own desires over those mandated by her society.

For Lois, the same detective skills she uses to solve crimes are essential in forming her own marriage. Each nuance of men’s behavior becomes a clue about whether they will be a suitable match, as she essentially appraises men as she does clues. For Lois, the ability to form a successful marriage is attached to the same piercing vision that is necessary for detective success. Just as being a detective allows her to succeed at work, it also provides a way for her to navigate through the Victorian marriage codes in order to form a sustainable relationship. In a dialogue with Harold, Lois’s perspective on love comes to the surface. While he asserts that “love is blind,” Lois instead insists that “Love has sharp eyes…It can see through brick walls” (285). For instance, she is quite easily able to see through Lord Southminster where less shrewd women would not. Her position is juxtaposed with that of the more traditional woman, Elise, who considers him the perfect, wealthy husband. Almost immediately after meeting him, Lois shrewdly comments that “Already it began to strike me that, though the pea-green young man was inane, he had his due proportion of a certain insidious practical cunning” (206). This moment, which is of course strikingly accurate, also harkens back to her immediate reaction to the first chapter’s Count, whom she immediately spots as a criminal. Despite his smooth demeanor, Lois is immediately aware that something is amiss with his attitude, too: “I have quick intuitions. I felt the foreign gentleman took an instinctive dislike to me” (18). In effect, she approaches suitors in the exact same way she does other suspects. Much in the same way that she keeps the Count from stealing her companion’s case of jewelry, she is able to keep from falling prey to Southminster’s deceptive proposals that she marry him. Because she is informed by direct, keen observation, her own marriage is one that is far more successful than those Allen has envisioned for his other feminist characters. Her detective skill enables her to find a husband
who is not only wealthy enough to provide material support, which alone would have satisfied
the prerequisites for many Victorian marriages, but rather to find a husband with whom she is
compatible and from which she receives respect.

Even once married, Lois maintains her pattern of using her detective prowess to guide her
towards decisions that will help her maintain an independent, adventurous life. To an extent, of
course, Lois’s attempts to protect the man she loves do fit into the mold of the “sentimental”
detective who desperately tries to free her “slandered or imprisoned lovers” (Panek 108). In fact,
Panek even places her specifically within the tradition of detectives with “romantic axes to
grind” (108). What separates her then from other detectives—like Mrs. Bucket, Valeria
Woodville, Anne Rodway, or Dorcas Dene—whose work is rooted in their attempts to aid their
husbands? Unlike these detectives, Lois’s motivation rests even more deeply in her need for
adventure. While she does a traditional detective’s work to protect the social order, solving
crimes that threaten the general peace, Lois’s agenda is ultimately her own. From the start, Lois
privileges her need for adventure above all else, including marriage. As soon as she is penniless,
she heads out into the world in search of adventure, hoping to travel and explore places that will
draw her away from the domestic sphere. Rather than “ask the first young man you meet in an
omnibus to marry you” (5), as her friend suggests, Lois alternatively says, “I am going out,
simply in search of adventure. Whatever adventure may come, I have not at this moment the
faintest conception. The fun lies in the search, the uncertainty, the toss-up of it” (5). Unlike the
delicate woman of the domestic sphere, she delights in the rebellion and adventure found outside
the home. Although she quite clearly loves Harold, Lois’s deeper desires spring from her own
internal need for adventure.

Of course, Lois does consent to marry by the end of the novel. But while the novel’s
conclusion may be a “predictable end” (Foxwell xiii), the marriage itself is far from a predictable one. The assumption that marriage is synonymous with the end of female adventure is not wholly accurate. For Allen, marriage does not automatically denote the death of their privileged state of gender equality. From the start, Lois’s marriage is indeed an unconventional one. In fact, she comments that “it was not an ideal honeymoon, and yet, I was somehow happy” (197). Her unusual honeymoon, which is steeped in intrigue and mystery, sets the course for her entire marriage, virtually ensuring that it too will be an unorthodox one. Moreover, the novel does not simply end with the heroine’s marriage, as critics argue, but instead continues on for several chapters. In fact, she only solves the novel’s central crime once she is Mrs. Tillington. The change in name does not denote a shift in character, and she is still described as a “clever person” (210). And once married, she also continues to have her “flash of inspiration or intuition” (203). Unlike Collins’s Valeria Woodville and Anne Rodway, both of whom put down their pens at the end of the novel, Lois refuses to do the same once her own mystery ends. Her own female agency is sustained after marriage because she continues to use the same detective skills that have helped her succeed in every other walk of life, rather than volunteers to abandon them in favor of domestic easiness. It is not until the final chapter, appropriately titled “The Unprofessional Detective,” that she does the brunt of her detective work. While her “unprofessional” status seems to denote her inferiority, Lois has never been a particularly professional detective; instead, her detective work has been at her own pace and for her own ends. In fact, the “unprofessional” classification reads as ironic in comparison with the novel’s only employed, male detective, whom Lois chides as someone with the “obstrusively unobtrusive air of a detective” (291), but without the ability to solve the case. The “unprofessional” label therefore only implies that she can continue to successfully work as a
detective, regardless of her marital classification or professional status. While marriage may have taken her out of the professional world, it surely has not stopped her detection. It is skill, rather than somewhat arbitrary labels, that makes her an effective detective.

Yet once married, her professional skills—especially her ability to read typefaces—resurfaces. Her awareness of something outside traditional women’s domain, such as the ability to understand and recognize what she has typed, is what ultimately enables her to vindicate her unjustly accused husband. Her ability to extract clues from typed documents is the sole factor in proving her husband’s innocence; as Lois, herself, says in one scene:

"The incriminated will had been “impounded,” as they call it; but, under certain restrictions, and subject to the closest surveillance, I was allowed to examine it with my husband's solicitor, before the eyes of the authorities. I looked at it long with the naked eye and also with a small pocket lens. The paper, as I had noted before, was the same kind of foolscap as that which I had been in the habit of using at my office in Florence; and the typewriting—was it mine? The longer I looked at it, the more I doubted it" (309).

And shortly after, she says:

"I want to know, first, who wrote this will. And of one thing I am quite clear: it is not the document I drew up for Mr. Ashurst. Just look at that $x$. The $x$ alone is conclusive. My typewriter had the upper right-hand stroke of the small $x$ badly formed, or broken, while this one is perfect. I remember it well, because I used always to improve all my lower-case $x$'s with a pen when I re-read and corrected. I see their dodge clearly now. It is a most diabolical conspiracy. Instead of forging a will in Lord Southminster's favour, they have substituted a forgery for the real will, and then managed to make my poor Harold prove it" (310-11).

Her professional abilities, like her ability to read typefaces, is vital to Lois’s effectiveness as her detective work continues. As she flaunts her professional skills to great success here, Allen concurs with his contemporary feminists that cultivating skills is indeed important for women, in that it opens up new opportunities for success in avenues—like detective work—that are not traditionally feminine.

