From providence to police:
The development of the literary detective figure in the long eighteenth century

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Abstract

This dissertation establishes a new chronology for the development of the detective figure in English literature. In opposition to the traditional view of detective literature as a nineteenth-century innovation, this study argues that the roots of the literary detective figure can instead be found considerably earlier, during the long eighteenth century (1688-1832). As rationalist scientific knowledge increased during the Enlightenment, people no longer believed that an omniscient providence directly intervened in human affairs to detect criminal activity. During this period, providentially motivated criminal texts of the early modern period were gradually replaced by human-driven detective narratives.

The first chapter examines how popular works about two real-life criminals contributed to the growth of detective fiction. The thief-taker Jonathan Wild (1683-1725) was depicted as both a criminal and a successful investigator who maintained methodical records and managed a network of deputies. The dual nature of Wild as a criminal and a detective would influence the portrayal of the detective as a potentially untrustworthy figure throughout the century. The prolific body of texts on the trial of Elizabeth Canning (1734-1773) highlighted the problem of evidence in criminal trials: through their consumption of these chapbooks and pamphlets, readers trained themselves to analyze texts critically and to perform detailed literary investigations.

The second chapter analyzes the activities of two early fictional investigative figures: Emily St. Aubert of Ann Radcliffe’s *The Mysteries of Udolpho* (1794) and Caleb Williams of William Godwin’s *Things as They Are; or, The Adventures of*
Caleb Williams (1794). Both of these novels feature proto-detective figures who actively investigate by collecting evidence, piecing together clues, and drawing conclusions based on the facts they have gleaned through these detective activities.

The third chapter details the emergence of two literary detectives who appeared in novels near the end of the long eighteenth century. The anonymously published Richmond; or, Scenes in the Life of a Bow Street Officer, Drawn Up from his Private Memoranda (1827) was the first English novel to feature a professional detective as the main character. Edward Bulwer-Lytton’s Pelham; or, The Adventures of a Gentleman (1828) introduced the first aristocratic detective in English literature, thus adding respectability to counteract the roguish origins and criminal connections of the detective figure.

The conclusion details how this collection of foundational eighteenth-century narratives influenced the development of the mystery novel genre in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. It considers how these early texts affected the depiction of a variety of later prominent detective characters, including Raymond Chandler’s Philip Marlowe, Arthur Conan Doyle’s Sherlock Holmes, Dashiell Hammett’s Sam Spade, Carolyn Keene’s Nancy Drew, and Dorothy L. Sayers’s Lord Peter Wimsey.
Résumé

Cette dissertation établit une nouvelle chronologie du développement des personnages ayant le rôle de détective dans la littérature anglaise. Contrairement à l’idée traditionnelle que le roman policier est une innovation du XIXᵉ siècle, cette étude affirme que les fondements de la littérature policière apparaissent beaucoup plus tôt, c’est-à-dire durant le XVIIIᵉ siècle prolongé (1688-1832). Lors du développement des connaissances scientifiques rationnelles au cours du siècle des Lumières, les gens ne croyaient plus qu’une force omnisciente, voire un dieu, intervenait dans les affaires humaines pour élucider l’activité criminelle. Les textes criminels du début de la période moderne, dans lesquels la Providence jouait un rôle, ont graduellement été remplacés par des narrations centrées sur l’humain.

Le premier chapitre démontre la façon dont les œuvres populaires au sujet de deux vrais criminels ont contribué au développement de ce genre de fiction en littérature. Le chasseur de primes Jonathan Wild (1683-1725), qui amenait les criminels devant la justice, est dépeint comme étant lui-même un criminel, mais il est également présenté comme un enquêteur renommé, qui conservait méthodiquement les archives et gérait tout un réseau d’adjoints. Les deux facettes contradictoires de Wild, lui-même criminel et détective, ont influencé la représentation du détective à travers le siècle. Il fut considéré comme une personne sur qui on ne devrait peut-être pas se fier. L’abondante collection de textes sur le procès d’Elizabeth Canning (1734-1773) souligne le problème des preuves dans les procès criminels: par la lecture de chapbook et de pamphlets, les lecteurs se sont entraînés à analyser les textes de façon critique et à mener une enquête littéraire détaillée.
Le deuxième chapitre analyse les activités de deux personnages fictifs d’enquêteurs : Emily St. Aubert, dans The Mysteries of Udolpho (1794) par Ann Radcliffe, et Caleb Williams, dans Things As They Are; or, The Adventures of Caleb Williams (1794) par William Godwin. Ces deux romans présentent des prototypes de détectives qui enquêtent activement en recueillant des preuves, en rassemblant des indices et en tirant des conclusions basées sur les faits recueillis.

Le troisième chapitre décrit l’émergence de deux personnages précoces de détectives fictifs qui sont apparus dans des romans de la fin du XVIIIᵉ siècle prolongé. L’œuvre anonyme Richmond; or, Scenes in the Life of a Bow Street Officer, Drawn Up from his Private Memoranda (1827) a été le premier roman anglais à présenter un détective professionnel comme personnage principal. Le roman Pelham; or, The Adventures of a Gentleman par Edward Bulwer-Lytton (1828) a créé le premier détective aristocrate de la littérature anglaise, faisant une césure avec les détectives du passé, à la morale douteuse et associés à la criminalité, rendant ainsi l’image du détective plus honorable.

La conclusion explique comment cette collection de récits fondateurs du XVIIIᵉ siècle ont influencé le développement du roman-mystère durant le XIXᵉ et le XXᵉ siècle. Elle détermine quels effets ces premiers textes ont eu sur la représentation d’une variété de personnages de détectives célèbres qui sont venus subséquemment, dont Philip Marlowe dans les romans de Raymond Chandler, Sherlock Holmes, décrit par Arthur Conan Doyle, Sam Spade de Dashiell Hammett, Nancy Drew par l’auteure Carolyn Keene, et Lord Peter Wimsey de Dorothy L. Sayers.
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Introduction

The chronology of the development of the detective novel has been debated by literary critics, but it is commonly understood to be a literary innovation of the Victorian period. Edgar Allan Poe’s amateur sleuth C. Auguste Dupin, who features in his short stories “The Murders in the Rue Morgue” (1841), “The Mystery of Marie Rogêt” (1842), and “The Purloined Letter” (1844), is widely regarded as the first detective figure in English literature. Wilkie Collins’s *The Moonstone* (1868) is regularly accepted as the first full-length detective novel in English, as was first argued in the influential commentary of T. S. Eliot, who called it “the first and greatest of English detective novels.” Other mid-nineteenth-century novels such as Charles Dickens’s *Bleak House* (1852-1853) and Charles Felix’s *The Notting Hill Mystery* (1862-1863) have also been put forth as potential contenders for the earliest

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4 *The Notting Hill Mystery* was republished in 2012 by the British Library, with the new edition bearing the definitive subtitle of “The First Detective Novel.” For criticism on *The Notting Hill Mystery* as the first detective novel, see: Paul Collins,
detective novel. The majority of critics agree that the detective story did not evolve until the nineteenth century, after the establishment of the Metropolitan Police Service in 1829 under the direction of Sir Robert Peel. The chronology of the development of detective literature can be traced to critical work from the earlier twentieth century. Dorothy L. Sayers, a literary critic as well as a practitioner of the detective genre herself, contended that “the detective-story had to wait for its full development for the establishment of an effective police organisation… during the early part of the nineteenth century.”5 George Bates, similarly, argued that the detective figure could not appear in literature until the formal establishment of a police force. Bates wryly asserted that “the cause of Chaucer’s silence on the subject of airplanes was because he had never seen one. You cannot write about policemen before policemen exist to be written of.”6 Early scholars of the detective genre tended to assume that literary detective figures were required to be members of, or work in cooperation with, formalized police forces. The detective story, and by extension the invention of the literary detective figure, has been traditionally understood to have originated in mid-Victorian texts which appeared after the establishment of the Metropolitan Police Service.

This dissertation posits that the genesis of the English literary detective figure actually occurred in a considerably earlier period, over the course of the long

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6 Qtd. in Howard Haycraft, Murder for Pleasure: The Life and Times of the Detective Story (London: Davies, 1942), 6.
eighteenth century (1688-1832). It will outline how the English detective novel gradually developed as a consequence of the secularization of society and rationalization of thought through the influence of science. The literary detective figure takes on a role similar to that of the investigative scientist: both are seeking to reveal truth in situations of confusion, darkness, and obfuscation. During this period, early modern narratives in which divine providence was the main discoverer of crime were gradually replaced with texts featuring detectives who used empirical analysis. This new type of criminal narrative featured a human investigator, rather than a heavenly one, as the main agent of criminal discovery. An emerging proto-detective figure is traceable in popular literature of the period, though a fully developed literary detective figure does not appear until the closing years of the long eighteenth century. The chronology of development put forth in this thesis is a new one, which locates the roots of the detective figure in a much earlier period than previously suggested.

Detective fiction began to receive critical attention in the late 1920s, during the so-called “golden age” of detective fiction which spanned the period between the two world wars. Writers including W. H. Auden, T. S. Eliot, and Dorothy L.

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7 In his seminal *English Society, 1660-1832: Religion, Ideology, and Politics During the Ancien Regime*, first published in 1985, J. C. D. Clark proposed that the “continuum 1660-1832” be considered as a coherent historical period, which he termed the “long eighteenth century” (x). This extension of the long eighteenth century to include works up until 1832 has been widely adopted by historians and literary critics.


Sayers published critical essays on this popular literary form. Foundational critical monographs on the development of the crime novel included Régis Messac’s *Le «detective novel» et l’influence de la pensée scientifique* (1929) and A. E. Murch’s *The Development of the Detective Novel* (1958). *The Art of the Mystery Story* (1946), Howard Haycraft’s edited collection of critical essays on detective fiction, compiled for the first time many early essays on the genre. None of the essays address any writers who predate Edgar Allan Poe: Haycraft notes in his introduction that this collection considers the “mystery-crime-detective story, from Poe to the present time.” Julian Symons’s *Bloody Murder: From the Detective Story to the Crime Novel* (1972) put forward a developmental chronology of the genre, arguing that the “puzzle plots” of earlier novels were being replaced by narratives which focused on the psychology of the criminal. While he does briefly acknowledge that “the characteristic note of crime literature is first struck in *Caleb Williams,*” Symons focuses largely on the development of the genre from the mid-nineteenth century onwards. Ian Ousby’s *Bloodhounds of Heaven* (1976) began the work of restoring the eighteenth-century history of the development of the English detective novel, as he cites Jonathan Wild, *Caleb Williams,* and Richmond as contributors to the development of the detective novel. Other foundational academic studies of the detective novel which contain some consideration of the eighteenth-century roots of

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the genre include Stephen Knight’s *Form and Ideology in Crime Fiction* (1980), Martin Kayman’s *From Bow Street to Baker Street* (1992), and Charles Rzepka’s *Detective Fiction* (2005). In recent years, the genre of detective fiction has received increased scholarly attention: both Cambridge and Blackwell have published critical companions to the genre, and Palgrave Macmillan is currently publishing a series of monographs under the umbrella of Crime Files. The body of critical literature thus far has considered the eighteenth-century contributions to the detective fiction genre only in a limited manner. Critics who do address eighteenth-century detective texts analyze them in passing as part of larger studies, which generally focus the bulk of their attention on nineteenth- and twentieth-century texts. This dissertation, in contrast, examines six detective texts from the long eighteenth century, and traces the growth and development of the literary detective figure during this period.

“Murder Will Out”: Providential Discovery of Crime in Early Modern England

In early modern England, God was believed to intervene directly in the detection of human criminal activity under the guise of “providence.” This belief was no doubt encouraged by the fact that law enforcement in this period was limited in scope, and did not have a high rate of investigative success. Instead, early modern culture created a narrative of a deeply involved divine presence who interceded in the investigation of crimes. Providence was believed to orchestrate coincidences, lead people to evidence, provide prophetic dreams, and work upon the conscience of
the criminal.\textsuperscript{13} Alexandra Walsham’s pioneering work on the concept of providence in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries has demonstrated that belief in providence was quite pervasive, and was held by citizens of every social level: “providence was a part of the mental furniture of the early modern mind, an explanatory tool which contemporaries could employ at will.”\textsuperscript{14} In this era, there was a widespread “belief that God was no idle, inactive spectator upon the mechanical workings of the created world, but an assiduous, energetic deity who constantly intervened in human affairs. His finger could be discerned behind every inexplicable occurrence; He regularly stepped in to discipline sinners and bestow blessings upon the righteous and good.”\textsuperscript{15}

This cultural understanding of providential intervention in the criminal investigation process is reflected in early modern proverbial wisdom such as “murder will out” or “the Lord comes with leaden feet but strikes with iron hands.”\textsuperscript{16} As Maurizio Ascari suggests, “according to popular belief – the primary agent of detection was divine providence. People believed that God, being inherently just, could not tolerate crime going unpunished.”\textsuperscript{17} The literature of the early modern period repeatedly features the narrative trope of providence as investigator: “the idea of God as the primal revenger was still fertile in the Renaissance period, as is shown by the popular

\textsuperscript{15} Walsham, 2.
\textsuperscript{16} Walsham, 97.
\textsuperscript{17} Maurizio Ascari, \textit{A Counter-History of Crime Fiction: Supernatural, Gothic, Sensational} (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007), 19.
literature of those years, in which murder plays a prominent role.”\textsuperscript{18} These texts are
“firmly framed within a Christian plot of guilt and punishment” in which “according
to a providential logic accidents are to be interpreted as signs of God’s will” and
involvement in the detection of murder.\textsuperscript{19} Such an intervention was understood
frequently to take the form of providential assistance with the discovery of criminal
activity.

In early modern popular crime narratives, the detective function was
generally performed through the intervention of providence. In these texts, crimes
were discovered through a series of divinely orchestrated coincidences:

Consumers of such murder literature learnt about many marvellous
manifestations of Providence: a farmer who, on a whim, drained a pond to
reveal two skeletons; tiny scraps of evidence preserved among ashes; and
discoveries by children whose innate innocence underlined divine influence.
Biblical images were deployed: brute beasts, fowls of the air, even stones and
“the offended winde” turned against murderers. Poisonings were discovered
by dogs and pigs who died after eating the victim’s vomit; horses threw
escaping murderers; and ships were caught in storms which abated once the
fugitives were apprehended.\textsuperscript{20}

Providence, as represented in these texts, played an active role in the detection and
exposure of criminal activity. Community policing and methods of investigation
were somewhat rudimentary concepts in the early modern period. The recurrent

\textsuperscript{18} Ascari, 26.
\textsuperscript{19} Ascari, 26.
\textsuperscript{20} Malcolm Gaskill, “Reporting Murder: Fiction in the Archives in Early Modern
literary theme of providence as a judicial arbitrator in human affairs was no doubt popular due to the appealing rhetoric of celestial justice punishing those who took criminal action against the lives or properties of other citizens. As increasingly sophisticated forms of law enforcement developed in England during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, the early modern trope of providence-as-investigator was gradually replaced with human-driven investigation.

Malcolm Gaskill has written extensively about the early modern reliance on providence as an active participant in the law-enforcement process. Since the structure of law enforcement in early modern England was relatively primitive, and enjoyed limited success, citizens were eager to rely on providential influence in the discovery of crimes and indictment of criminals. As Gaskill argues, “providential ideology” became an important part of the early modern concept of criminal detection “because it offered a certainty and reliability which caulked the gaps of chance and contingency between the planks of law enforcement against serious crimes.”

Gaskill notes that “God’s providence was dramatized in many ways” in printed criminal literature, such as instances of culprits being caught in storms to prevent their escape, corpses bleeding afresh in the presence of their murderer, the apparition of ghosts, and prophetic dreams. Literary representations of crime, in songs and chapbooks, highlighted examples of providential intervention in the detection of crime, as exemplified in the following ballad:

Alas, that any Murther should lye hid:

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From true Discovery, the Lord forbid:

Though they commit it ne’er so secretly,

They cannot hide from God’s all-seeing-eye.\(^\text{23}\)

Providence is characterized as a relentless pursuer of crime and guilt in literature of the early modern period, unmatched by any earthly investigative force. As Stephen Knight observes, “divine guidance lies behind the revealing of guilt… murder will out, they insist, for both moral and religious reasons,” and early modern crime literature “operate[s] in a world drenched in Christian belief.”\(^\text{24}\) The rhetoric of providential discovery of crime began to change with the Enlightenment: the early modern “reliance on providence to discover murder” and other crimes was gradually supplanted by “a greater certainty of detection offered by advances in policing, evidence gathering, and medico-legal standards of proof” over the eighteenth century.\(^\text{25}\)

These advances in English law enforcement led to a gradual displacement of providential modes of inquiry during the eighteenth century, both in the development of actual police work and in narrative representations of crime. Martin Kayman proposes that providence’s cultural role in the investigation of crime was reduced during the long eighteenth century:

\(^{23}\) *Criminals cruelty: giving a just and true account of one John Wise, who together with Richard Jones, and Charles Tooley yet untaken, did one Sunday night being the twentieth of April, commit that barbarous and unnatural murther on Elizabeth Fairbank* (London: J. Deacon, 1684), 1.


The culminating spectacle was thus the narrative conclusion of the discourse of the criminal law, in which the disruptive sequence of events which were signified by crime and its culture were finally ordered into a spectacular proof and tragic enactment of the inexorable destiny of evil, with the criminal law and its juridical institutions playing the part of Providence.26

As forensic science improved and methods of empirical analysis were developed and refined, divine providence was gradually supplanted by human investigators and by earthly detective activity. Régis Messac was the first to suggest that the scientific thought of the Enlightenment influenced the development of the detective novel;27 contemporary scholarship, however, has generally focused on the influence of science on detective fiction from the mid-nineteenth century onwards.28 This dissertation contextualizes the effect of new scientific thought on the pre-existing, providentially driven crime narratives of the eighteenth century. The movement away from providential discovery to human investigation of crimes was not simple or speedy. The fitful progression towards effective, trustworthy human investigators of crime during the eighteenth century is reflected in the gradual evolution of the detective figure in English literature.

The Rationalization of Criminal Detection

Numerous organized police forces existed in England considerably in advance of the establishment of the Metropolitan Police Service in 1829. Policing roles included those of village constables (from the sixteenth century onwards), night watchmen (a system begun in the City of Westminster in 1720), and ultimately the Bow Street Runners, founded in 1749-1750 by justice of the peace Henry Fielding (the formation of the Bow Street Runners will be addressed in greater detail in chapter 3). The notion of a state-governed police force has its roots in Enlightenment philosophy and the social contract theory of government, particularly in the Lockean idea of the preservation of property. In his Second Treatise of Government, John Locke writes that “the great and chief end… of men’s uniting into commonwealths, and putting themselves under government, is the preservation of their property.” In order to achieve protection of their property and their own safety, citizens were required to turn over some of their liberty to an organized police force. In Locke’s state of nature, “people have liberty and lack security,” so “reasonable people would trade some of their liberty for increased security.” This trade presented a significant cultural shift: as long as the detection of crime had been

attributed to divine intervention, there was theoretically little need to be concerned about the potential for human corruption of law enforcement. With the movement toward an organized, state-sponsored police force, the work of the detective was no longer the function of an omnipotent, divine being, but instead became the duty of a fallible, corruptible human. The fear that this shift induced would eventually be allayed by increased scientific knowledge and forensic ability which could be employed in the service of criminal detection. Developments in forensic knowledge did not, however, keep pace with the development of policing forces over the eighteenth century. Literary representations of criminal investigations during this period thus betray anxiety over the figure of the detective. In even the best cases, the literary detective figure is operating with limited knowledge and with less success than his providential predecessor, who triumphantly and reliably revealed all aspects of criminal activity in early modern texts. In the worst scenarios, the literary detective figure is himself duplicitous and criminal.

Despite the advances made in scientific knowledge during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, forensic science was not integrated into criminal investigations until relatively late in the eighteenth century. Most early partnerships between law enforcement and science during this period involved relatively rudimentary experiments:

Scientists and medical men had been offering their expertise to those seeking to detect offenders and to those concerned with prosecuting and defending them from the end of the eighteenth century. Early detection had often
deployed the relatively simple techniques of taking casts of footprints or measuring the length of axles.\textsuperscript{34}

A few examples of early forensically influenced detection have been preserved in the historical record. These examples, though they applied only quite basic scientific knowledge, set the precedent for more sophisticated forms of forensic medicine and investigation that would flourish into the nineteenth century and be reflected in later literary criminal investigations.\textsuperscript{35}

The earliest extant examples of forensic evidence being applied in a criminal investigation in Britain occur in the late eighteenth century. On 19 January 1784, Edward Culshaw (also spelled as Kelsall) was murdered by John Toms in Ditton, Lancashire. Toms had reputedly befriended Culshaw on the road while travelling, followed him home, then shot Culshaw through the head “with a horse-pistol, the ball of which hit him on the back part of his head, and went through his forehead.”\textsuperscript{36}

After robbing Culshaw of “his watch and some pence,” and putting “the pistol under the body of the deceased,” Toms left the scene of the crime.\textsuperscript{37} He was speedily apprehended the same evening, approximately eight miles away in Wavertree, outside of Liverpool.\textsuperscript{38} When Toms was tried at the Lancaster Assizes on 23 March 1784, his guilt was ultimately proved by matching the torn ballad in his pocket with


\textsuperscript{36} \textit{Bath Chronicle} (29 January 1784): 2.

\textsuperscript{37} \textit{London Chronicle} (27 January 1784): 5.

\textsuperscript{38} \textit{Morning Herald and Daily Advertiser} (28 January 1784): 2.
The pistol wadding found in the murder weapon. The records of the Lancaster Assizes reported the details of how the verdict was determined:

a very extraordinary fact came out respecting the murder upon which Toms was convicted, viz., he had bought a ballad, and tore part of it off for a wad for the pistol. This wad was found [with the deceased], which exactly corresponded with the part left in his pocket.\(^{39}\)

This particular innovative example of forensic evidence would later be taken up in literary form: a dramatized account of the trial appeared in the *London Journal* in 1864,\(^ {40}\) Elizabeth Gaskell used a matching piece of paper as a key plot element in *Mary Barton* (1848), and Dickens “borrowed the notion of fragmentary-text-as-evidence” in *Bleak House* (1852-1853), where jigsaw paper wadding is used by Inspector Bucket to determine the guilty party.\(^ {41}\)

Another example of forensic investigation from the late eighteenth century is the case of William Richardson in 1786. A young woman in Kirkcudbright, Scotland, was found murdered in her home, with her throat cut. After an autopsy, the victim was discovered to be pregnant. The steward-deputy of the area, acting as lead investigator, determined that a number of unidentified footprints had been left around the ground of the cottage. The identity of the murderer was determined by “matching


shoes of men attending the funeral with footprints at the scene of the murder.\textsuperscript{42} Richardson’s shoes exactly corresponded with the footprints found at the scene of the crime: after this initial discovery, he was identified by an eyewitness, his alibi was broken, additional evidence was found at his home, and he ultimately confessed to being both the murderer and the father of the girl’s unborn child.\textsuperscript{43} The forensic process of matching footprints to determine guilt was later appropriated by Walter Scott and used as part of the plot of his 1815 novel \textit{Guy Mannering, or The Astrologer}.\textsuperscript{44}

The regularization of criminal investigation during the eighteenth century, including the organization of police forces and the application of scientific knowledge to investigative inquiry, was a logical outcome of the rationalizing tendency of the broader Enlightenment intellectual milieu. Since eighteenth-century authors were writing in the shadow of the logic-driven Enlightenment, it might have been expected that a Sherlock Holmes-like detective figure who applied methodical principles of investigation would have appeared in fiction about a century prior to his actual debut in 1887. Part of the reason for the delay was the complex cultural transition from narratives of providential investigation of crimes to texts featuring human-driven investigations.

\textsuperscript{43} Wills, 384-389.
The Development of the Literary Detective Figure in the Eighteenth Century

During the eighteenth century, the role of the detective became progressively more organized, centralized, and effective: this change in role can be traced back to advances in policing structures and investigative procedures. The secularization of the investigative process led to the literary innovation of the detective figure, who could replace the role of providence in the narrative of criminal investigation.

The transition from divine to human investigation of crime, however, did not occur smoothly. In early modern crime writing, much of the interest of the plot arose from the activities of the criminal himself, as the investigative process of an omniscient, omnipotent providence did not lend itself to much suspense. Thus, the crime writing of the early modern period tended to glamorize the adventures of the criminal, which afforded much of the interest of the plot, before soberly concluding with a moralizing lesson on the dangers of sin.\(^{45}\) The criminal narrative was of particular significance to the rise of the novel: early practitioners of the genre, most notably Daniel Defoe, drew heavily on the English tradition of crime writing in

creating the picaresque adventures of roguish heroes and heroines. The collection of stories known collectively as *The Newgate Calendar* was a popular publication which provided an assortment of execution narratives and criminal lives. The name of the calendar is derived from the name of London’s Newgate Prison, where convicted felons were confined to await their execution. Numerous critics, including Maurizio Ascari, Stephen Knight, Peter Linebaugh, Andrea McKenzie, and Heather Worthington, have noted the significance of *The Newgate Calendar* to the genre of crime literature as well as to the later genre of detective fiction. Knight argues that “the immensely popular collections of crime stories usually called *The Newgate Calendar*, which appeared in the eighteenth century, can be taken as the

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archetype of pre-detective crime stories.”49 These tales also gave their name to the “Newgate Novels” genre, cited as another precursor to detective fiction.50

The popularity of criminal narratives in England during the early eighteenth century may be partially attributed to the fact that these texts would have been seen as topical, as there was a strong perception in Augustan England that crime was on the increase. This perceived upswing was ascribed to a plethora of cultural problems, including “increasing urbanization, changing family roles, class anxieties, issues of legitimacy, the Jacobites, foreign and civil wars, new ways of making money, and challenges to established religious doctrine.”51 Henry Fielding commented:

That the most dreadful crime of Murder hath of late encreased in a very deplorable degree in this kingdom, is a fact which every man must confess, and which every good man must very bitterly lament. Till this age, indeed, cruel and bloody actions were so seldom heard of in England, that when they happened, they appeared as prodigies, and raised not only the detestation, but the astonishment of the people. In all the arts of fraud, knavery, and theft, we have long since been equal to any of our neighbours; but Murder is very lately begun, perhaps is even now beginning to be common among us.52

Fielding conjures the image of an earlier, bucolic England, and contrasts it with the crime-ridden social reality of the eighteenth century. Yet, as a number of scholars of eighteenth-century crime and crime writing have noted, the perception of increased criminal activity did not necessarily reflect reality. Lincoln B. Faller argues that “though it seems now that crime was actually declining in early eighteenth-century England, contemporary observers were sure it was catastrophically on the rise.”

Regardless of the actual statistics of crime in the era, Augustan readers certainly felt crime to be a topic of interest: as a result, narratives focusing on crimes and criminals were perennially popular. The transition from narratives focused on criminals as protagonists to those focused on investigative figures as protagonists was a gradual process which developed throughout the long eighteenth century.

The concept of a detective, rather than a criminal, as a literary hero needed to be established. The dual nature of the heritage of crime literature created additional complications. As Hal Gladfelder argues, crime writing in the eighteenth century had two distinct strains: “fictions of providential intervention” which were “complexly plotted and highly patterned in their effects—corresponding to both the elaborate machinations of the murderers they portray and to a view of the world as ordered, purposeful, watchfully governed,” and “picaresque stories” which were “episodic and arbitrary in their moral and emotional effects, just as the world they imagine is unstable, disintegrating…”

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of providentialism and the picaresque gradually merged into the nascent genre of detective fiction.

Part of the difficulty of the creation of a heroic literary detective figure was that the state-sponsored investigator occupied a morally ambiguous social position for much of the eighteenth century. Thief-takers were the earliest governmentally sanctioned detective figures, and they were the first whose primary job was to investigate crimes and apprehend criminals. Their social backgrounds were dubious at best: most thief-takers were drawn from the ranks of the criminal classes, as they were the people most likely to be able to procure information about other criminals in exchange for indemnity and a financial reward from the state (the history of thief-takers will be discussed in further detail in chapter 1).\textsuperscript{55} Even as police forces became more regularized and less mercenary, the taint of the potential immorality of earlier investigative figures remained. Eighteenth-century literary representations of the professional detective reflected the dual nature of the detective-criminal. As the literary detective figure continued to develop, the character was constructed as increasingly respectable, although vestiges of the earlier immoral roots of the detective figure lingered.