Although linked to her work as a typist, Lois’s detection in these scenes is also relatively
traditional. In an article from 1930, Albert Schneider specifically refers to the pocket lens as a detective tool, saying “simple magnifiers or pocket lens...have long been used by detectives of all classes and grades” (10); these tools, he argues, are especially important because “The detective effort is directed toward the securing of information by special secret methods...The special investigation of the...spy has to do with secret writings of all kinds, with ciphers, codes, examination of documents, of books, of manuscripts, of sketches, of photographs, of seals, of passports, of certificates, of checks, of bank notes, of inks, of papers, ect., ect.” (10). While her typing places her in a line of working women, Lois’s use of the pocket lens to examine important documents is strikingly similar to the male detectives of her time, like Sherlock Holmes who frequently pulls out his own pocket lens while doing detective work. Thus, the professional label becomes ironic in that she does still seem to be professional and a detective.

In a twist that undercuts critical opinions of the text as conformist merely because the heroine marries, it is actually the continuation of her relationship with Harold that enables Lois to continue in the same vein as an adventuress. Once married, Lois experiences adventures even more exciting than the ones from her earlier, single life. It is only after she has abandoned single life that she leaps from trains, assumes disguises, and evades the police. Her own telling of how she disproved accusations against her husband creates a moment of intense pleasure in her work that quite clearly still exists once she is married; in her own words:

I grew more and more excited as the whole cunning plot unraveled itself mentally step by step before me...Then another clue came home to me. ‘Mr. Hayes,’ I cried, jumping at it, ‘Higgins, who forged this will, never saw the real document itself at all; he saw only the draft; for Mr. Ashurst altered one word *viva voce* in the original at the last moment, and I made a pencil note of it on my cuff at the time...It grows upon me more and more each minute that the real instrument is hidden somewhere in Mr. Ashurst’s house (202).

Her final revelation, while it provides ample evidence that she is still willing to do detective work after marriage, shows Lois’s consistency of character. An adventuress at heart, Lois is still
filled with jumping, growing excitement; she has not merely settled into a quiet, easy routine life as a wife. Instead, her marriage becomes another of the adventures referenced in the title.

The way in which this marriage plays out allows for a rereading of the ending as something more productively feminist, especially because it includes room for everything from detective activity to adventure to professional work. Her eventual marriage is on her own terms, and she is the exclusive agent in her fate. When she finally consents to marry, it is only after Harold too has become penniless and ostracized—he is now “poor, friendless, hunted” (186). Her decision is one that creates a marriage between two outsiders, both of whom are literally on the run from the hegemonic society represented by the courts and police that place them on trial—literally in the novel’s final chapters, but also by readers who expected pleasant entertainment. The unusual relationship between two characters who are hereditarily upper-class, but temporarily marginalized establishes a new sort of marriage. Her marriage, therefore, becomes more than a moment of “crushing conformity” (Walls 236). Instead, the act of marriage becomes another way to remain outside society’s bind. It provides a method to satisfy her desire for adventure, and remains consistent with her subversion of gender mores. As a detective, she is able to solve the “Woman Question” by following a path that acknowledges her own need for freedom and adventure, as well as society’s need for women to marry into comfortable, although not necessarily patriarchal homes. The cunning nature of her truly transgressive act, as well as Allen’s, is that she is able to sustain her liberation and adventure while still under the guise of being conventionally married. At once, she finds a way to work around the concerns of the patriarchal order and the New Woman, creating a system of marriage that is suitable for the capable, educated female.
CHAPTER V: HILDA WADE’S ROLE REVERSAL IN MARRIAGE AND DETECTION

In *Hilda Wade: A Woman With Tenacity of Purpose*, Allen operates in the same way as he does in his earlier detective novel, in the process providing an example of the ways in which female detectives can be transgressive. This novel too was not appreciated as a subversive one by Allen’s contemporaries, although it is perhaps more accurate to say that it was appreciated for being rather conventional. A review *The Bookman*, published in 1900, describes the heroine as a woman with “firmness of will and…indomitable courage” (590) before it seems to describe the novel favorably:

“The story is full of thrilling adventures in South African and in India; of exciting experiences on land and on sea. The evil genius of the professor follows Hilda from one country to another, but she outwits him at every turn. Evidently this feminine Sherlock Holmes is too much for any man. She fills the reader’s heart with admiration and the improbably situations do not disturb us in the least” (590).

In a review from the same year in *The Critic*, Cornelia Atwood-Pratt similarly describes the novel as “amusing and original” novel, a “melodrama of the light and satisfactory variety wherein the reader is assured, from the beginning, of a happy issue and a triumphant heroine” who “emerges unscathed from all kinds of wildly improbably adventures” (275). These reviews, although relatively positive, draw some of the novel’s complications into focus. Why was it possible to read this novel, unlike a text such as *The Woman Who Did*, as positive and pleasant rather than troubling in its presentation of a feminist character? Why, unlike many of her predecessors, was Hilda considered “not disturbing” despite her detective work? In part, these reviews imply that the female detective—although admirable in terms of her courage and intellect—is an unrealistic, impossible character. The heroine’s most empowering qualities, like her bravery and tenacity, lose their feminist potential when the novel is read as a light melodrama. Essentially, therefore, these critics considered the novel pleasant but not politically
subversive. At once, the interpretation of the lady detective as an impossible figure—exciting and amusing, but improbably—lessens the impact of Hilda’s radical feminist activity, and also ignores the profound ways in which Allen’s novel effectively works to create a more positive idea of women.

The reading of the novel as a relatively conventional one, at least in its treatment of female detectives as powerful but imaginary characters, is also common in modern critical discourse about the novel. In “Jack the Ripper, Sherlock Holmes, and the New Woman,” Johanna Smith participates in the popular reading of the female detective novel as a conformist one, focusing on Hilda Wade as an example of the ways in which deviant women were eventually written into acceptable ones. In the essay, she frames Hilda as a detective whose “anti-man” sentiment “is eventually endowed with a heterosexual desire channeled into marriage” (133). And later, she repeats this sentiment by offering an analysis of Hilda as yet another example of a detective who ultimately conforms: “Her life’s mission is not her profession, but salvaging the reputation of her doctor father from a scandal initiated by Sebastian. Although pursuing this mission involves Hilda in such New Woman activities as traveling alone to Rhodesia and bicycling away from the Matabele rebellion, after clearing her father’s name she marries Cumberledge” (133). This analysis conforms to the two major tenets of the prevalent critical opinion of female detectives: first, Hilda’s detective work is read solely through the lens of her relationship with her father; and second, Smith also suggests that the heroine’s eventual marriage signifies the end of her detective work. Even while she notices the Hilda’s obvious feminist potential, Smith reads the heroine as a one-time feminist whose radical activity is rooted in dislike of men; and therefore, Lois’s marriage can only signifying the end of her brief “anti-man” period, and the abandonment of her feminist side. This perspective,
however, is one that overlooks Lois’s more subtle brand of feminism, which is rooted in a desire to improve her own status more than misandry.

In *The Alternative Sherlock Holmes*, Peter Watt and Joseph Green similarly reads the novel as a relatively unexceptional one, arguing that Hilda is “yet another sleuth with a cross to bear” (267); they summarize the plot thus: “She was once a nurse and had decided to become a detective, for her prime assets were ‘a photographic memory’ and ‘the deepest feminine gift—intuition.’ It is disclosed that Hilda’s real name is Maisie Bannerman and she has to do what she has to do so as to prove the innocence of her husband, who has been unjustly condemned to death for a murder he did not commit” (267), and they end their reading by repeating that she too “ended her career in the arms of her narrator” (267). This reading is not only technically incorrect because it names her husband, rather than her father, as the man she tries to avenge, but also is shallow in its reading of her motivations for detection and marriage.

While a traditional perspective of the novel lends itself to a rather flat reading of Hilda as another example of a woman whose subversive potential is stunted, Allen’s novel is considerably more complicated than this reading suggests. As in *Miss Cayley’s Adventures*, Allen leaves room for potential feminist activity in this detective story, in part by once again having his heroine’s story end with a marriage that allows her to continue working. The fact that his subversive novel reads as a conventional one is a testament to Allen’s subtle methods, which rely on his gradual—but still definitive—reworking of gender roles. Many critical readings, therefore, tend to oversimplify Hilda’s detective work by deeming it less than radical.

Even more than Lois, Hilda’s existence is rooted in her ability to work outside the home. In fact, Hilda never inhabits a domestic space over the course of the novel, with the brief exception of her time in Rhodesia. Instead, Allen situates his heroine firmly in the professional
world, particularly the hospital. In *Independent Women: Work and Community for Single Women, 1850-1920*, Martha Vicinus examines the nursing profession as an extension of nineteenth-century ideas of women as charitable, compassionate mothers. Of course, the very notion of independence through work was troubled by attempts to channel women into careers that relied on stereotypical feminine areas of expertise, thereby reinforcing the same gender differences that were used to classify women as essentially dependent on men. Because there was a “general admiration for the self-sacrificing nurse” (112), the profession was considered an acceptable line of work for women. By the 1890s, nursing was an extremely popular profession for the surplus of unmarried women who needed to make ends meet. But like other careers, including typing, the nursing profession was not one that provided easy access to female empowerment. The relationship between female nurses and male doctors left little room to resist the patriarchal hierarchy, instead reducing the nurse’s purpose simply to “fulfilling the doctor’s orders and performing housework in the wards” (Vicinus 93). Thus, nursing provided a way for Victorian women to bridge the gap between their need for financially stability with society’s desire for domestic women.

In large part, then, Hilda’s work as a nurse, whose work demands the gendered qualities of patience and sympathy, places her in a line of traditional women. For instance, Smith reads her as a “feminine care-giver,” arguing that her work makes her into a conventionally maternal female—a reading that is supported by her patients, as well as Hubert, who repeatedly refer to her as an “angel.” In their eyes, Hilda is merely an angel of the hospital rather than an “angel in the house.” Yet she is not nearly so angelic as she appears to the casual reader: in Hilda, the supposedly feminine aspects of nursing are sublimated beneath personal motivations that read as more masculine. The concerns that drive her to become a nurse are not angelic, as others insist,
but instead are rooted in somewhat selfish interests. To some extent, at least, her nursing stems from her personal desire for a more interesting life. As a financially solvent woman, Hilda is not cut out of the same mold as the conventional nurse precisely because she has little need to work for a living. Her decision to work is not one made under duress, but instead is a choice that stems from a personal desire for independence. In the words of her friend Mrs. Mallet, Hilda “went in for this mission fad early; she didn’t intend to marry, she said; so she would like to have some work to do in life” (10). While her work of course contributes to the social welfare, it is nevertheless motivated by her desire to avoid the leisurely but boring life of the bourgeois nineteenth-century woman. In nursing, Hilda finds an opportunity for a rich personal life that was not a typical reality for middle-class women. In the hospital, therefore, she finds the fulfillment that Lois experiences by traveling and exploring, as well as the independence that comes with working.

Moreover, Hilda’s nursing work is intricately connected with her detective career—a fact that seems to undermine the stereotypically feminine nature of her work. By working as a nurse, Hilda finds an opportunity to perform the brunt of her detective work, rather than to do feminine caretaking. From the start, Hilda declares that she wants to be a nurse “to be near Sebastian” (10) in order to observe him. On the surface, Hilda seems to become a detective—and a nurse, therefore—in order to clear her father’s reputation. In *The Lady Investigates*, for instance, Patricia Craig and Mary Cadogan observe that nineteenth-century lady detectives typically take up their profession in order to clear the name of a wronged male relative (21). Of course, Hilda does essentially conform to this pattern. Her relentless work, at least on the surface, is performed in the attempt to restore her father’s honor—which Watt and Green refer to as her “cross to bear” (267). In *Murder She Wrote*, Patricia D. Maida and Nicholas B. Spornick
describe her as “young woman in her early twenties whose exploits are motivated by her desire to clear her father’s name” rather than someone who uses her “sense of evil…to ferret out guilty secrets” (107). In effect, Hilda becomes yet another example of a female detective whose subversion is performed in service of a male family member, and therefore looses much of its feminist potential.

But this structure does not account for the numerous other crimes she solves along the way, like rescuing trapped tourists and locating missing murderers. Her decision to become a detective in order to vindicate her father creates striking similarities to someone like Valeria Woodville, who only becomes a detective in order to disprove accusations against her husband. But unlike Hilda, Valeria does not solve a slew of other crimes along the way. Even though it is motivated by her father’s wrongful conviction, Hilda’s detection becomes an integral part of her life. Why exactly is she so invested in her detective work? The outcome of the case has little real importance, especially because the crime happened years ago. And while she refuses to marry until she has solved her father’s crime, this obstacle is an artificial, self-imposed one that Hilda, herself, could easily wave off at any moment. Instead of stemming from a desire to protect a family member, alone, Hilda’s detective and nursing work also provides a means to participate in the broader drive towards social justice. Although her interest in crime solving can indeed be traced to the injustice perpetrated against her father, it manifests itself in a more general movement towards “justice and redress” (213) that places her in line with male detectives, rather than her female counterparts whose only motivation is the defense of the men in their lives.