While the term “mystery novel” is often, understandably, used synonymously with “detective novel” in modern scholarly and common parlance, this dissertation is restricted to the examination of the developing role of proto-investigative detective figures in particular. The definition of the mystery novel, which requires only a mysterious or concealed event, and not necessarily a figure who actively investigates, is too broad for the purposes of this project: the eighteenth-century canon is filled with novels featuring confused identities, unknown strangers, clandestine happenings, and supernatural events, particularly in the gothic genre. For the purposes of this study, the detective is defined as a literary character who actively seeks to comprehend an unknown, mysterious, or confusing event through active, rational, and directed investigation. The role of the literary detective is restricted solely to the act of discovery and proof of criminal activity, and therefore does not include other aspects of law enforcement during this period, such as the prosecution, incarceration, or punishment of criminals.56

Chapter one examines the published narratives surrounding two real-life criminals in the context of detective fiction. Jonathan Wild (1683-1725) gained fame

and popularity as an exceptionally organized and successful thief-taker before he was ultimately unmasked as a powerful criminal. Elizabeth Canning (1734-1773) was a youthful servant girl who claimed to have been abducted and held captive for a month in 1753. Her accusations were questioned, with public opinion fiercely raging both for and against Canning’s claims. These two prominent criminal cases provided important foundations for the development of the literary detective figure. Wild’s methodical record keeping and network of criminal deputies served as inspiration for later literary detectives. The portrayal of Wild’s dual nature as investigator-criminal complicated and delayed the literary development of the detective-as-hero. The Canning case, which received considerable attention in the press, encouraged readers to perform the detective function themselves: chapbooks on the case included diagrams, measurements, and other pieces of forensic evidence for readers to consider. The close attention paid to the case encouraged detailed investigation by readers, in an early and widespread example of “armchair detectives.” Popular literature surrounding these true crime cases serves as an important body of transitional texts: these chapbooks, ballads, and other ephemeral literature bridge the earlier, providentially motivated criminal texts of the early modern period to the human-driven investigation of the post-Enlightenment period.

Chapter two illuminates the activities of early fictional investigative figures in two gothic novels of the late eighteenth century. In Ann Radcliffe’s *The Mysteries of Udolpho* (1794), the heroine Emily St. Aubert is compelled to investigate mysterious, seemingly supernatural occurrences in the remote castle of Udolpho. While her conclusions are not consistently accurate, her curiosity and methods mark
her as an early proto-detective figure. In William Godwin’s *Things as They Are; or, The Adventures of Caleb Williams* (1794), the eponymous hero becomes a self-appointed “spy” who seeks to determine the guilt or innocence of his master, Ferdinando Falkland, through amateur investigative activities. After Williams discovers damning evidence, he shifts from investigator to object of investigation, as Falkland hires the thief-taker Jones⁵⁷ to pursue Williams relentlessly. The gothic themes of secrets, concealment, and revelation provide the backdrop for these early examples of detective fiction. Both of these novels feature characters who actively investigate by collecting evidence, piecing together clues, and drawing conclusions based on the facts they have gleaned through these detective activities. Though their conclusions are not consistently accurate, these analytical activities mark Emily St. Aubert and Caleb Williams as early examples of amateur detective figures in English literature.

Chapter three demonstrates how two novels of the late long eighteenth century contain examples of the literary detective figure, predating Poe’s C. Auguste Dupin by at least a dozen years. The anonymously published *Richmond; or, Scenes in the Life of a Bow Street Officer, Drawn Up from his Private Memoranda* (1827) was the first novel in English literature to feature a professional detective as the main character. This picaresque novel recounts the various cases and adventures of Tom

⁵⁷ Godwin originally named this character Jones, but later altered his name to Gines. Michael Cohen suggests that Godwin may have renamed the character Gines in order to strengthen a connection to “the *Don Quixote* episode of Gines de Pasamonte, an episode in which Don Quixote pronounces the Platonic—later Godwinian—doctrine that a prisoner should not be punished against his will” (Michael Cohen, *Murder Most Fair: The Appeal of Mystery Fiction* (Madison, NJ: Fairleigh Dickinson University Press, 2000), 177).
Richmond, a sympathetic rogue who finds employment as a Bow Street Runner after a misspent youth. The novel is episodic in nature, recounting a number of memorable cases investigated by Richmond, arguably creating a precedent for the literary vogue for featuring a recurring sleuth in a series of short stories. Edward Bulwer-Lytton’s *Pelham; or, The Adventures of a Gentleman* (1828) features the eponymous hero as an amateur detective figure who is compelled to act as investigator in order to prove the innocence of his friend Sir Reginald Glanville. The identity of the true murderer is kept from the reader until the final section of the novel, thus allowing the plot to build to a high level of intensity which anticipates the dramatic revelations in the conclusions of later detective novels. These early examples of detective novels contain numerous parallels to earlier eighteenth-century texts on detection, particularly the rogue-investigator figure of Jonathan Wild.

While the development of the literary detective figure was complicated and delayed by the concurrent cultural narrative of the detective as criminal, the roots of the detective figure are unquestionably found in eighteenth-century English literature. The rise of the detective figure in English literature is closely linked with the rise of rationalist scientific thought which flourished in England in the eighteenth century: in many ways, the detective figure is inherently a symbol of the Enlightenment, bringing light and clarity into circumstances of darkness, confusion, mystery, and crime.
Chapter 1: Deception and Analysis in the Early Development of the Literary Detective Figure

The true-life crime stories of Jonathan Wild and Elizabeth Canning serve as foundational texts in the history of detective fiction. These criminal cases from the early and mid-eighteenth century contain significant elements of investigation and analysis that would contribute to the later formation of the detective figure in English literature: Jonathan Wild prefigures the role of the roguish detective with dubious methodology who possesses ties to the criminal underworld, while the debate in print over the Elizabeth Canning case contributes to the growing understanding of physical evidence, concern over the veracity of eyewitness testimony, and the need for the development of competent investigative techniques.

Jonathan Wild (bap.1683-1725) was a criminal who achieved great fame in his lifetime and afterwards: Pat Rogers comments that he “was perhaps the greatest folk-villain in the English-speaking world during the eighteenth century. Not even George III, Lord North or Benedict Arnold achieved so widespread a notoriety.”¹ Wild began his career as a petty criminal, but used his intellect and underworld connections to transform himself into the “Thief Taker General of Great Britain and Ireland.” He ran a successful business, reuniting citizens with their stolen goods, for a fee, and collecting the lucrative rewards on thieves offered by the government. He was ultimately himself charged with theft, arrested, and executed in 1725.

Elizabeth Canning (1734-1773), an eighteen-year-old servant girl, became notorious in late January 1753, when she appeared at her home in a malnourished

and bedraggled condition after being missing for about a month. She claimed to have been abducted by two men and to have been held hostage, with very little to eat, by a gypsy woman named Mary Squires. Squires denied the story, claiming that she had never even met Canning. The case received a good deal of popular attention, with public opinion being sharply divided between the Canningites, who believed the young girl’s story, and the Egyptians, who sided with Mary Squires. This division was so prominent that it prompted one contemporary commentator to suggest that it wiped out all other political affiliations: “The Appellations Whig and Tory, Court and Country, have entirely subsided... and seem with us all to be merged into Canningite and Egyptian.”

These early examples of nascent detective stories are missing one key attribute which would characterize later iterations of the genre: namely, a reliable central detective figure. By the time that the detective novel reached its zenith in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, it had developed into an essentially optimistic genre. The formula of the detective novel was premised on a movement from chaos to order, from confusion to clarity. The figure of the detective himself generally acted as a chaperone, who guided the reader safely through a crime-ridden world towards a triumphant unveiling of the mystery achieved by the close of the novel. There was an assumption that the detective figure could be trusted. Exceptions such as Agatha Christie’s The Murder of Roger Ackroyd (1926), in which the novel was narrated by the character who was ultimately revealed to be the murderer, elicited poor reactions in readers: in a list of “Ten Commandments” for the detective

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fiction genre published a few years after *The Murder of Roger Ackroyd*, Ronald Knox pointedly proposed as the first rule that “the criminal must be someone mentioned in the early part of the story, but must not be anyone whose thoughts the reader has been allowed to follow.” By this stage in the history of detective fiction, while readers were not to expect the detective figure necessarily to be a saintly character, the integrity of the detective, insofar as the reader was concerned, was understood to be unimpeachable. As the detective was their guide through a crime-driven narrative, readers needed to be able to rely on his or her judgment, observations, and deductions in order to have a feeling of safety within the narrative.

The earliest examples of eighteenth-century detective fiction offered readers no such comforting central sleuth figure. In the case of Jonathan Wild, Wild himself was an untrustworthy figure, who duped London society into trusting him with their investigations into lost or stolen property while he simultaneously managed a complex network of thieves across the metropolis. In the case of Elizabeth Canning, there was no central guiding figure in the literary texts on the case: instead, readers were expected to act as literary investigators themselves, being encouraged by pamphlet writers on both sides of the debate to pore over evidence and to draw their own conclusions. There was no shortage of opinionated, partisan writers who were delighted to publish works highlighting the Canningite or Egyptian evidence, but there was no singular investigative figure in the case who could be trusted. Readers were expected, and in many cases overtly encouraged, to investigate for themselves.

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The literary treatments of Canning and Wild exemplify the unsettling world of early-eighteenth-century crime and the judicial system. As procedures for treating evidence and testimonies were still being developed, convincing rhetoric was as likely to succeed, regardless of its veracity. Ian Bell argues that Augustan literature on crime was lawless and chaotic, and that the lack of a literary detective figure in the period meant that crime literature was considerably more disquieting to the reader than in subsequent eras. He argues that later readers would feel protected by the presence of the detective, who would act as “an agent of consolation or security,” as “the detective becomes the reader’s personal custodian, guaranteeing safe passage and neutralizing the threat of even the most cunning criminals.”

In contrast:

Eighteenth-century commentators were describing a world they saw as replete with rogues and desperadoes of all kinds, a world without detectives, without even much of a police force, without reliable insurance companies or other mechanisms of personal protection, and with an inefficient and often flagrantly corrupt court and prison system. Texts on Jonathan Wild and Elizabeth Canning demonstrate the disordered world of eighteenth-century crime and prosecution. Wild was an active and successful participant in his contemporary, iniquitous justice system: indeed, his success as an investigator and restorer of lost property was entirely reliant on his impressive network of thieves. Canning’s celebrity status was predicated almost entirely on the fact that her testimony was so dubious.

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5 Bell, 9.
This chapter examines how the literary treatments of Wild and Canning contributed to the rise of the literary detective figure in English prose over the course of the eighteenth century. In the case of Wild, writers grappled with the contrast between his work as a thief-taker, ostensibly for the public good, and his corrupt connections to the criminal underworld. This dual nature of Wild, as detective and as criminal, would contribute to the literary anxiety around the role of investigative figures in the later literature of the long eighteenth century, creating an uneasy division between literary detectives and the public in whose interest they were expected to act. In the case of Elizabeth Canning, readers were themselves encouraged to act as detectives, weighing the veracity of the information presented to them and considering the limits of their ability to determine character in both the literary and the moral sense of the word.
Jonathan Wild (1683-1725)

Jonathan Wild occupies a critical role in the history of the detective figure in English literature. Wild simultaneously inhabited the worlds of law enforcement and criminality: this contradiction in his character would help to establish the duality of the English literary detective figure for the remainder of the long eighteenth century. Wild has the distinction of being referred to by name by Sherlock Holmes in Arthur Conan Doyle’s *The Valley of Fear* (1915). In conversation with Inspector MacDonald, Holmes inquires:

“Have you ever read of Jonathan Wild?”

“Well, the name has a familiar sound. Someone in a novel, was he not? I don’t take much stock of detectives in novels—chaps that do things and never let you see how they do them. That’s just inspiration: not business.”

“Jonathan Wild wasn’t a detective, and he wasn’t in a novel. He was a master criminal, and he lived last century—1750 or thereabouts.”

“Then he’s no use to me. I’m a practical man.”

“Mr. Mac, the most practical thing that you ever did in your life would be to shut yourself up for three months and read twelve hours a day at the annals of crime. Everything comes in circles—even Professor Moriarty. Jonathan Wild was the hidden force of the London criminals, to whom he sold his brains and his organization on a fifteen per cent commission. The old
wheel turns, and the same spoke comes up. It’s all been done before, and will be again…”

Conan Doyle’s overall summary of Wild’s activities is reasonably accurate: Wild was an extremely clever criminal who found loopholes in laws intended to punish thieves, and exploited the system for his own gain. He also had an extremely effective, sophisticated system of tracking and returning stolen goods to their rightful owners, for a price. In the quotation above, Conan Doyle introduces the contradiction between Wild as criminal and as detective: despite Holmes’s firm assertion that Wild “wasn’t a detective,” Wild may be considered one of the earliest examples of the professional detective as well as an early criminal mastermind.

To trace Wild’s roots as an early detective figure, one must examine contemporary accounts of his life and exploits. As a result of his notoriety, Wild was fictionalized after his death, most famously in John Gay’s The Beggar’s Opera (1728) and Henry Fielding’s Jonathan Wild (1743). Both of these texts use Wild as satirical fodder to mock the corruption of the government of the day: however, they do not offer particularly relevant material for the consideration of Wild as literary detective figure. In Fielding’s Jonathan Wild, Wild stands in as a satiric caricature of politician Robert Walpole: Fielding is more concerned with lampooning Walpole than providing an accurate perception of Wild as a thief-taker and detective figure. Similarly, Gay uses Peachum, the Wild-inspired character who manages a conglomerate of thieves, in The Beggar’s Opera primarily to mock Walpole and to

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deride the political scandal surrounding the South Sea Bubble. While the works of Gay and Fielding are rich examples of the literary afterlife of Jonathan Wild, neither text is of particular relevance to the depiction of Wild as an early detective figure.

For the purposes of this study, the most relevant depictions of Jonathan Wild as a literary investigator are found in popular chapbooks published around the time of his arrest, incarceration, and execution. Wild’s self-appointed role as “Thief-Taker General” initially earned him a great deal of respect from his countrymen, before the magnitude and scope of his own crimes was discovered. Even after his arrest, the public perception of Wild was mixed: accounts of his life, particularly those written and published before his execution, illuminate what contemporaries thought of his role as an early investigative figure in London. Wild, for all his flaws, provided a valuable service to the public through his restoration of stolen goods. After Wild had been arrested and charges of corruption had been laid against him, contemporary writers still reluctantly gave him credit for his success as a public defender and investigator, even while reporting on how he had simultaneously worked this system to his own advantage.

Thief-Taking in England: A Brief Overview

Jonathan Wild was arguably the most notorious thief-taker in English history, but he was not the first of his kind. The term “thief-taker” appears in the legal record as early as 1609, but governmental attention to “seeking the solutions of crime and the weaknesses of prosecution” blossomed exponentially following the Revolution of 1688, leading to an increase in the practice of thief-taking in the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries. In the reign of William and Mary, and later under Queen Anne, more bills related to criminal activity and the prosecution thereof were passed than in the previous hundred years. As there was not yet a paid, unified constabulary force in existence, the government chose to recruit a stable of freelance informants, who were offered financial recompense for the capture and conviction of criminals, particularly thieves: “citizens were exhorted and paid to transform themselves into agents of control.” As the practice of thief-taking became increasingly sophisticated in the early eighteenth century, thief-takers “emerged as policing entrepreneurs, manipulating legal procedures and knowledge, criminal connections, and the demand for private security and protection.” The regularization of the process of thief-taking represented a significant change in the landscape of policing in England in the eighteenth century.