But also, her detective work reflects a desire to engage with the outside world, rather than to merely wait for a husband within her home, or even to marry at the first chance. By becoming
a detective, Hilda’s desire for adventure manifests itself much in the same way that her drive to find meaning through a nursing career does. Ironically, her nursing actually draws her closer to the dangerous world of crime, placing her in close proximity to her father’s killer so that she can constantly perform her detective work. In one later scene, she also agrees to accompany another woman as her nurse because the job requires camping out in Indian hillside for several weeks—something Hilda insists would “be an adventure, at any rate” (176). On this trip, too, she finds her detective work creeping into nursing as she is forced to expose and protect her companion from a plot to them. As a result, Hilda’s infusion of her detective work into her nursing profession further complicates the inherent femininity in nursing. Her two modes of work become entangled in a way that makes feminine nursing seem inseparable from masculine detection. For Allen, the transformation of nursing into something akin to detection enables a deconstruction of the gender codes that limited women to feminine professions. The fact that she participates in a traditionally female profession for non-traditional purposes therefore undercuts, rather than supports, the anti-feminist reading performed by some critics who read her work as only conventionally feminine.

In the process, the Victorian constructions of masculine and feminine professions become somewhat muddled. Ultimately, Hilda’s work is complicated by motivations that run contrary to the traditional ideas of nurses as maternal philanthropists. In fact, her nursing is rooted in something that is quite the contrary—the desire for revenge. In the final chapters, Hilda’s nursing skills come to the forefront as she nurses her enemy back to life, carefully watching over his health. Her decision to save him, however, does not stem from a womanly charity. Instead, she literally nurses Dr. Sebastian—her nemesis who is responsible for her father’s wrongful conviction—back to health after he has nearly drowned because it is the only way to vindicate
her father. For Hilda, the rescuing of another man’s life is only important in that it is essential to her own success as a detective. In one particular moment, Hilda’s perspective on this comes to light, as she says: “We have saved him, Hubert!...We have saved him! But do you think he is alive? For unless he is, MY chance, OUR chance, is gone forever!” (212). His life is of far less value than her own ambitions, and nursing effectively becomes a method of detection, while the philanthropic qualities of the profession are displaced. Her work as a nurse, then, is ironically more radical than the work of professional female detectives—like Loveday Brooke or Dorcas Dene—who couch their transgressive work in sentimental platitudes about femininity.

Like Lois, who is able to solve her final case because she is an accomplished typist, Hilda’s real-world skills are integral to her detective success. Her detective work is not only important because it suggests a new possible form of employment for women that was historically unrealized at this point, but also because it enables her success in other careers to which many middle-class women already had access. For example, Hilda is also successful at her nursing work in a way that many of her contemporaries were not, largely because she is able to rely on her detective prowess. While the possibility for empowerment at work was often all but impossible for nurses, Hilda does find a way to use her detective skills—especially observation—to enhance her standing at work. Her work as a nurse, although represented as a “diagnosis” (86), is essentially detective work. In her diagnosis of Dr. Sebastian, for instance, she essentially reads him as she would one of the suspects in her cases, conducting a physiognomical examination of his face. According to Hilda, Dr. Sebastian’s mouth has “cruel corners’ (15) she realizes that he would “stab a man without remorse, if he thought that by stabbing him he could advance knowledge” (86). With another patient, Hilda is able to suggest a rare treatment because she realizes that the patient’s “large black eyes which bespoke a
passionate nature” (17) suggest that she will be able to withstand the drug’s side effects. In these moments, Hilda’s gains access to the medical work usually performed only by doctors, instead of merely assisting her male superiors. In performing these diagnoses, Hilda is effectively performing the doctor’s function, using her rational, informed decisions to treat patients. Therefore, she comes to experience a type of female empowerment because she is able to use her detective skills to her benefit in the workplace. In essence, Allen calls attention to the ways in which the cultivation of talents—and, especially detective skills—was necessary for nineteenth century women to find new modes of success. At the same time, Allen also reinforces her success to show the shallow, inaccurate nature of gender constructions.

Unlike Lois, who work earns her the financial stability to claim control over her marriage, Hilda is already independently wealthy enough to provide for herself. Her work, however, is important because it becomes the site of her courtship. And, her success at work is what attracts her husband. Nevertheless, her ability to diagnosis her patients complicates her femininity, at least according to Hubert. As the novel opens, Hubert refers to diagnosis as the masculine counterpart to feminine intuition, or “the other side of the same endowment in its masculine embodiment” (8). He soon comes to understand, however, that Hilda is already an able diagnostician. At one moment, Hubert excitedly asserts that he “recognised at once the truth of her diagnosis” (88), realizing that she has perfectly evaluated her patient. In the process, his unflinching definition of diagnostic capabilities as masculine comes under attack through Hilda’s accurate, masculine assessment of her own patients. Rather than resent her, however, Hubert instead exclaims, “you are a wonderful woman!” (88). Her ability to take on traditionally male qualities only increases Hubert’s respect and regard for her as a potential wife. In effect, Hilda’s ability to diagnose others becomes a seemingly masculine—although actually more
androgynous—trait, but one that is attractive rather than problematic. Unlike other detective writers who flaunt their heroine’s femininity through sentimental storylines, Allen alternatively brings her supposedly masculine characteristics to the forefront, while exposing them as false constructions. For Allen, Hilda’s hybrid gender identity is essential in her renegotiation of marriage, in that it allows her to represent herself as something more than a traditional woman. It is this representation that sets the precedent for a marriage based on the participants’ personalities, rather than their sex. And in Hubert, she finds someone who not only tolerates—but also admires—the very qualities aspects of Hilda’s personality that made her problematic to a nineteenth-century audience.

The way in which her supposedly feminine work transforms into something more masculine, but still acceptable, is a pattern that Allen continues to use through the text, specially as he takes up more explicitly the issue of marriage. Unlike his predecessors, including Collins and Perkins, he does not reawaken Hilda’s femininity at every possible turn. Instead, he moves in quite the opposite direction; throughout the novel, Allen methodically rewrites his heroine as someone whose detective work does indeed make her more masculine—at least in a nineteenth-century understanding of the word. But it is this masculinity, here defined with traits like bravery, perseverance, and wisdom, that enables Hilda’s success in finding happiness with a husband who is her equal. From the start, Dr. Sebastian recognizes her as a sort of hybrid, someone who combines masculine intellect with feminine emotion; he claims,

“Most women…are quick at reading THE PASSING EMOTION. They can judge with astounding correctness from a shadow on one’s face, a catch in one’s breath, a movement of one’s hands, how their words or deeds are affecting us…Most men on the contrary, guide their life by definite FACTS—by signs, symptoms, by observed data…But this woman, Nurse Wade, stands intermediate mentally between the two sexes. She recognises TEMPERAMENT—the fixed form of character, and what it is likely to do—in a degree which I have never seen equaled elsewhere” (9).
As he shrewdly implies, Hilda is unique in a way that few other female detectives are, in that her masculinity is not suppressed by her femininity. Her conventionally feminine characteristics—like her deep understanding of emotion—are only one part of her character, which is complemented by her ability to reason.

Like many of her detective predecessors, especially the professionals, Hilda likely appealed to readers precisely because she uses this reasoning ability to step in to assist in the places where the police fall short. As a detective, Hilda serves as an “entrepreneur for a number of moral panics” (Smith 132), using her detective skills to solve society’s problems. Although bringing light to her father’s innocence drives the overarching plotline, Hilda along the way manages to facilitate a couple’s marriage, rescue a threatened baby, and defend an innocent father. In one of her cases, for instance, she tracks down a criminal who killed his wife in order to ensure that his children are not forced to account for his crimes. While adept at actually tracking the criminal, literally using clues to pin down his exact location, she also has the ability to see cases in an innovative way that allows for human concerns—both skills which the novel’s police lack. According to Hubert, the police’s ineptitude is not uncommon: “It is a way they have; the police are no respecters of persons; neither do they pry into the question of motives. They are but poor casuists. A murder is for them a murder, and a murderer a murderer; it is not their habit to divide and distinguish between case and case with Hilda Wade's analytical accuracy” (65). In fact, the police never realize in this scenario that that man did indeed kill his wife, but instead remain entirely clueless about the events that have occurred. In this sense, Hilda exists within the line of morally-inclined, highly sensitive lady detectives like Loveday Brooke or Valeria Woodville, both of whom have an analytical insight that the police lack. But
in Hilda, Allen pushes past the conventional representation by firmly declaring his heroine as superior to the police, and thereby fashioning her into a more subversive figure.

Although the idea that lady detectives could do meaningful social work that the police could not was a popular theme, Allen pushes this concept a step farther by drawing attention to just how deep the problems of the justice system run. In the same way that her nursing work becomes radical, Hilda’s detective work also shifts from something conventional into an opportunity for transgression. In the process of doing her detective work, Hilda explicitly calls attention to the ways in which the men around her are inept. In one conversation with her father’s lawyer, Hilda’s perspective on the male police’s ineptitude comes into acute focus:

“Without prejudice, Miss Bannerman, without prejudice,” said the lawyer, with some confusion. “Our conversation is entirely between ourselves, and to the world I have always upheld that your father was an innocent man.”

But such distinctions are too subtle for a loving woman.

“He was an innocent man,” said she, angrily. “It was your business not only to believe it, but to prove it. You have neither believed it nor proved it; but if you will come upstairs with me, I will show you that I have done both.”

In the above conversation, Hilda claims full credit for her work by arguing that she alone has proven her father’s innocence. The sentiment that men are blind to certain aspects of human nature that make detective work successful is not uncommon, and of course Loveday Brooke provides an example of the ways in which women are indeed better detectives than the police. But while in a novel like Pirkis’s, the police ultimately step into the fray to assert their own role by doing the physical portion of the detective work, Hilda receives little assistance from institutionalized legal powers. In this sense, Allen’s text is more radical in that he does not back away from the concept of his heroine as a detective, and therefore as someone who does at times
have more power than less perspicacious men. He is fully committed to and invested in his
detective heroine’s superiority.

Over the course of the novel, Allen also gradually deconstructs the notion of women’s
detective work as mere “intuition”—a popular nineteenth-century idea which also surfaces to a
lesser extent in the characterization of Lois. The label of intuitive female is attached to Hilda
often, despite her diagnostic and reasoning capabilities. Indeed, Hubert’s first reflection of her is
as someone “who herself possessed in so large a measure the deepest feminine gift—intuition”
(8). For Victorians, the notion of intuition carried important gender implications. It was defined
as a womanly trait that did have positive uses, but also as the opposite of objective intellectual
reason; in fact, the nineteenth-century notion of intuition matches up almost perfectly with
Hubert’s earlier analysis of it as the opposite of deductive reasoning. In an essay on “Victorian
Intellectual Capacity,” Joan N. Burstyn succinctly summarizes the complications inherent in the
nineteenth-century idea of intuition, claiming:

Women’s powers of intuition were thought to be superior to men’s, although this was of
dubious value since intuition was no substitute for rational thought when it came to
decision-making. However, since women’s intuition could at times help men, and
certainly added to women’s charm, it had to be preserved from the enchroacment of
reasoning. Women’s superiority to men in intuition was used…to justify her inferiority
in status (72).

This notion of intuition as something that marks women as intellectually lesser than men casts
Hilda’s apparent reliance on intuition in a less than flattering light. It would only be fitting that
the maligned figure of the female detective would “have relied on…female intuition rather than
analytical reasoning” (Royer 1005), unlike her more rational male counterparts like Sherlock
Holmes.

Although much is made of the heroine’s intuition, by her husband as well as literary
critics, Hilda’s intuition has little to do with her ability to do productive detective work. As the
Title implies, Hilda’s tenacity—not her intuition—is what allows her to prevail. Even her enemy, Dr. Sebastian, commends her resolution:

“A remarkable woman, gentleman,” said he, “a very noteworthy woman. I had prided myself that my willpower was the most powerful in the country—I had never met any match to it—but I do not mind admitting that, for firmness and tenacity, this lady is my equal. She was anxious that I should adopt one course of action. I was determined to adopt another. Your presence here is a proof that she has prevailed” (220).

Furthermore, the vast majority of her work is indeed done through observation, and the masculine work of gathering facts. Her observation skills immediately come into acute focus, as Hubert describes her as a “lynx-eyed detective” (10) with a “sphinx-like smile” (13) who always “was watching Sebastian, watching him quietly, with those wistful, earnest eyes, as a cat watches a mouse-hole; watching him with mute inquiry, as if she expected each moment to see him do something different from what the rest of us expected of him” (9). Essentially, she is an imminently successful detective because she combines keen observation with an inquisitive nature. The traditionally feminine imagery in these scenes, especially the representation of the women as puzzles, provides more insight into Hubert than any broad reflection on women themselves. Although his description of Hilda as observant is accurate, Hubert seems to be the only person who is puzzled by her behavior. The audience of readers, as well as the brilliant Dr. Sebastian, both understand that her behavior is attached to a rational, clear objective—the desire to correct a social injustice. As a result, the representation of the heroine as a “sphinx” reads as ironic, and even comical, in that it is quite obviously incorrect. In a moment in which on the surface level Allen seems to invoke traditional myths about women, he actually does more subtly subversive work by exposing these myths as false, and even ridiculous.