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9 Beattie, Policing and Punishment, 231.
10 Beattie, Policing and Punishment, 231
The success of the thief-takers stemmed from their knowledge of the criminal underworld: as a result of these connections, they occupied a nebulous position in society. As Tim Wales notes, “several thief-takers had a background in, and all had connections with, criminal networks. Much of their trade lay in brokering the return of stolen goods to their owners, a trade which involved ambiguous relations with thieves.”

Despite their suspicious connections, thief-takers performed a necessary role in the detection and return of items unmatched by other models of law enforcement: “thief-takers filled a void, providing services that a public watch patrolling the streets did not.”

When Jonathan Wild embarked on his career as a thief-taker, he was entering an established, though dubiously-regarded, profession. It was Wild’s combination of astute public relations and organization which enabled him to become a briefly beloved and eventually infamous early English detective figure.

**Wild as Detective: Scientific Methods and Practises**

Jonathan Wild distinguished himself as a successful and valued private detective through his outward displays of respectability, which are emphasized in fictionalized accounts of his activities as a thief-taker and restorer of lost or stolen goods. He was represented in contemporary texts as an orderly and methodical

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14 Wales, 68.
detective figure. His methods appeared to be a product of Enlightenment regularity: he compiled copious notes based on his clients’ testimonies, and maintained an organized book, which included information on stolen items and their owners. He was highly regarded as a valuable private investigator, and his methods of detection were particularly prized since they seemed to yield fruitful results. For the average upper-class client who consulted him over a matter of theft, Wild would have played an appreciated role, as no police force yet existed which could be consulted on the matter of a lost purse, sword, or sedan chair. In one pamphlet, the writer notes that Wild:

…was now Master of his Trade, Poor and Rich flock’d to him: If any Thing was Lost, (Whether by Negligence in the Owner; or Vigilance and Dexterity in the Thief) away we went to Jonathan Wild. Nay, Advertisements were Publish’d directing the Finder of almost every Thing, to bring it to Jonathan Wild, who was eminently impower’d to take it, and give the Reward.

How infatuate were the People of this Nation all this while? Did they consider, that at the very time that they treated this Person with such Confidence, as if he had been appointed to the Trade? He had, perhaps, the very Goods in his keeping, waiting the Advertisement for the Reward; and that, perhaps, they had been Stolen with that very Intention?\(^\text{16}\)

This early representation of detective work in English literature was ultimately revealed to be pure artifice: Wild’s success as an investigator was derived, not from

\(^{16}\) The True and Genuine Account of the Life and Actions of the Late Jonathan Wild (London: John Applebee, 1725), 20.
his methodical, innovative methods, but from his control of the network of thieves who had stolen the items in the first place. As an early literary detective figure, the corrupt character of Wild stood in stark contrast to the unimpeachable hand of providence that had detected crimes and recovered stolen property in early modern texts.

Wild was regarded as a singularly successful private investigator who used systematic methods of record keeping and analysis to solve crimes. He was perceived as being “the first... to use ‘science’ in the art of detection,” which was “a quality much admired at the time.”

Although Wild’s success was eventually revealed to be attributable to his own criminal connections and activities, his performance as a scientific sleuth would influence later literary representations of the logical detective figure.

When a prospective client and Wild consulted over a matter of lost property, they met at his office located at the front of his residence. Wild successfully promoted his “Lost Property Office” as an official venue with an unshakeable air of authority about it. He established three “Lost Property Offices” during his career: the first in Cripplegate Parish near Grub Street, the next in St. Giles-in-the-Fields just off Drury Lane, and the third in the Old Bailey just off the Fleet. Each of these locations had the advantage of being “remarkable as a low-rent and undesirable district which was nevertheless crisscrossed daily by foot-traffic from more desirable neighborhoods.”

17 Howson, 115.
though it were officially connected to the law courts located in the Old Bailey, which had served as London’s central criminal court since 1673. The regular newspaper item that appeared, headed “From Jonathan Wild’s at the Old Bailey,” provided an air of reassuring legitimacy to Wild’s office.

After welcoming clients to his elegantly appointed office with a pot of tea, Wild would methodically question them regarding the loss of their property, paying particular attention to their description of the item and the circumstances and location of its disappearance.¹⁹ One writer reports that Wild:

…openly kept his Compting House, or Office, like a Man of Business, and had his Books to enter every thing in with the utmost Exactness and Regularity: When you first came to him to give an Account of any thing Lost, it was hinted to you, That you must first deposite a Crown, this was his Retaining fee; They you were ask’ed some needful Questions... as where you liv'd, where the Goods were Lost, whether out of your House, or out of your Pocket, or whether on the Highway, and the like; and your Answers to them all were Minuted down, as if in order to make a proper Search and Inquiry…²⁰

Wild recorded all of these pertinent details in his notebook, which was a fixture of his office and was an item associated with Wild himself—a 1725 engraving of Wild shows him clutching his notebook even while incarcerated in Newgate (Figure 1), which may have influenced a later eighteenth-century sketch of Wild calmly

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¹⁹ Howson, 74-76.
²⁰ The True and Genuine Account, 22.
consulting his notebook while the mob jeers at him en route to Tyburn (Figure 2).

Wild’s pretence of gathering information on behalf of his clients’ interests is

**Figure 1 - “The True Effegies of Jonathan Wild”**

Frontispiece to *The True and Genuine Account of the Life and Actions of Jonathan Wild* (1725)
Figure 2 - “Jonathan Wild pelted by the mob”

Reproduction courtesy of the British Museum, Department of Prints and Drawings
convincing: such questions would indeed be useful queries from a legitimate
detective figure. He exhibits an awareness of scientifically minded, procedural
knowledge-gathering, potentially informed by enlightened rationalist thought. Wild’s
performance of careful attention to administrative detail must have comforted his
clients by displaying his apparently professional, meticulous nature. His clients
would have been encouraged to perceive him as an official, quasi-judicial figure in
whom one could place a good deal of trust.

After his arrest, writers continued grudgingly to praise Wild’s organizational
methods: he was presented as an extremely capable and organized administrator,
even in the realm of lawlessness. According to pamphleteers, the criminal
underworld of London moved from chaos to order under Wild’s uniquely methodical
direction. Once he established himself as an authority figure of the underworld, he
was able manage thieves and other criminals with regularity and efficiency. A
pamphlet reported that Wild kept his “Rogues... industriously dispers’d throughout
the City and Suburbs; that different Hours and Stations should be observ’d among
them,”21 prefiguring the systematic detachments and stations of official police forces
that would later be developed. In fact, one of the pamphleteers describes groups of
Wild’s premiere employees as “Detachments of some of his cleverest Fellows.”22
Wild’s disguised agents anticipate the existence of undercover police:

There were another Sort of Gentry under his Command, whose Business it
was to loiter about the Streets in the Day-time… These Sort of People

21 An Authentick Narrative, 28-29.
sometimes go in Liveries, and sometimes dres’d like Ticket Porters with Silver Badges either upon their Coats, or about their Necks.\textsuperscript{23} Wild’s adroitness in organizing and disguising his network of associates continued to impress: even after his duplicity was unearthed, his talent for organization was still commented on. One writer bestowed limited praise upon Wild, calling him “a Person of no uncommon Parts” for his ability “to form and establish a Body of such lawless People into what we may call a Form of Government.”\textsuperscript{24} Another was impressed by his ability “to govern a Body of People who were Enemies to all Government; and to bring those under Obedience to him, who, at the Hazard of their Lives, acted in Disobedience to the Laws of the Land.”\textsuperscript{25} Though Wild’s team was largely composed of criminals, they were nonetheless an extremely effective organization. Writers treated Wild with reluctant respect, allowing that his success, though unethical, was remarkable.

The success of Wild’s Lost Property Office was predicated entirely on his network of criminal connections. He was careful to maintain a public distance between himself and his confederates, as demonstrated in his elaborate system for the restoration of lost property:

[He] acted with such extream Caution… that after he had bargain’d with the People, and they were come by his Appointment to pay the Money, and receive the [lost property], he led them into a Room contriv’d for that Purpose; where pushing back a small Pannel of the Wainscot, a Hand us’d to

\textsuperscript{23} H. D., 60.
\textsuperscript{24} \textit{The Life and Villainous Actions of That Notorious Offender, Jonathan Wild} (London: T. Catesby, 1725), 9.
\textsuperscript{25} H. D., vii.
appear with the [property] in it, and the Parties were to take them out of that Hand, and to put the Money into it… so that they could not say he had ever taken any of their Money, or receiv’d the stolen Goods…

Nevertheless, Wild’s success in recovering stolen property ensured that copious numbers of Londoners consulted him for his investigative services. As demonstrated in the pamphlet story below, Wild was able to determine the identity of a thief and restore property to its rightful owner as a result of his thorough knowledge of criminal activity in London. A gentlewoman from Hackney consulted the thief-taker, inspired by his public reputation for success, in an attempt to recover her stolen fabric:

A Lady, who came attended by a Foot-man and a Maid, took a Lodging in [the gentlewoman’s] House; the first day they had Possession of it, they broke open a Scrutore… which was full of Chince and Muslin, and very dexterously carried off the whole Cargoe; it was a great Loss to the poor Woman, who lamenting with her Neighbours, they advis’d her to go to Jonathan Wild, and offer a sum of Money to recover it… when she gave him an Account where she liv’d and what she had lost, he call’d to his Book keeper to search the Books, to know if any of their People had been lately out to take the Air at Hackney: The Fellow having examin’d answer’d immediately that Wapping Moll had been there and that Tawny Bess was her Maid and Harry Smart her Footman; Jonathan appear’d in a passion and curs’d them sufficiently, but appointed the Gentlewoman to come again in a

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26 H.D., 15.
little Time, when he procured the Things upon her paying the Money agreed for.\textsuperscript{27}

While Wild makes the pretence of being appalled by the criminal activity of his confederates, it is his thorough knowledge of their activities which enables him to restore the woman’s stolen property. Nonetheless, he is careful to preserve a prudent distance so that he cannot be accused of trafficking in stolen items.

Wild’s excellent public relations skills enabled him to create a respectable persona for himself. He presented himself socially in the guise of a prosperous citizen: fictionalized accounts of Wild emphasized his displays of financial and social success. Prior to his arrest, Wild was a fixture of London society: one pamphlet writer reported that “Thus \textit{Wild} went on successfully in Discoveries, &c. which drew such a vast Resort of People of all Ranks and Degrees to his House, that it was become a Question and Matter of Dispute in the Town, whether the Lord \textit{High Chancellor} or the \textit{Thief-Taker} had the largest \textit{Levee}.”\textsuperscript{28} One chapbook reports that Wild “made a considerable Figure in the World, having a Silver mounted Sword, and a Footman at his Heels,”\textsuperscript{29} while another recounts that “his [city] House was handsomely furnish’d, and set out with Plate, Pictures, &c… He kept a Country-House, dres’d well, and in Company affected an Air of Grandeur.”\textsuperscript{30} He promoted himself as a defender of public safety, through his activities as a thief-taker, and lived up to this reputation on a number of occasions, going so far as to break into the

\textsuperscript{27} \textit{English Rogue}, 10.  
\textsuperscript{28} \textit{An Authentick Narrative}, 12.  
\textsuperscript{29} \textit{An Authentick Narrative}, 7.  
\textsuperscript{30} H. D., 58.
house of a suspected murderer and arrest him at gunpoint. Wild’s overt displays of affluence and heroism strengthened his position in society, adding to his reputation as a respectable investigator.

Wild was able to use his public veneer of respectability to exert influence in the legal system. Indeed, his talent for public relations—or perhaps for bribing the proper officials—was so renowned that he was employed as an adviser by the Privy Council in 1720, who consulted him about the best way to reduce the growing number of highway robberies. Writers represented him as easily manipulating the legal system to the benefit of himself and his allies, and to the disadvantage of any of his enemies:

[He] was often called upon by the Court to look at the Prisoners, and give them Characters; which seemed to have great Weight at that time. And sometimes by ingenious Quirks, or by managing the Juries or Evidences, he has brought off some of his Favourites…

Wild’s ability to rig juries and manipulate the legal system meant that he gained the loyalty of criminals across the metropolis. As an early overlord of a complex network of organized crime, Wild benefited from the power he gained through his social respectability.

Wild grew in success as a thief-taker and restorer of lost goods from 1714 to 1724. His involvement in the arrest and prosecution of two notorious criminals, Jack Sheppard and Joseph “Blueskin” Blake, in the autumn of 1724 drew attention to his

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32 Howson, 125.
33 *The English Rogue Revived* (London: Dan Pratt, 1725), 12.
criminal connections and ultimately led to his downfall. He was arrested in 1725 on the charge of assisting a compatriot in escaping from a constable. Wild was held on a warrant of detainer based on a lengthy list of accusations which, amongst other charges, asserted that he “had form’d a Kind of Corporation of Thieves, of which he was the Head or Director,” had “divided the Town and Country into so many Districts, and appointed distinct Gangs for each, who regularly accounted with him for their Robberies,” and had concealed his criminal intent by carrying “a short Silver Staff, as a Badge of Authority from the Government” in order “to gain some Credit with the ignorant Multitude.”\(^{34}\) The arrest and prosecution of a celebrated public figure drew the attention and excitement of the public, resulting in a proliferation of popular writing on Wild during the period of his arrest, trial, and execution. Literary representations of Wild in these popular texts vary considerably.

The combination of Wild’s successful methods and his criminal activity meant that contemporary representations of the thief-taker after his arrest were inconsistent in tone and message. Writers attempted to reconcile Wild’s methodical work and bravery with his corruption, criminal connections, and deception. Some publications chose to emphasize Wild’s acts of public service, while others condemned him as an inexcusable felon. As Ian Ousby notes, Wild was a particularly difficult character for writers to develop into a pure hero or villain, as his detective and criminal activities were incontrovertibly intertwined:

In Wild’s case the detective was not merely corrupt or similar to the criminal in his methods: he was also a master criminal. The two professions… were

not merely alternative sources of income, but necessary complements. Wild’s Lost Property Office was the means by which he disposed of the goods stolen by hands under his supervision. Similarly… his work as a thief-taker consolidated and increased his power over the underworld.  

As discussed in the following section, writers were divided on how to represent this new, quasi-criminal, quasi-investigative character. This influential early example of an ethically capricious detective in English literature had a lingering influence on the development of the literary detective figure.