In his discussion of female intuition, Allen follows a similar path by implying that society’s concept of intuition—both as something distinctly feminine, and as the counterpoint to
ration—is only another ill-conceived myth. At the same time, Hilda’s detective work also takes on a more intellectual quality that veers into conventionally masculine mode of behavior. While she mentions her own intuitive capabilities, Hilda’s frequent references to such hint at the irony inherent in this concept. By her own admission, Hilda does her work in a logical and rational manner comparing herself to a novelist, and therefore representing herself in a more intellectual capacity:

“Now, I am not a great novelist; I cannot create and imagine characters and situations. But I have something of the novelist’s gift; I apply the same method to the real life of the people around me. I try to throw myself into the person of others, and to feel how their character will compel them to act in each set of circumstances to which they may expose themselves” (76).

In this self-reflective moment, Hilda provides honest insight into the female detection process that demands creativity and observation. However, she also divorces intuition from its traditional meaning by reframing it as something androgynous. Her analogy implies that both detectives and novelists—conventionally male professions, of course—rely on intuitive powers. Much of her detective skill rests in her ability to recall at will what she has read, which is of course not a gender specific task. Although she too explains her own detective work through intuition, she is nevertheless able to back up her so-called “intuition” with a much more concrete “train of reasoning” (48). In her own words, she claims to be able to “recall even quite unimportant and casual bits of knowledge when any chance clue happens to bring them back to me” (47). In one case, she only succeeds because she remembers passages from a book on Buddhism that she had rather arbitrarily picked up; in another, Hilda is able to determine where a man is hiding based on newspaper stories she read years ago about his family. Her intuition in these cases is actually detective work, based on observation and memories; and, her detective work is performed in a rational way, not backed by any mystical intuition.
Over the course of the novel, Allen also returns to the same nationalistic arguments found in his earlier detective novel in order to call attention to the ways in which the ill-treatment of women—and even the their stereotyping as intuitive but not logical—is savage. In Rhodesia, for instance, the savage natives are convinced to kill the “white women” because they are “Witches—all witches. They give charms to the men; cook lions’ hearts for them; make them brave with love-drinks” (148). Despite the obviously ludicrous nature of these accusations, many nineteenth-century ideas about women incorporated the myth of the witch-like female. The concept of intuition, which is a mystical, inexplicable female power, is not too far from this myth. Hubert himself even questions whether “witchcraft” (47) is what helps Hilda. At times, he internally argues that she is a “sibyl” (50) whose ability to read people as she would clues is “inexplicable” (10.) But the episode in Rhodesia, a “half-baked land” (115), casts his rather naïve understanding of female intuition in a less than flattering light. His understanding of women as mystical sibyls or witches, who rely on some mysterious intuition rather than logic, descends to the primitive status of the Rhodesians, whose belief that women are witches reads as an unenlightened, and even ludicrous. As in *Miss Cayley’s Adventures*, Allen suggests that thinking of women in such a flat way is primitive. Accordingly, the English should be educated enough to conceive of women in a way that that reflects positively on their supposedly superior education and intelligence.

In his probing of intuition, Allen fully commits to a portrayal of his detective heroine as a valid detective, who should be treated as such by her civilized peers. Yet, the deconstruction of the intuition myth is also important in that it paves the way for Hilda’s attempts to renegotiate her role within the institution of marriage. Because she earnestly loves Harold, she does want to marry him so long as doing so does not compromise her own ambitions—echoing the sentiments
of Lois, and more subtly of Herminia Barton. In one particular case, Hilda’s views on marriage as a necessary but complicated institution come into focus. In “The Episode of the Gentleman Who Had Failed for Everything,” Hilda participates in traditional female detective work by arranging for the marriage of a troubled couple—Daphne Malcolm and Reggie Nettlecraft. Like Hilda, Daphne is a woman with “genuine self-respect and real depth of character” (25). Hubert’s description of her, in fact, echoes his earlier appraisals of Hilda. In one instance, he says: “Fools do not admire her; they accuse her of being ‘heavy.’ But she can do without fools…Very young men seldom take to Daphne: she lacks the desired inanity. But she has mind, repose, and womanly tenderness. Indeed, if she had not been my cousin, I almost think I might once have been tempted to fall in love with her” (25). The implication is that serious, shrewd women—a category that includes detectives—need men who appreciate these qualities. As a detective, Hilda’s work is not to ensure that this woman marry, but rather that she marry the right man—someone who appreciates her because she is “heavy,” and not “inane.” Her self-declared purpose in this case is to find Daphne “a husband who will love and appreciate her” (45), and to do so she must hunt down Daphne’s fiancé based on his pictures and letters, essentially stalking a flawed potential suitor as she would a criminal. Rather than allow her friend to marry the insipid Cecil Holsworthy, Hilda tracks down this other man in order to talk him out of marrying a woman for whom he is ill-suited. Although she does eventually match Daphne with another husband, thereby doing feminine matchmaking work, this man is someone for whom Hilda declares “she IS fitted” (44) to marry. In this construction, Hilda’s stereotypically feminine work takes on a feminist character, because it draws women’s concerns about marriage into the conversation. Like Lois’s, the work she does in the service of this couple is not evidence of her blind endorsement of the institution of marriage. Rather, it provides insight into the ways in
which Hilda uses her detective prowess to create positive marriages, which provide a space for intelligent, capable women.

In Hubert, Hilda finds someone who is willing to participate in her renegotiation of gender relationships, as well as someone who is has an intrinsically good character. Much like Harold Tillington, Hubert finds himself attracted to the exuberance and intelligence he sees in Hilda. In his descriptions of Hilda, he praises her personality as much as her appearance; and, once more he seems to take no offense at the ways in which her behavior is potentially masculine:

Hilda Wade, when I first saw her, was one of the prettiest, cheeriest, and most graceful girls I have ever met—a dusky blonde, brown-eyed, brown-haired, with a creamy, waxy whiteness of skin that was yet warm and peach-downy…Her vivacious spirits rose superior to her surroundings, which were often sad enough….She laid no claim to supernatural powers; she held no dealings with familiar spirits; she was simply a girl of strong personal charm, endowed with an astounding memory and a rare measure of feminine intuition (49).

Soon after, he repeats this appraisal, saying:

Externally, she seemed thus at first sight little more than the ordinary pretty, light-hearted English girl, with a taste for field sports (especially riding), and a native love of the country. But at times one caught in the brightened colour of her lustrous brown eyes certain curious undercurrents of depth, of reserve, and of a question wistfulness which made you suspect the presence of profounder elements in her nature (49).

Hubert is particularly attracted to the “brightened” and “lustrous” aspects of her that reveal the inner depth in Hilda. But his analysis of Hilda, too, seems to fall into nineteenth-century patterns of reading women as “angels in the house” in some ways. As much as he admires her adventurous spirit, including her love of outdoor activity, he also is attracted to the “creamy, waxy whiteness of skin” that harkens back to the wax-doll.

Despite an exterior that could be read as wax-doll like, Hilda does not fit into the tradition of domestic and inanimate women; instead, she is vivacious, spirited, and thoughtful.
In part, Allen builds off of the same sort of discourses found in *Lady Audley’s Secret*, suggesting that this outward appearance has little bearing on the real Hilda. Although he is not as shrewd a judge of character as Hilda, Harold makes much of this clash between her seemingly ordinary appearance with the accompanying suggestion that there are “profonder,” and even abnormal, “elements in her nature.” Ultimately, his attraction is based, not on her “ordinary pretty” appearance, but rather on the characteristics which separate her from this norm. These include, of course, her detective-like qualities such as her “astounding memory” and “vivacious spirits.” In Harold, Hilda finds someone who appreciates both vibrant, intellectual side at least as much as her physical charms. His suggestion that there is something deeper in her than her appearance reveals, implies that he is not interested solely in a woman who conforms to Victorian norms, but instead hints that he is attracted to personality and character. In a later scene, Harold similarly cries out: “What a beautiful, tender, sympathetic face! And yet, how able!” (86). He, quite clearly, is not troubled by the balance of outward feminine beauty with the suggestion of an internal, masculine ability to do real work. His rather enlightened attitude implies a responsive sensitivity to feminist understandings of Victorian women, and especially wives, as more than just dolls. Thus, Allen finds a way to make it rather apparent that Harold is just the sort of husband that would suit Hilda.

Of course, Hilda is also perfectly at ease about the fact that she will not marry until she has avenged her father. The decision not to marry until she is ready would have been empowering for nineteenth-century women in her position, in that it provided a way of claiming a control over the arrangement of her marriage that was usually reserved for men. Hilda’s constant refusals to marry him, ironically, are part of what appeals to Hubert. After reading one of her letters, in which she rejects another of his proposals, he captures this moment of mixed
feelings, saying: “Did any man ever court so strange a love? Her very strangeness drew me.” (115). The fact that their courtship falls outside normal nineteenth-century lines, especially in that a single woman is not desperate to marry any appropriate suitor, intrigues rather than dissuades him. Their usual courtship, therefore, lays the foundation for a relationship that also is different from the typical one.

The man she chooses, fittingly, is one who is somewhat unusual himself. Although certainly intelligent and capable in his own right, Hubert becomes almost feminine when contrasted with his future wife. The same pattern in which the female detective triumphs over the police also plays out almost constantly in Hilda’s relationship with her own future husband, who frequently trails behind her logic. To some extent, Harold is actually the less logical of the two. While detective work comes easily to Hilda, he finds it immensely difficult to track her down. As he attempts to find Hilda, for instance, he says: “When I came to reconnoiter the matter in this light, I became at once aware how great a gulf separated the clumsy male intelligence from the immediate and almost unerring intuitions of a clever woman….I felt that in order to play Hilda’s part, it was necessary to have Hilda’s head-piece. Not every man can bend the bow of Ulysses” (104). Once more, he uses the word intuition to describe Hilda’s ability to the detective work he cannot. But he also seems to understand her intuition as something rooted in cleverness—and a cleverness in which he does not share—rather than in the traditional sense of clairvoyance. Ironically, he is reliant on the “happy accident” (112) of finding a letter with Hilda’s new address in order to track her down.

Unlike Dickens with Mrs. Buckett, Allen casts a man in the role of the lesser, assistant detective. Throughout the novel, Hubert quite clearly assumes the role of bumbling assistant—the ordinary man to Hilda’s brilliant detective. The two form a sort of detective couple, with
both parties participating in the crime-solving, although it is Hilda who almost exclusively does all of the major detective work. For the most part, Hubert’s role is limited to chasing her frantically around different countries, simply because he is so desperate to marry her. In this gender reversal, the man is also the one who takes up detective work only so that he can marry. Unlike Hilda, who is committed to her own work, Hubert instead is driven by what he terms the “quiverings of my heart” (87). Similarly, he is the one willing to abandon his home and work in order to follow her, insisting “I will help you in whatever way you will allow me” (87). As he takes on this seemingly feminine stance, which echoes someone like Valeria Woodville’s commitment to her husband, Allen constructs a relationship that is based on the mutual desire to help one another. The role reversal sets a precedent in their relationship that the wife’s desires will not constantly be sublimated to her husband’s, but that new opportunities to play their gender roles in alternate ways are possible.

While this certainly casts Hilda in a more authoritative role, almost mirroring the structure of a male detective story like Sherlock Holmes’s, it is also an important foundation of the couple’s relationship. Because her future husband is not a good detective, Hilda must assume the burden of determining whether they are a suitable couple. In Hubert, she finds someone who is willing to make sacrifices for her, and to help her do her work. As they travel through India and Africa solving various minor crimes, Hilda becomes increasingly assured that they are compatible teammates. These pages of the novel trace a development of the two characters’ friendship, which is filled with conversation rather than courting rituals. In one instance, Hubert describes “her eyes meeting mine with a sincere, frank gaze” (87) as the two talk about their future. Unlike the woman in traditional nineteenth-century relationships, Hilda does not try to attract a husband through coy flirtation, instead opting for a more honest mode of
communication. In the process, the two gradually learn one another’s personalities and histories, evolving into a complementary couple who can help one another. Although a man does assist Hilda with her detective work, he does so as a teammate who works in conjunction with her in order to solve her own cases.

Simultaneously, though, this structure forces the detective heroine into a male role, which she is naturally suited to take. Throughout the novel, much is made of her exceptional bravery. When the boat on which they are traveling hits a rock, for instance, Hilda refuses to perform the role of frightened, helpless female, instead remaining completely self-assured. While other “women shrieked and cried aloud in helpless terror,” Hilda continues on “perfectly collected” with her usual “infinite calm” (210). In fact, even Dr. Sebastian finds her attitude admirable, saying: “You are a brave woman. Whether I sink or swim, I admire your courage, your steadfastness of purpose” (210). And to fully cement her bravery, Hilda insists that she will wait for the men’s boat, rather than leave with the other single ladies. In part, Allen puts into motion this role reversal in order to dispel notions about women, arguing that they are indeed suited for work that requires courage, including detection, which does not need to be domestic only, since women like Hilda are perfectly equipped to take on dangerous situations and criminals. Even her enemy is forced to recognize that Hilda has little in common with the delicate, flower-like woman. But the role also becomes a way to represent Hilda’s essential equality with her husband. Hilda, as she refuses to take the women’s lifeboat, literally places herself on an even standing with Hubert. He does not rescue her as soon as danger strikes, but instead finds that Hilda is perfectly capable of fending for herself. By enacting this role reversal, Allen suggests that his heroine’s marriage is not one that will conform to conventional norms, with a submissive
woman and omnipotent husband. Rather, the implication is that her marriage is one in which she will have power, which if not completely masculine, still comes with quite a bit of authority.