Conflicting Representations of Wild: Proto-Detective, Hero, or Villain

Following Wild’s arrest in 1725, a prolific number of chapbooks appeared, each purporting to offer the “true” or “genuine” account of his life and actions. These pamphlets were certainly influenced by the established genre of criminal lives, but also represented a departure from the usual parameters of this genre: in addition to being focused on the criminal actions and downfall of Wild, these texts also reported his success as an investigator. These texts therefore contain some of the earliest representations of the detective in English literature. Since the criminal narrative was a popular literary form in the eighteenth century, the large volume of chapbooks and pamphlets published on Wild’s life was not unexpected. Criminal lives and ballads were an established feature of the eighteenth-century English literary landscape, as discussed by Ian Bell, Lincoln Faller, Hal Gladfelder, Michael Harris, and Philip Ousby, 15-16.
Rawlings, amongst others. The body of texts about Wild’s life occupies a crucial place in the history of detective fiction, for it marks a bridge between the established genre centered on the life of the criminal and the emerging genre centered on the methods and exploits of the detective.

Early modern crime narratives glamorized the work and life of the criminal: the thrills of the narrative were largely gleaned from the criminal’s daring and brash deeds. The body of popular writing on Wild, while demonstrating continuity with earlier texts on criminals’ lives, also included a novel narrative strain: in the texts on Wild, the central character is acting as both a law-breaker and law-enforcer, with these two narrative threads being inextricably woven together. The popular biographies of Jonathan Wild, therefore, “represent a new type, the judicial criminal: a criminal whose crimes, and the complications that arise from them, are due to his taking advantage of inadequacies in the judicial system and, to a lesser extent, flaws in the social class system… Wild’s success as a criminal can be attributed to his understanding of the law rather than to his defiance of it.”

Wild operates as the key middle link in the gradual shift from criminal to detective at the centre of crime.

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narratives. The developing genre of detective fiction would eventually replace the criminal and criminal activity with the detective and the exposure of criminal activity. This new genre still had the potential to offer much of the excitement of the criminal narrative, with the exception that the protagonist was working on the official side of law enforcement. Wild’s dualistic nature as both criminal and law enforcer provided a bridge from the criminal narratives of the early modern period to the detective narratives of the long eighteenth century.

Popular contemporary narratives about Wild vary in their stance on his value to English society of the period. Some texts construct him simply as an unrepentant criminal, while others are more generous in their portrayal, noting his acts of public service alongside his less savoury actions. This inconsistent view of Wild would go on to influence the literary construction of the detective as both a hero and a villain in later texts. Wild is treated as an ambivalent hero by some pamphleteers, who just as eagerly recount his tales of daring and public-minded success as his criminal and nefarious exploits.

A number of pamphlets purporting to be true biographies of Wild were published, starting after his arrest and continuing after his execution. One of the earliest surviving pamphlets is entitled *An Authentick Narrative of the Life and Actions of Jonathan Wild, Citizen and Thief-Taker of London*: because of its prompt publication, it offers the most intriguing balance between Wild as criminal and Wild as law-enforcement official. This chapbook is one of the most sympathetic print treatments of Wild. This may be due in large part to the chronology of its publication: when the pamphlet was published, Wild was still in prison, awaiting
trial. The writer is careful to portray Wild in a balanced, even sympathetic manner, as he knew that if Wild were proven innocent of the charges laid against him, he would be a formidable enemy to a pamphlet writer who had slandered his reputation. While the writer does relate crimes reputedly committed by Wild, he is also careful to highlight instances of Wild's bravery and public-spiritedness. He pragmatically even admits that Wild’s “Office in Town” did do “some Good” in its success in restoring lost goods to Londoners, despite Wild’s corrupt methods. Indeed, the subtitle of the pamphlet terms Wild “Citizen and Thief-Taker of London.”

One of the stories of public service related in this pamphlet revolves around the murder of a Mrs. Knap in 1716. The writer reports:

Mrs. Knap, a Widow Gentlewoman, being barbarously murdered in the Jockey-Fields, near Grays-Inn, by four Foot-Pads, as she was coming from Sadler’s-Wells, in Company of her Son, and a large Reward offer’d for the Discovery of the Murderers, Jonathan Wild got Information that Isaac Ragg, one of the Villains, was secreted in a House near Lambeth Marsh. A Warrant was issued for the apprehending him, and Jonathan, assisted by the Peace Officers, invested the House; but the Ruffian declaring from within, that the first Person as entered should perish by his Pistol: The Posse were discouraged from proceeding any further, till Wild resolutely, with Pistol in Hand, burst open the Door, received Ragg’s Fire, return’d it, and then secured him and brought him to Newgate… if all his other Practices had been of this

38 An Authentick Narrative, 18.
kind, Mr. Wild had been in better Credit and Circumstances than he is at present.\textsuperscript{39}

Wild’s bravery is notable: he chooses to enter the residence of a known violent criminal by force at considerable risk to himself. Wild is the clear leader in the situation, being assisted by the official peace officers (presumably members of the night watch) rather than assisting them. The writer of the pamphlet reports another similar instance of Wild’s bravery, in which Wild arrested an armed criminal “who drew his Pistols” but “had not an Opportunity to cock them” as “the Thief-Taker held him fast by the Chin, with his Teeth, till he dropp’d his Fire Arms, surrender’d, and was brought to Newgate.”\textsuperscript{40}

Another contemporary pamphlet, \textit{The True and Genuine Account of the Late Jonathan Wild}, offers a less sympathetic treatment than \textit{An Authentic Narrative}, but stops short of portraying Wild as a pure villain. This pamphlet was published by John Applebee, known as “the leading publisher of criminal lives in the early eighteenth century,”\textsuperscript{41} but the authorship of the pamphlet is not noted in the publication.\textsuperscript{42} According to \textit{The True and Genuine Account}, Wild presents himself as a rogue with a strong sense of honour who was motivated to locate and return lost or

\textsuperscript{39} \textit{An Authentick Narrative}, 8-9.
\textsuperscript{40} \textit{An Authentick Narrative}, 15.
\textsuperscript{41} Gladfelder, \textit{Criminality and Narrative}, 142.
\textsuperscript{42} This text has been tentatively ascribed to the prolific pamphleteer Daniel Defoe, an attribution debated by scholars. Defoe biographer Maximillian Novak has pointed to the “obvious signs of Defoe’s unique style” within the pamphlet and deems him “certainly responsible for it” (\textit{Daniel Defoe, Master of Fictions: His Life and Ideas} (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), 641), while Defoe bibliographers P. N. Furbank and W. R. Owens concluded that “though it would not be absurd to attribute this to Defoe, there hardly seems sufficient grounds for doing so” (\textit{Defoe De-Attributions: A Critique of J. R. Moore’s ‘Checklist’} (London: Hambledon, 1994), 139).
stolen property on behalf of the public: “he was never backward to own that it was his early Practice, and boasted of it as doing a piece of Service which none but himself could manage, and that he thereby assisted honest People in the recovery of their own.”

The central theme of this chapbook is the dichotomy between the useful service that Wild provided to the public and his own private, lucrative schemes of lawlessness. The writer comments on the necessity of Wild’s having connections to the criminal underworld in order for him to succeed in his public service of the restoration of lost and stolen property:

…he had two very clear Pretences for what he did... 1. The Publick Good, in taking and apprehending the most open and notorious Criminals; and, 2. The procuring and restoring the Goods again to the right Owners... It was allowed, that neither of these could be done effectually… but by an avowed Intimacy and Acquaintance among the Gangs and Societies of Thieves of every sort; and it was very hard to Imagine, that such an Intimacy could be maintain’d without being really a Party to their Management.

According to this pamphlet, as well as others, Wild was a master of public relations who feigned continued innocence and presented himself as a disinterested public servant.

In *The True and Genuine Account*, the pamphleteer dramatizes Wild’s interview techniques by presenting a conversation in dramatic form between him and an unnamed woman who has lost her watch. This marks the first time in the

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43 *The True and Genuine Account*, 9-10.
44 *The True and Genuine Account*, 15.
pamphlet that we “hear” Wild’s voice, while the narrator also adds descriptive details such as Wild’s appearing “in his Callimancoe Night-gown” or greeting a client “with a pleasant Look” in order to flesh out his literary character.\textsuperscript{46} Wild is presented as formal, polite, and seemingly quite official. The anonymous female client is characterized as pleasant, kind-hearted, and trusting: the characterization of this sympathetic client results in making Wild’s trickery seem worse.

The English public reacted with a vicious backlash against Wild after his duplicity was eventually revealed. While the crowds were often sympathetic to condemned criminals en route to the gallows, the mob was furious with Wild.\textsuperscript{47} In \textit{The True and Genuine Account}, the writer reports:

\begin{quote}
The rudeness of the Mob to him, both at his first going into the Cart, and all the way from thence to the Place of Execution, is not to be expres’d, and shews how notorious his Life had been, and what Impression his known Villanies had made on the Minds of the People; for, contrary to the general Behaviour of the Street in such Cases, instead of compassionate Expressions, and a general Cast of Pity, which ordinarily sits on the Countenances of the People, when the see the miserable Objects of Justice go to their Execution; here was nothing to be heard but the Cursings and Execrations, abhorring the Crimes and the very Name of the Man, throwing Stones and Dirt at him all the way, and even at the Place of Execution…\textsuperscript{48}
\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{46} \textit{The True and Genuine Account}, 27.
\textsuperscript{47} Howson, 272-276.
\textsuperscript{48} \textit{The True and Genuine Account}, 39.
Wild’s transformation from cherished public detective figure to fallen criminal mastermind elicited fear and anger from the crowd. Wild was considerably more dangerous than any regular criminal, however violent. His most serious crime was that of duplicitousness: his doubled identity as criminal and detective betrayed the trust that the English public had placed in his office as a public service. The first detective figure in English literature was a contradictory character with competing loyalties who ultimately could not be trusted.

As Malcolm Gaskill has argued, the nascent professionalization of police work in the long eighteenth century led to a gradual secularization of the process of criminal investigation:

New procedures of policing and prosecution from the later seventeenth century onwards gradually interposed man between God and [the criminal], and raised public confidence that the fate of such criminals could be determined without direct providential intervention.49

The fictional representation of Wild as detective complicated this new move towards a secularization of criminal investigation in literature. Once Wild’s corruption had been revealed, the populace had an understandable fear of and discomfort with later detective figures. Wild had achieved popularity partially through the positive fictionalized accounts of his detective work, but his popularity shifted swiftly to notoriety once the true source of his own seeming omniscience in the detection of crime was revealed. While divine providence as investigator would be expected to

possess omniscience, human detectives who seemed to have too much knowledge were henceforth treated with suspicion. Readers were left to wonder if other detectives had, like Wild, gained this knowledge through their own criminal background or connections.
Elizabeth Canning (1734-1773)

The 1753 Elizabeth Canning case was a real-life crime story which captivated English readers. While Canning, unlike Jonathan Wild, did not herself prefigure the literary detective figure, the collective body of narratives inspired by this controversy made a significant contribution to the development of the literary detective figure.

On New Year’s Day 1753, a young maidservant named Elizabeth Canning had been granted a day off to spend with her family. After eating dinner with her aunt and uncle at Saltpeter Bank, she headed back to her employer’s home in Aldermanbury in the evening. Her aunt and uncle accompanied her part of the way home, and parted company with her at Houndsditch, assuming that the short remainder of her journey would be safe. As Canning continued her journey home over Moorfields by Bedlam wall, she claimed to have been accosted by two men who stole her money, gown, apron, and hat. She said that they hit her, causing her to go into a convulsive fit, and carried her off to an unknown house, later established as the home of Susannah Wells. At the house of “Mother” Wells, Canning claimed that a gypsy woman named Mary Squires first offered her fine clothes if she would become a prostitute; then, when Canning refused, Squires stripped her of her stays and confined her to a small room with only a jug of water and a quarter loaf of bread for sustenance. According to Canning, she survived four weeks in captivity in this room, finally escaping out of a small window on January 29. She returned to her

51 Moore, Appearance of Truth, 27.
52 Moore, Appearance of Truth, 29, 33.
53 Moore, Appearance of Truth, 33-34, 41.
mother’s home in a weakened and emaciated state, with skin and nails blackened from exposure.\textsuperscript{54} Canning’s family and friends acted as her champions, bringing the case to trial and charging Mary Squires with assault and theft and Susannah Wells as an accessory.\textsuperscript{55} The two women were found guilty, with Wells sentenced to branding and Squires sentenced to be hanged.\textsuperscript{56} Sir Crisp Gascoyne, Lord Mayor of London, was unsatisfied with the verdict, and began his own investigation, uncovering inconsistencies and changes in witness testimony.\textsuperscript{57} He brought Canning to trial for perjury, where she was found guilty and sentenced to transportation to the American colonies.\textsuperscript{58} The situation immediately captured the attention of contemporary readers, who betrayed an insatiable taste for texts which purported to offer the “true” history of the circumstances: the British Library’s English Short Title Catalogue (ESTC) contains ninety-six publications devoted to Canning published between 1753 and 1755. Even with a very conservative print-run estimate of two hundred copies per publication,\textsuperscript{59} this would amount to approximately 19,200 physical copies of publications on the event circulating during the period.

The writers and the readers of these chapbooks, pamphlets, and other ephemeral literature on the Elizabeth Canning controversy acted as literary detectives who sifted through, presented, and analyzed evidence. Pamphlets and chapbooks on the case laid out an enlightened protocol for the investigation of crimes after the fact:

\textsuperscript{54} Moore, \textit{Appearance of Truth}, 46, 14.  
\textsuperscript{55} Moore, \textit{Appearance of Truth}, 50, 73.  
\textsuperscript{56} Moore, \textit{Appearance of Truth}, 77.  
\textsuperscript{57} Moore, \textit{Appearance of Truth}, 87-91.  
\textsuperscript{58} Moore, \textit{Appearance of Truth}, 163.  
\textsuperscript{59} Padhraig Higgins, \textit{A Nation of Politicians} (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 2010),48.
namely, a reliance on rationalist thought, the use and limits of eyewitness testimony, and the problem of determining character from outward actions and appearances. Those who created and consumed the conflicting narratives on the Canning controversy were expected to act as intellectual armchair detectives, weighing the evidence and using their literary investigative abilities to make their own decisions: as Kristina Straub notes, “the Canning case was a whodunit for London’s readers.”

Texts on both sides of the dispute placed strong emphasis on the collection and interpretation of physical evidence. The central position of physical evidence in these narratives stems from increasingly sophisticated perspectives on scientific investigation. The attempt to place multiple writers and readers in the position of detective in order to determine the truth of the situation was ultimately unsuccessful: public opinion on the issue became so hotly contested and splintered that Londoners divided themselves into camps of “Canningites” (those who supported the claims of Elizabeth Canning) and “Egyptians” (those who supported the claims of Mary Squires).

The lack of a definitive conclusion to the case contributed to the innovation of a single detective figure in literary narratives, who could act as the readers’ unified surrogate in fictionalized detective narratives.