It is not until the novel’s final pages that we fully see how the couple’s marriage will play out, and of course it seems to imply that equality will be preserved even once they have wed. And as in the earlier novel, Hilda’s marriage does little to dispel the belief that she will not continue doing detective work—on the contrary, doing just the opposite. Like Lois, Hilda is too attached to her own career to abandon it once married. Although her husband has narrated the entire book, Hilda has the final line of dialogue, which she uses to declare her continued dedication to detection. If a text in which a female narrator—like Valeria Woodville or Anne Rodway—puts down her pen lends itself to anti-feminist readings, then a novel in which the male narrator is preempted by a female character conversely engenders feminist readings. The novel enacts a process by which the female detective heroine gradually asserts her desire to share in her husband’s masculine authority, and the novel’s final sentences suggest that Hilda has achieved an equal balance with her husband. The novel does not, as critics would suggest, end with the heroine reduced to a passive role; but rather, Hilda’s final declaration that “We have much to do, Hubert” (224) implies her continued commitment to an active life that leaves room for future detective work, with a husband-teammate who will bolster rather than impede her success.

In “Gendering the Cannon,” Johanna Smith reads the modern female detective as someone who “combines conventional ‘masculinity’ and ‘femininity’ so as to blur the distinction between them” (41), arguing that “in conjunction these conventions lose their gender coding” (41). This same structure however also seems to apply to Hilda, who can be read as both masculine and feminine, alternately. Unlike his contemporaries, Allen participates in this radical
breakdown of gender roles in a way that actually paved the way for future writers to create equally empowered female detective, as well as other feminist characters. The breakdown of these gender codes provides a way for Hilda to renegotiate her marriage role, transforming it into something that is based on equality between teammates and companions rather than hierarchal rules. In her marriage, the traditional gender roles—which also demand women’s submission and oppression—do not apply, in part because these characters are already not conventionally feminine and masculine in the nineteenth-century sense. By following this path, Allen provides his heroine with a husband who will not inhibit her work, but actually will assist her in doing her detective work, thereby allowing for a more nuanced reading of their marriage as one does not force Hilda to sublimate her desires beneath her husband’s.
CHAPTER VI: FUTURE PROBLEMS FOR LADY DETECTIVES

In his novels, Allen set a path for female detectives to find subtle, but still transgressive ways to evade norms. His novels accomplished the gender reversal expected of a paradoxical character like the female detective, but did so in a manner that allowed his heroines’ continued participation in mainstream social institutions, like marriage. But while he established a pattern for the female detective to her skills to evade conforming to patriarchal norms in new, innovative ways, Allen’s solution still failed to solve the problem of the female detective in its entirety. In generations to come, the female detective would still face many of the same complications that she had since her inception, including the issue of whether marriage would inhibit or improve her detective work. While female detectives are largely lost in the conversation about nineteenth-century detectives, especially when compared to their vastly more popular male counterparts, the continued discussion of how these marginalized characters both subverted and conformed to gender roles sheds light on the ways in which the literary heroines of the genre used the skills Allen’s brings into focus in his lady detectives to find new forms of resistance.

In the 1920s and 1930s, the Golden Age of Detective Fiction was accompanied by a number of moments of historical progress for women, especially with new professional opportunities and the suffragist movement. But even while women started to acquire more rights, the discourse of female detectives as different from their male counterparts—and in many ways inferior to them—still continued. Ironically, it was during this time of feminist activity that the detective genre saw a “domestication of crime” (Light 87), with female detective novels reverting to the same formula of ladylike, indoor amateur sleuthing found in Collins’s novels. As the female detective came increasingly into vogue, Rzepka declares that the era’s “detective fiction shifted accordingly, away from the adventure elements that had traditionally appealed to
male readers and toward plots of ratiocination and inspired observation verging on ‘intuition’, capabilities which most women at the time were more inclined to admire” (158). In particular, Rzepka refers to two of the most popular female detectives of the era—Agatha Christie’s Miss Jane Marple and Patricia Wentworth’s Miss Maud Silver—as spinster detectives who used intuition to solve crimes. Although they do their sleuthing decades later, Miss Silver and Miss Marple are the clear descendants of the nineteenth-century female detectives whose work becomes complicated by their sex. The spinsterish quality of both women, which is rendered unforgettable by the “Miss” label attached to their names, is played up in their ladylike behaviors of cleaning, knitting, and cooking.

Why did these writers take pains to make sure that their intelligent, perceptive detective heroines are both spinsters and feminine? Did they solve the problem of the female detective by writing her as someone, like Loveday Brooke, who is so far beyond the marriageable age that she can remain single but not sexualized? On the contrary, this structure seems to follow the notion still that marriage makes female detective work impossible. If these women become twentieth-century examples of how the female detective is able to “challenge prevalent notions…as they outwit established patriarchal authority without unduly threatening it” (Mezel 104), then is the genre ultimately a nostalgic rather than a progressive one? Perhaps even more disjointing, though, are the ways in which these women are still marked as different than male detectives. Despite all the advances in women’s rights, their work is still read as intuitive; and, while shrewd these women are still a far cry from the hard-boiled characterization of their male contemporaries like Dashiell Hammett’s Sam Spade and Raymond Chandler’s Philip Marlowe, or even R. Austin Freeman’s Dr. Thorndyke. The problem of the future generation of writers of female detective fiction was to find new ways to bridge the gap between male and female detectives,
while looking for newer ways for their heroine’s to subvert the norms that would not compromise their detective work.

Many aspects of twentieth-century detective fiction still conform to the same patterns of their forerunners, featuring single detective women whose work is complicated by their search for husbands. And accordingly, in today’s popular female detective literature many of the same issues of female liberation and empowerment come to the forefront. Are modern female detectives, even seemingly progressive ones like Janet Evanovich’s Stephanie Plum, Val McDermid’s Kate Branningan, and Sue Grafton’s Kinsey Millhone immune to these problems? Do the seemingly ubiquitous romantic subplots in these novels become a way “to reassure readers of this strong woman’s traditional femininity rather than to develop her character or personality” (Klein 205) as some modern critics claim? Or do these women, in the tradition established a century before by Allen, find innovative ways to avoid falling into the patterns of restricted genre roles? And what does the repetition of these patterns suggest in terms of the genre’s evolution, more specifically the treatment of the potentially radical figure of the female detective?

At the very least, the modern female detective genre still “confronts in an entertaining and accessible medium questions of women’s agency in general” (Walton and Jones 4), thereby moving forward into the feminist territory once explored by their nineteenth-century forerunners. Even chronological distance has not seemed to allow the female detective to evade the complicated questions of what detective work means for her femininity, and in this sense the genre’s survival reflects yet another attempt to find peace with the character. The same questions of the feminist potential in female detective novels are ones that still need to be probed as study of the genre goes forward, although it is imperative to continue looking at these texts—
like Allen’s—in less than traditional ways that allow for newer, richer understandings of all the transgressive elements at work within them.
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