This section will examine how the texts on Elizabeth Canning reveal a newly emerging cultural narrative of the primacy of evidence. It will then consider the multiple investigative figures involved in the textual conversation about Canning’s guilt or innocence, and demonstrate how the proliferation of perspectives in the

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61 Moore, *Appearance of Truth*, 64.
matter ultimately led to a textual overload of evidence and interpretation. This early attempt at literary depictions of detective work without the guiding, clarifying intervention of providence was unsuccessful at solving the mystery and was ultimately frustrating to readers who searched for a definitive answer concerning Canning’s guilt or innocence. Readers’ frustration at the lack of a concrete answer would eventually be satisfied by the innovative figure of the detective, who could enact the role of investigating providence. While there was a considerable delay until a fully formed detective figure could completely and successfully occupy the providential role, the body of texts surrounding this significant 1753 criminal case was influential in demonstrating the narrative gap which needed to be filled by the character of the detective.

**The Emerging Literary and Cultural Significance of Evidence**

The Canning case occurred as the scientific approach to criminal investigation was changing and developing. Readers and critics of the controversy were inheritors of the logic of the scientific revolution of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, but those scientific methods had not yet been successfully applied to the investigation of criminal cases. The earliest recorded examples of the application of forensic techniques in criminal investigations did not occur until considerably later in the eighteenth century. Nonetheless, the scientific intellectual milieu of the period meant that readers and analysts of a criminal case were primed to apply the tenets of logic and scientific proof to the evidence at hand to reach a definitive conclusion. There was a strong focus on physical evidence in the material
printed about Canning. Contemporaries writing on both sides of the Canning controversy emphasized the centrality of evidence to the case: one writer regarded it as no less than “an enquiry into the nature of moral evidence, the axis upon which all human affairs turn,”62 while another argued “that it is by the testimony of evidence alone that the truth of any fact can be absolutely determined.”63 Modern critics have expressed support for considering the story of Elizabeth Canning as a watershed moment for the use of evidence in English criminal cases. Judith Moore comments that Canning’s trial was “one in which evidence, and particularly medical evidence, must be crucial,”64 while Jack Lynch cites it as an early example of the developing “need for the best possible circumstantial evidence, along with the ways in which new conceptions of circumstantial evidence combined with the language of aleatory mathematical probability to make it possible to balance likelihoods.”65 Barbara Benedict reports that “the opposing versions of Canning’s conduct and the contradictory evidence tested both competing definitions of human nature—physical, moral, sexual, and social—and competing applications of logic,” noting that “adherents of both sides enlisted ‘Reason’ to prove their arguments.”66 Just as Linnaeus was bringing order to the chaotic natural world through his methodical

63 Daniel Cox, An Appeal to the Public, in Behalf of Elizabeth Canning (London: W. Meadows, 1753), 9.
65 Lynch, 70.
application of a scientific classification system in the first half of the eighteenth century, so too did investigators aim to bring order to the chaotic, contradictory evidence and testimony provided by the alleged victim and her accused.

The testimonies of the two central parties in the dispute, Elizabeth Canning and Mary Squires, were so diametrically opposed as to render both testimonies essentially useless in the analysis of the veracity of the case. Instead, commentators focused on the tangible data that was available to them. They evaluated with great precision evidence such as the dimensions of the room, the exact amount of food and water consumed by Canning over the course of a month, the height of the window from which she reputedly escaped, and the distance she travelled between the residence of Mary Squires and the home of the Canning family after her escape. The precise colour of her skin after her reappearance was debated, as was the fluctuation of her weight. A contemporary etching (Figure 3) displays a well-engineered diagram of the room with details relevant to the investigation painstakingly noted. Elizabeth’s own body was subjected to invasive scrutiny in the texts, which variously detailed the state of her bowels and menses. The scrupulousness of evidence presented in the proliferation of texts on Canning was remarkable, as Malvin Zirker notes:

In writing about Canning one is in fact faced with a nearly overwhelming abundance of information. Her contemporaries pursued every detail connected with her story with a remarkable avidity and recorded their

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67 Moore, Appearance of Truth, 117.
69 Cox, 19.
Figure 3 - “A Plan of Susanna Wells’s House”

Reproduction courtesy of the British Museum, Department of Prints and Drawings
information with an equally remarkable scrupulosity. We know more than we want to about the cleanliness of Elizabeth’s shift on her return home, the workings of her bowels, the number of bread crusts that sustained her while she was purportedly held prisoner for twenty-seven days in the house of ill fame at Enfield Wash.\textsuperscript{70}

The attention to physical evidence displayed in this body of texts made a substantial contribution to the eventual development of logic-driven narratives which featured a central detective figure. As providential forms of investigation were displaced in literary narratives, the gathering and interpretation of physical evidence began to gain increasing importance.

The most significant detail which received considerable attention in the collection of texts on Canning was that of her physical body: specifically, whether she could have survived, as she claimed, for twenty-seven days on merely a single pitcher of water and large loaf of bread. The physician James Dodd, who had the authority of a medical background to support his claim, declared in his chapbook that “I would not infer that a Person might thrive upon such a Pittance, or even retain the Flesh they had, upon such Dieting; but that Life might be preserved thereby is not to be doubted, especially when all Things are considered.”\textsuperscript{71} He provides a multi-page analysis and calculation of how Canning might have survived on so little, as well as a lengthy list of precedents in which other people had survived on less. Dodd


\textsuperscript{71} James Dodd, \textit{A Physical Account of the Case of Elizabeth Canning} (London: J. Bouquet, 1753), 14.
triumphantly concludes his thorough discussion with an assumption that his scientific analysis of the facts of the case has convinced his readers: “When all the above is consider’d, I doubt not but many of my Readers will say with me, it is not only within the Bounds of Possibility, but Probability and Reason, that she could subsist and endure Life on that Quantity of Bread and Water she relates she did.”

Through his writing, Dodd is acting in the role of a scientific investigator in pursuit of the truth, and expects his readers to accompany him through his exhaustive forensic analysis of Canning’s claims. Despite the confidence that Dodd expresses in his analysis, those opposed to Canning did not find his text compelling: the anonymous author of Canning’s Magazine, for example, disdainfully dissects Dodd’s various claims to Canning’s innocence, and ultimately dismisses Dodd’s text as “very trifling, in Vindication of the Girl.” Dodd’s narrative of scientific analysis as trump card is ultimately unsuccessful as a rhetorical device in attempting to offer a definitive answer to the mystery of Canning’s claims.

Another physical detail which received attention in writings on Canning, with potentially scandalous ramifications, was her state of virginity. Her opponents suggested that she had deliberately disappeared in order to hide a pregnancy and delivery or abortion:

There are such distempers as lyings-in and miscarriages, to which young servant-maids of eighteen are very much subject; distempers that will hold them as long and reduce them as low as has been related of E. Canning, especially if attended and nursed in the manner we may easily have supposed

72 Dodd, 31-32.
her to have been. It may not be amiss to hint, that thirteen shillings and six-pence, with the sale of a gown and pair of stays, is hardly more than sufficient to defray the expences of such an operation; even altho’ no part of it was expended in a christening, a wet nurse, or a coffin.  

Her supporters offered evidentiary rebuttals to accusations against Canning’s virtue. Another medical writer, Daniel Cox, arranged for Canning to be examined by a midwife, Frances Oakes, in order to determine if there was any truth to the assertion “that Elizabeth Canning had retired to lie-in.” Oakes first examines Canning “by the several usual methods… of examination,” and reports to Cox that it was “her positive judgment and opinion, that Elizabeth Canning has never had a child.” Cox himself performs an examination of Canning’s “breast and belly, which with much reluctance the girl submitted to” and also concludes that Canning had never been pregnant or delivered a child. Cox closes his text with an appeal to the use of physical evidence above pure ratiocination to prove the truth of the case in a definitive manner:

…the business I professed to undertake in this Essay, was to produce Evidence of matters of fact…since all facts cease to be improbable, when prov’d to be true, and their truth is not to be evinc’d by reasoning, but by evidence. It appears to me, that it has been the want of considering Canning’s story in this light that has created the embarrassments the public seem to have been under, in judging the facts of this story. People have been endeavouring

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74 Ramsay, 20.
75 Cox, 23.
76 Cox, 23.
77 Cox, 23.
to shew, that a fact cannot be true, because of some difficulties attending the relation, when they should be searching for evidence whether or not it is true.\textsuperscript{78}

Cox appeals to the reader to focus on verifiable physical evidence, rather than relying on detached ratiocination which assesses only the probability of a situation. This perspective would prove to be of vital importance to the development of the detective narrative: few solutions to fictional mysteries are likely or probable, but all are ultimately proven to be true through the use of physical evidence. Cox’s text was ultimately unconvincing to Canning’s opponents, however, as they questioned his ability medically to assess Canning’s body in an accurate fashion: “there may be many, who will not think themselves sufficiently authorised to pin their Faith upon the positive Opinion of an old Woman, however experienced, nor much more upon the uncertain Belief of a Gentleman whose Course of Practise does not often lead him into Enquiries of this Nature.”\textsuperscript{79}

This game of literary debate between opposing pamphleteers was ultimately inconclusive. While there was a heated argument over the interpretation and significance of various pieces of evidence, neither side achieved a clear triumph in its version of events. As Barbara Benedict states, the dispute “vitiated... approved methods of evidence,” since the physical evidence of the case was interpreted in contradictory manners and could be used to support either Canning’s or Squires’s version of events.\textsuperscript{80} The multiplicity of interpretations and biased readings led to an

\textsuperscript{78} Cox, 48-49.
\textsuperscript{79} Genuine and Impartial Memoirs, 119.
\textsuperscript{80} Benedict, 166.
impasse. The literary experiment in evidentiary arguments, motivated by the Canning case, was not a resounding success.

**Towards a Methodology of Detection**

The controversy received a substantial amount of popular attention: Judith Moore notes that “publications with the name of Canning somewhere in the title seem to have met a fairly indiscriminate demand,” and she remarks on the “rapidity with which one title succeeded over another, never priced at more than a shilling and usually offered for six pence or less.”\(^{81}\) The demand for information, and consequently more pamphlets, on Canning was virtually insatiable. Eager readers devoured new information and analysis of the case: they yearned to discover more details, whether in favour of Canning or against her.

Readers acted as self-appointed amateur detectives, combing periodicals and pamphlets for facts and clues, and piecing together their own conclusions on the matter. Pamphlets on the topic encouraged readers to enact the role of the detective themselves. Some pamphleteers even went so far as to urge the cultivation of detective abilities as the civic duty of English citizens: Allan Ramsay wrote that “it extremely behoveth every man who may be called upon to sit in judgement, that is every Englishman, to make himself well acquainted with the nature of evidence.”\(^{82}\) The significance of the debate had far-reaching consequences for the representation of crime, investigation, and justice in English literature. The chapbooks and other forms of ephemeral literature published about Canning contributed to the

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\(^{81}\) Moore, *Appearance of Truth*, 176.  
\(^{82}\) Ramsay, 53.
development of a literary culture that was beginning to rely on new forms of evidence and investigatory knowledge. The new literary form valued not solely the outcome but also the process of weighing the evidence gathered by the detective figures. This move was a significant shift from earlier narratives of providential discovery of crime: for the first time, human investigators were taking tangible steps to attempt to solve a mysterious crime and discover the truth through interpretation of evidence. Jack Lynch argues for the significance of the growing narrative emphasis placed on evidence, noting that the development of detective fiction “would not have been possible without the epistemological shifts that took place in eighteenth-century British theories of evidence,” particularly circumstantial evidence. The detective novel, the plot of which is generally constructed out of careful trails of physical evidence, is indebted to this watershed case which emphasized the role of physical evidence and analysis in the minds of the English reading public of the mid-eighteenth century.

The numerous pamphlets published on the subject were concerned with one central mystery: was Canning telling the truth or not? Different authors used facts to the advantage of one side or the other, with varying degrees of scrupulosity in their approaches to the logical application of evidence. Barbara Benedict notes that “the opposing versions of Canning’s conduct and the contradictory evidence tested both competing definitions of human nature—physical, moral, sexual, and social—and competing applications of logic. Adherents of both sides enlisted ‘Reason’ to prove

Amongst these pamphleteers championing themselves as logical and reasonable, two landmark pamphlets stand out for their contributions to the development of a methodology in the analysis of evidence in the Canning case. The first, *The Unfortunate Maid Exemplified, in the Story of Elizabeth Canning Vindicated from every Mean Aspersion Thrown Upon It* (1754), is notable for its measured, methodical use of reason to sort through the conflicting issues at hand. The second, James Dodd’s aforementioned *A Physical Account of the Case of Elizabeth Canning, with an Enquiry into the Probability of her Subsisting in the Manner therein affected, and her Ability for Escape after her suppos’d Ill Usage* (1753), is exceptional in its scientific application of medical knowledge to the analysis of Canning’s survival and escape.

*The Unfortunate Maid Exemplified* was published in August 1754, when the flurry of debate in print on the subject of Canning’s claims was already ongoing. The anonymous author, identified simply on the title page as “An Impartial Hand,” introduces seven objections that had been raised in the print debate over Canning’s innocence, ranging from the veracity of Squires’s alibi to Canning’s lack of knowledge of her supposed prison. The author here acts as a methodical detective, answering each objection individually, and ultimately takes pride in having “solved these seven mighty Objections, which successively found a Place in several publick Papers.”

Barbara Benedict describes this pamphlet as serving as a “catechism

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84 Benedict, 167.
85 *The Unfortunate Maid Exemplified, in the Story of Elizabeth Canning Vindicated from every Mean Aspersion Thrown Upon It* (London: C. Corbett, 1754), 11.
86 *The Unfortunate Maid*, 14.
showing readers how to solve dubious cases by detecting ‘Prejudice, Partiality and Ignorance.’”

*The Unfortunate Maid* employs a question and answer format, responding to queries posed by earlier pamphlets. In addition to specific questions about the dispute over Canning’s claims, the queries and answers also include philosophical questions about the nature of truth and the best methods of its detection:

**Query 1.** “When any Truth lies for some time concealed, through the Cunning and Subtilty of contaminated Minds, what are the most orthodox Methods to be taken in such a Case...?”

**Answer.** The best Method is to weigh the Case in a sincere Manner, and to admit every Reason that is given on both Sides, in order to compare them together, and rule ourselves accordingly.”

**Q. 2.** “When in any Transaction which concerns the Publick, or Individuals, Truth cannot, at that Juncture, be cleared up... what Means are to be used, in order to come as nigh this salutary Point, as the Circumstance of Things will admit of?”

**A.** “By comparing the Points and admitting what our Reason, guided by Sincerity, suggests to us in favour of both Sides concerned in an Affair, and by weighing these Suggestions, we come as nigh the Point as the Circumstance admits of.”

The author relies heavily on the idea of reason above all else, as a metaphorical beacon shining in the darkness to cut through deliberate deception and uncertainty.

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87 Benedict, 167.
Sincerity and human goodness are also used to temper the effects of cold reason: the
author mentions elsewhere that he “keep[s] strict to the Rules of Common-sense,
when guided by Religion and Virtue.”

In *The Unfortunate Maid*, clues are presented which relate to Canning’s
family background, character and appearance:

Her Family has always been famed for Honesty and Virtue, and all the
worthy Persons, with whom she had lived, have expressed the highest
Concern for her while absent, and the tenderest Regard when returned; her
Person is the Picture of Modesty, her Appearance that of Innocence, and her
Countenance that of Simplicity…

The author as investigator is limited in his role as a detective because he lacks
providential, omniscient knowledge. Since he cannot view the heart or mind of
Canning or Squires, the author focuses on that which can be easily seen or verified.
One problem with an externally focused investigative method is that a guilty suspect
may simply take additional pains to counterfeit the appearance of innocence.

In *A Physical Account of the Case of Elizabeth Canning*, the surgeon James
Dodd chooses to apply his medical background to evaluate the veracity of Canning’s
claims. Using the epigraph “Credideris nihil temere” (“you should believe nothing
rashly”) drawn from Cato, Dodd attempts to position himself as a detached
observer. In his introduction, he comments on the “very strange and almost
incredible Manner” of Canning’s version of her survival escape and briefly relates

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89 *The Unfortunate Maid*, 18.
90 *The Unfortunate Maid*, 4.
91 Lynch, 95.
the cultural debate over the case. His own biases swiftly become apparent as he reviews the pamphlet war: he refers to the pro-Canning Henry Fielding as being filled “with great Reason.” Fielding, who had been involved in the matter in his capacity as a magistrate, concluded his pamphlet by commenting on the fantastical nature of the situation, writing, “Such is the Narrative of Elizabeth Canning, and a very extraordinary Narrative it is, consisting of many strange Particulars, resembling rather a wild dream than a real Fact.” Despite the improbable nature of Canning’s story, Fielding was a strong champion of the pro-Canning side of the case. Hal Gladfelder notes that Fielding’s publication on Canning can be seen as an early forerunner of detective fiction: “in his Elizabeth Canning pamphlet [Fielding] articulates the fragmentary and contradictory material of criminal inquiry into a detective fiction, a narrative of suspense.” Fielding’s attempt to represent Canning’s claims in a logical, coherent manner in his pamphlet was apparently convincing for Dodd. After reading A Clear State of the Case of Elizabeth Canning, Dodd was motivated by “an Intention of considering what [Fielding] hath left to be done,” and chose to address four remaining points of contention in his pamphlet on the case:

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92 Dodd, 7.
93 Dodd, 7.
96 Dodd, 8.
“That it is impossible two Men could carry a Girl eleven Miles... and that she could be the greatest Part of that Time insensible...”

“To give Reasons why she died not for want of Food, but was subsisted by so small a Quantity...”

“To assign natural Reasons for her Ability to escape and return home...”

“To consider the Effects such Fasting is said to have upon this Girl, and enquire whether they could be the Effects of any other Cause.”

To answer these concerns, Dodd draws upon a wide body of medical and historical texts. Precedent is central to Dodd’s arguments: throughout the text, he cites voluminous previous examples of extreme cases. He is very specific in the examples he employs: rather than simply making a general observation that epileptic fits can leave patients unconscious for long periods of time, for example, he reports that he has “before [him] an Instance of one Mrs. Susan Floide, a Patient of Sir Charles Scarborough, Dr. Bathurst, and Dr. Collins. She was seized with an universal Convulsion, that she remained eleven Hours without any Sense, her Body and Limbs inflexible.”

His citation of patients and doctors by name has the effect of presenting the text as authoritative to his readers, suggesting that they could apply to the people in question for verification of his claims. Dodd employs a rhetoric of scientific knowledge and intellectual superiority in order to claim authority as a knowledgeable investigator.

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97 Dodd, 10.
98 Dodd, 13.
99 Dodd, 32.
100 Dodd, 37.
101 Dodd, 13.
The Problem of Multiple Investigators: Public Debate and Unresolved Mystery

In most popular crime narratives of the eighteenth century, the narrative interest of the story centred on the figure of the criminal. What made the matter of Elizabeth Canning so uniquely appealing and controversial was that society could not come to a consensus about who was the criminal and who was the victim. Elizabeth Canning was a young, innocent-seeming girl with no obvious malice towards Mary Squires. As Jack Lynch notes,

We are the heirs of the eighteenth century’s discovery of the importance of motive. It continues to inform our courtroom practice, where prosecution attorneys strive to reveal the defendant's motive. It is likewise all over our popular literature—motive is an absolute necessity in our crime fiction and detective stories... The prospect that someone might commit a crime—whether literal or figurative—for no motive at all was, and is, worrisome.¹⁰²

The texts on both sides of the debate labored to determine a motive for either party, and attempted to use evidence to support their hypothesized views. For the pro-Canning camp, this meant that they needed to construct the literary character of Elizabeth Canning as that of innocent, injured virtue.

The literary treatment of the Elizabeth Canning case may have been influenced by earlier novelistic treatments of servant girls, most notably Samuel Richardson’s *Pamela, or Virtue Rewarded* (1740).¹⁰³ In Richardson’s novel, the

¹⁰² Lynch, 70, 169.
¹⁰³ See: Eve Tavor Bannet, “Runaways: Elizabeth Canning, Pamela and Moll Flanders in America,” *Transatlantic Stories and the History of Reading, 1720-1810*
testimony and sexual integrity of the titular heroine, Pamela Andrews, are questioned throughout the narrative: her good character ultimately triumphs, and she is rewarded with an advantageous marriage. One contemporary writer even termed Elizabeth Canning “a realized Pamela.”\(^{104}\) Ironically, Henry Fielding, who had published two of the most scathing satires of Pamela—*Shamela* (1741) and *Joseph Andrews* (1742)—was one of Elizabeth Canning’s strongest champions. For the Canningites who might choose to read the story of Canning’s purported treatment as a novel, Mary Squires would be an easy avatar for Mrs. Jewkes, particularly with the implications of her acting as a procuress for Mr. B against the pure Pamela-like heroine. Conversely, the Egyptians reading the case as a novel would be more likely to cast Elizabeth in the role of Shamela, a conniving, lying young woman laying false claim to her “vartue” as power.

Elizabeth Canning’s story inspired a twentieth-century detective novel. Elizabeth Mackintosh (1896-1952), writing under her pseudonym of Josephine Tey, published *The Franchise Affair* in 1948, which was adapted into a film in 1951. In her retelling of the story, Tey is firmly on the side of the Egyptians. In the novel, a young woman named Betty Kane claims to have been abducted, physically abused, starved, and kept in an attic by two single women. Like Canning, Kane is able to

\(^{104}\) *Genuine and Impartial Memoirs*, 5.
describe the attic in great detail, lending credence to her claim. The evidence of the case is based upon the testimony of one party against the other, with public sympathy being largely swayed by the shocking tale portrayed by the young Kane. In the end, it is revealed that Kane crafted the tale to conceal her affair with an older man in Copenhagen. Tey is clearly aware not just of the historical events of the Canning trial, but also of the role of the eighteenth-century pamphlet press in circulating information and publicizing the event: in her updated version, a newspaper adds unwelcome publicity to the case, leading the police investigator to dryly comment, “We have a fine free press.”

The impetus towards scientific, rationalist investigation of crimes reflected in the Canning controversy influenced detective techniques in the literature of the eighteenth century and beyond. This approach to literary detective fiction, with its roots in enlightened, empiricist thought would later influence the crime-solving techniques of Sherlock Holmes and other later literary detectives who rely on forensic analysis. Despite this pervasive literary influence, applying scientific analysis to Canning’s claims themselves was not a particularly successful activity. The testimony and evidence were so thoroughly contradictory and unreliable as to prohibit successful empirical analysis. The lack of sophisticated forensic techniques in the period was not the only reason that investigators were stymied: even contemporary scholars who have analyzed the case with the benefit of modern scientific knowledge have been unable to draw any definitive, scientifically verifiable conclusions.

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Determining the guilt or innocence of Elizabeth Canning through her textual representations was difficult for her eighteenth-century contemporaries, and continues to divide modern academics with the advantage of historical distance. Jack Lynch suspects “that Canning hid from her relatives to conceal a lying-in, an abortion, or a salivation for a venereal disease,”\textsuperscript{106} while Judith Moore reports that after concluding her research she had “come to believe that Elizabeth Canning’s whole story was true.”\textsuperscript{107} The eighteenth-century criminal trial that so captivated literate society and transformed London readers into amateur detectives continues to mystify and divide modern scholars. The most convincing piece of evidence for considering the Canning case as a seminal body of texts in the history of the detective novel genre is that the case remains of perennial interest: it turns generation after generation of readers into amateur literary detectives who sort through the body of eighteenth-century texts for clues and evidence.

\textsuperscript{106} Lynch, 168-169.
\textsuperscript{107} Moore, \textit{Appearance of Truth}, 256.
Chapter 2: Literary Investigative Figures and the Gradual Displacement of Providence

It is not until the final decade of the 1700s that the first detective figures appear in the English novel. The methods of these characters are influenced by earlier narratives of criminal activity and evidence gathering, including the texts on Jonathan Wild and Elizabeth Canning. Two novels, both published in 1794, feature early proto-detective figures who, driven by curiosity and inquisitiveness, involve themselves in the investigation of criminal activity, and voluntarily put themselves in danger in their pursuit of the truth.

These early proto-detective novels represent an important shift in the literary mode of criminal narratives. The criminal is no longer placed at the centre of the narrative and glorified as a roguish hero: instead, the protagonists are the detective figures themselves. The heroine of Ann Radcliffe’s *The Mysteries of Udolpho* (1794), Emily St. Aubert, investigates the seemingly supernatural occurrences which take place in the purportedly haunted castle of Udolpho. The eponymous hero of William Godwin’s *Caleb Williams* (1794) investigates the mysterious past of his employer, Ferdinando Falkland, in order to determine if Falkland is in fact guilty of murder. St. Aubert and Williams are not consistently successful in their attempts to gather evidence or make inquiries, but their strong desire to investigate establishes them as landmark figures in the history of the development of the detective novel.

Both novels feature curious protagonists who encounter danger as a result of their investigative tendencies: “in both *Caleb Williams* and *The Mysteries of Udolpho*, the tendency of curiosity to fragment identity, to overtake or possess the
possessor, colors curiosity as a dangerous virtue.”¹ The seed of curiosity found in the main characters of both novels would ultimately grow into the fully developed intellectual and forensic curiosity of professional and amateur detective characters of later works in the genre. The character attribute of personal and intellectual curiosity becomes a requirement for the detective figure to flourish and prosper: even in the case of professional detectives, there is a narrative requirement for the detective figure to be personally compelled to investigate a murder, disappearance, or other mysterious event and thereby raise the crime to greater importance in the narrative.

The circumstance of these novels being published in the same year is notable, and suggests that there may have been historical events which prompted the concurrent development of these two proto-detective figures in fiction. Additionally, Radcliffe’s novel may have directly influenced Godwin: according to his diary, he was reading The Mysteries of Udolpho while he was composing Caleb Williams.²

The 1780s and 1790s were a time of reform and regularization of police forces in England. In 1782, a new department of the Home Office was created, termed the Criminal Branch.³ One of the results of the dedicated attention to the administration of criminal law was that significantly greater efforts were “undertaken in the 1780s to improve the policing of London.”⁴ This led to the 1785 London and Westminster

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¹ Benedict, 238.
⁴ Beattie, The First English Detectives, 135.
Police bill, which was unsuccessful in Parliament, and its successor, the Middlesex Justices Act, also known as the Police Act, which passed in 1792. The 1792 act created a new system of law enforcement: a series of Public or Police Offices were created throughout the metropolis of London, each of which employed a number of Principal Officers. These professional investigators were also granted jurisdiction beyond their geographic area, should the pursuit of a suspected criminal be required. The increased attention to policing in the political arena attracted attention in print. Notable texts on policing published during this period included titles such as Thomas Gilbert’s *A Plan of Police* (1781), Jonas Hanway’s *A New Year’s Gift to the People of Great Britain, Pleading for the Necessity of a More Vigorous and Consistent Police* (1784), Edward Sayer’s *Observations on the Police or Civil Government of Westminster* (1784), and George Barrett’s *An Essay Towards Establishing a System of Police, on Constitutional Principles* (1786). The lively discussion of principles and methods of policing in the press during this time made its influence felt in contemporary fictional narratives of detection. The narratives of Radcliffe and Godwin each contributed a different element to the emerging figure of the literary detective in the period.

Neither Emily St. Aubert nor Caleb Williams is a thoroughly successful sleuth, but each novel contains recognizable narrative elements which would later be folded into the detective novel genre. Moreover, the protagonists both demonstrate early traces of detective aptitude and ability. *The Mysteries of Udolpho* contains numerous mysterious occurrences, living up to the promise of its title, but Emily

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5 Beattie, *The First English Detectives*, 159-166.
6 Cox, 31.
herself investigates only a few of these events. There is only one central mystery of *Caleb Williams*, the question of Falkland’s guilt, but Caleb pursues the answer to this central question in a doggedly determined fashion. Neither of these early sleuths achieves triumphant success as a detective. Though the mysteries of the castle of Udolpho are revealed by the novel’s end, these explanations are due only in small part to Emily’s detective activity. In *Caleb Williams*, Caleb does elicit a confession of guilt from Falkland, but his successful detective work results in Caleb’s becoming an outlaw, constantly trying to escape the reach of his vengeful former master. Despite their limited success, these two characters serve as significant early examples of proto-detective figures who investigate, analyze, and draw conclusions based on collected data.

The limited success of these early detective figures is attributable to the transition from a providentially-driven investigation of crime in early modern texts towards new, modern narratives of successful human investigators using new methods of detection, analysis, and forensic evidence. As discussed in the introduction, the late eighteenth century saw the rise of a new integration of scientific knowledge into criminal investigations, as in the cases of John Toms or William Richardson. Human investigation of crimes, without perceived providential intervention, was becoming more successful. Nonetheless, the deeply entrenched cultural and literary narrative of providence-as-detective could not be simply swept away with the advent of newly developed forensic techniques. The early literary detective figures of Emily St. Aubert and Caleb Williams dramatize the difficulty in
progressing towards this watershed change in the modes of real-life, and consequently literary, investigation.

In *The Mysteries of Udolpho*, Emily, who has received an explicitly scientific education, transfers her intellectual curiosity towards a rational exploration of the various mysteries of the castle. Radcliffe’s integration of the rational and scientific with the natural world marks the author as a thinker with latitudinarian tendencies. Her writing betrays a sympathetic integration of earlier providential discoveries of crime and mystery. While Radcliffe’s use of the “explained supernatural” strips out most of the mythic or spiritual content of her gothic tale, the one remaining supernatural force in the narrative is the presence of coincidence orchestrated by providence. By creating a human investigator with limited aptitude and power in investigations, Radcliffe retains a place for the idea of literary investigation by providence in the early detective narrative.

In *Caleb Williams*, the hero becomes a self-appointed private investigator who is determined to reveal the secrets of his master’s potentially criminal past. Caleb is not motivated by money, pride, or any need to seek revenge or clear his own name: he pursues detective work motivated solely by his own curiosity and interest. Despite Caleb’s somewhat bumbling approach to investigation, he eventually discovers damning evidence which elicits a confession of guilt from Falkland. At this point in the narrative, Godwin reintroduces the older trope of the all-seeing eye of providence, but in an uncomfortably subverted manner. An omniscient providence does not pursue the guilty murderer: rather, a vengeful Falkland relentlessly pursues Caleb as revenge for his inquisitiveness. The detective figure becomes the fugitive,
who is forced to adopt a series of disguises and remain in constant motion to evade his master’s influential grasp. By creating a detective figure in quest of truth who himself becomes an outlaw, the novel emphasizes the potential problems with increased judicial powers which may be open to abuse.
Emily St. Aubert, the heroine of Ann Radcliffe’s 1794 gothic novel *The Mysteries of Udolpho*, is one of the earliest amateur detectives in English literature, and certainly one of the first female proto-detective figures. She is motivated to investigate and uncover the facts behind a multitude of mysterious circumstances in an attempt to protect herself and her family. Emily exhibits considerable bravery and curiosity in her various attempts to uncover the truth. She achieves only limited success in revealing the multiple mysteries of Udolpho, but her concerted attempts to discover truth in the novel mark her as an active detective figure who pieces together evidence to compile a view of the whole.

Emily’s role as an early detective figure has been remarked upon by a handful of critics. Charles Rzepka characterizes her as “an amateur detective… surrounded by mysteries defying rational explanation: cadavers in hidden rooms, strange night sounds, secret passages behind fluttering curtains, and the like. Emily makes several discoveries for herself as she escapes from the castle.”7 Lucy Sussex “read[s] Emily as a prototype female sleuth,” and argues that “her structural role is certainly comparable to that of a detective, being a rational elucidator of the mysteries of the castle, which includes searching for traces of crimes.”8 Lisa Dresner considers Emily to be an “almost-detective,” noting that she “demonstrates great investigative skill in the areas of interpretation, language, and the body.”9

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critical work of these scholars has helped to begin the work of inserting Emily St. Aubert and *The Mysteries of Udolpho* into the critical history of the detective novel.

This section expands on the pioneering work done by Rzepka, Sussex, and Dresner to consider, in greater detail, Emily St. Aubert as an early detective figure and to analyze how *The Mysteries of Udolpho* contributes to the early history of the detective narrative. Emily behaves as an active investigative figure who repeatedly puts herself in physical danger in order to determine the truth about the world which she inhabits, and she occupies herself with exploring a number of mysterious occurrences. In this proto-detective narrative, Radcliffe uses the “explained supernatural” to act as a bridge from the gothic genre to the Enlightenment world. Her juxtaposition of gothic supernatural with explained Enlightenment logic is integral to the development of the detective, who inhabits the messy, unknown world of crime, while ultimately bringing order, light, and revelation through the application of rational investigation and deduction. While Emily does not achieve the ideal state of full knowledge solely on the strength of her own detecting prowess, the scientific, logic-based approach that she uses as an investigator forms the basis for the methods of detection employed in later literary texts. Emily’s limitations as a sleuth reflect the limits of human investigative ability at this point: Radcliffe retains a role for providential discovery and revelation in the world of *Udolpho*. The insertion of providence allows for the remnant of one last supernatural force in *Udolpho’s* rationalist, Enlightenment world in which rationalism predominates.

Before analyzing *Udolpho’s* use of the explained supernatural in relation to the detective figure, the history of the development of this subgenre of gothic fiction
should be briefly addressed. While Ann Radcliffe is the best-known and most prolific practitioner of this type of gothic writing, Clara Reeve was the first writer to use this narrative style in her novel *The Old English Baron* (1778), which she had originally published anonymously the previous year under the title of *The Champion of Virtue*. Reeve’s use of a rational explanation for seemingly ghostly occurrences was inspired by her frustration with Horace Walpole’s decidedly non-rational supernatural in *The Castle of Otranto* (1764), which features, amongst other things, a self-propelled helmet which enacts violence and a walking portrait. In her preface to the second edition of the novel, Reeve lamented that Walpole’s novel:

> Palls upon the mind… [because] the machinery is so violent… it destroys the effect it is intended to excite. Had the story been kept within the utmost *verge* of probability, the effect had been preserved, without losing the least circumstance that excites or detains the attention…When your expectation is wound up to the highest pitch, these circumstances…destroy the work of imagination, and, instead of attention, invite laughter.\(^\text{10}\)

Walpole was dismissive of the emerging explained supernatural strain, preferring his own brand of terror-driven gothic fiction. His response to *The Old English Baron* is preserved in a letter to Rev. William Mason, in which Walpole reveals that he is unimpressed with the rationality of Reeve’s novel:

> Have you seen *The Old Baron* [sic], a Gothic story, professedly written in imitation of Otranto, but reduced to reason and probability! It is so probable

that any trial for murder at the Old Baily [sic] would make a more interesting
story.”\textsuperscript{11}

Walpole’s casual comparison between a murder trial and the Reeve’s rationalist text was prescient. In a fictional universe which allowed for unexplained, magical occurrences, the literary detective figure would be of little use: any rational assessment of evidence or clues would be fruitless in the pages of an irrational novel which prized superstition above science. The character of the detective could only flourish in a text which accounted for apparently mysterious events by employing the rational explanations for their occurrence. Gothic novels written in this tradition, rather than those whose stories focused on unexplained horror, form an important link in the transition from the gothic novel to the detective novel. The explained supernatural gothic and the emergent detective novel feature a central character who is motivated to bring order and explanation to a world of disorder and mystery, whether the mystery is of a ghostly or a criminal variety.

\textbf{The Investigating Heroine and Scientific Inquiry}

Emily is propelled into acting as a detective figure as a result of her forced incarceration in the mysterious castle of Udolpho. She is taken to the remote and decrepit castle after the unexpected and sudden marriage of her aunt and guardian, Madame Cheron, to Montoni. Shortly after her arrival at the castle, Emily witnesses a number of seemingly supernatural occurrences and horrifying items. Her inquisitive, rationalist nature compels her to investigate some of these events to

determine the truth behind them. All the mysterious events in the novel, whether actively investigated by Emily or not, are revealed to have entirely mundane explanations by the close of the novel. Radcliffe depicts Emily as an enlightened female armed with logical, scientific learning.

Radcliffe constructs Emily as being of a generally inquisitive and intellectual nature. She is described as “aspiring to moral and labouring for intellectual improvement, to the pleasures of enlightened society” (672), and as referring to books in her personal library as “her sweet delight in happier days, and her soothing resource in hours of moderate sorrow” (248). Moreover, Radcliffe explicitly characterizes Emily as having received a specifically scientific education. She emphasizes Emily’s scientific learning in her explanation of her heroine’s upbringing and advantageous education:

St. Aubert cultivated her understanding with the most scrupulous care. He gave her a general view of the sciences, and an exact acquaintance with every part of elegant literature. He taught her Latin and English, chiefly that she might understand the sublimity of their best poets. She discovered in her early years a taste for works of genius; and it was St. Aubert’s principle, as well as his inclination, to promote every innocent means of happiness. “A well-informed mind,” he would say, “is the best security against the contagion of folly and vice...” (6)

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Perhaps as a result of her two brothers having died in infancy, Emily receives a thorough, rationalist education which would have been exceptional in the eighteenth century, and significantly more so in sixteenth-century France, where the novel is ostensibly set. Women of the late medieval period would have received an extremely limited education at home, restricted to modern languages and religious and moral instruction: Ruth Watts observes that it “was unlikely for any female below the rank of a noblewoman to attain classical learning— it was feared their purity of mind might be damaged.” Emily’s education would have been unusual to the point of anachronism for a young girl in sixteenth-century France: her scientific and classical education would have been more common, though still unusual, in the eighteenth century. While a few “privileged women had contact with contemporary science through salon cultures,” any females with scientific learning during the eighteenth century would have been considered “exceptions and cultural ornaments.”

Radcliffe’s emphasis on Emily’s scientific education links the character to the logical world of Enlightenment inquiry. As noted in the introduction, scientific knowledge was starting to be applied for the first time in an investigative, forensic context during the latter decades of the eighteenth century. Emily’s scientific education prepares her to act as a detective driven by the desire to gather evidence, weigh proof, and draw conclusions within a logical framework. In an early critical analysis, E. M. Wrong observed that detective fiction as a genre could not begin to develop

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until after the Enlightenment, as pre-scientific societies had “faulty law[s] of evidence” and therefore “detectives [could] not flourish until the public [had] an idea of what constitutes proof.”\textsuperscript{15} As the heroine of a late-eighteenth-century novel, Emily St. Aubert is well positioned, chronologically speaking, to take advantage of the strides made in scientific knowledge over the course of the Enlightenment.

Though the novel is set in sixteenth-century France, Radcliffe’s heroine is apparently well versed in eighteenth-century advances in scientific understanding. The discoveries of the scientific revolution began in the seventeenth century, with the work of scientists and natural philosophers such as Francis Bacon, Isaac Newton, and Robert Boyle. Over the course of the following century, the process of scientific discovery became absorbed into the intellectual culture. The development of rationalized methods of analysis of the natural world in the emergent fields of biology, chemistry, and physics was key to the orderly approach of Enlightenment thought. Thomas Hankins argues that “the creation of new scientific disciplines was probably the most important contribution of the Enlightenment to the modernization of science.”\textsuperscript{16} As these disciplines became more firmly entrenched in society, the processes they required for the gathering and interpretation of data from the physical world became similarly entrenched in common thought and understanding of the world. The growth of the Royal Society in the seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries, under the aegis of Isaac Newton, Hans Sloane, and Joseph Banks, amongst others, helped to cement the scientific method at the centre of intellectual life and


culture of the period. In the latter half of the eighteenth century, leading up to the composition of *The Mysteries of Udolpho*, scientists made significant advances in empirical knowledge and understanding. These innovations ranged from Joseph Priestley’s work with gases and discovery of oxygen, to Lavoisier’s quantitative chemical experiments which led to his statement of the law of conservation of mass, to Humphry Davy’s discovery of several alkali and alkaline earth metals. Radcliffe herself demonstrates some knowledge of scientific advances in Europe in the late eighteenth century, and portrays science in her novels as “bridging divine order and human routine.” Radcliffe’s awareness of scientific writing is evident in one of the handful of original footnotes that she chose to include in *Udolpho*. While on the ramparts of the castle, one character remarks that “a storm is coming on—look at my lance,” and holds it forth “with the flame tapering at its point” (408). In case her reader is unaware of the details of this phenomenon, Radcliffe inserts a footnote instructing her readers to “see the Abbé Berthelon on Electricity” (408). Pierre Berthelon was a French cleric who published a number of scientific treatises in the 1780s, and was best known for his experiments with electricity. Radcliffe’s citation of Berthelon’s writings indicates her interest in and awareness of scientific experiments and publications of the period.

The characterization of Emily as scientifically and classically educated links her with female scientists of the late eighteenth century. In her creation of the circumstances of Emily’s exceptional education guided by an attentive father, Radcliffe may have been influenced by the lives of two female French scientists,

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Émilie du Châtelet (1706-1749), a potential namesake for Emily, and Marie-Anne Pierrette Paulze Lavoisier (1758-1836). Both scientists were raised as only children who were doted upon, tutored, and encouraged in their intellectual pursuits by influential fathers. Du Châtelet went on to conduct research on the science of fire and kinetic energy, while Paulze Lavoisier worked in tandem with her husband Antoine Lavoisier in their laboratory investigations of the nature of gases. The pursuit of empirical data and knowledge by du Châtelet and Paulze Lavoisier mirrors Emily’s pursuit of the true nature of the events she witnesses at Udolpho.

The development of scientific methods of analysis during the eighteenth century influenced a similar rationalization of criminal analysis. The process of criminal investigation required an ability to collect, process, and successfully analyze evidence. Such a process needed to be in place for fictional detective work to take place, as well: Robert S. Paul notes that “fictional detection could not develop properly until the... Enlightenment had cleared people’s minds of superstition, destroyed the ‘ordeal’ method of determining guilt and innocence, and produced a legal system that accepted reason as absolute in the treatment of empirical data.”

The plot of Udolpho offers a compressed version of a new model of criminal investigation: Emily moves from superstition to empirical data as the novel progresses, occupying the role of principal investigator, in both the scientific and detective sense.

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The Many Mysteries of Udolpho

The novel, true to the “mysteries” promised in its title, contains numerous mysterious occurrences and subplots. Some of the most notable mysteries include the apparent haunting of the castle of Udolpho, the kidnapping of Madame Montoni, the disappearance of Ludovico, and, most famously, the secret of what is concealed behind the black veil. The themes of these subplots, such as the supernatural, locked room mysteries, and concealed identities, would become integral narrative elements in the later development of detective fiction. Emily contributes, in varying degrees, to the revelation of the secrets behind these mysteries. Emily’s investigative tendencies are dismissed by Montoni, who does not approve of her inquisitive nature: when she attempts to question him about her aunt’s disappearance, he sternly replies that “it does not suit me to answer enquiries... Nor does it become you to make them; time may unfold them all” (230). Montoni’s words are prophetic, as the mysteries that Emily is investigating will indeed be revealed by the novel’s end, at least partly as a result of her detective activities.

Emily takes on the mantle of an investigative figure in order to determine the truth behind the mysterious occurrences which affect her directly during her stay at Udolpho: namely, the fact that the castle—and her chamber—are apparently haunted. The mysterious noises and appearances are ultimately revealed to have been caused by smugglers, while her admirer Du Pont is the source of the disembodied music and other seemingly ghostly activity. In one instance of detective work, while examining her chamber, Emily discovers “a door, that was not quite shut...she opened it, and, going forward, had nearly fallen down a steep, narrow staircase that wound from it,
between two stone walls” (235). She repeatedly finds the door to the staircase ajar, despite taking great pains to shut and bar it herself. She initially “want[s] courage to venture into the darkness alone” (235) when she discovers the hidden staircase, but ultimately chooses to investigate in order to determine where the staircase leads. She exhibits a practical investigative approach by sensibly delaying exploration until a time “when day-light might assist the search” (241). Her practical nature is a helpful, though not infallible, bastion against the superstitious beliefs held at Udolpho by many of the servants and other inhabitants. When Emily physically enters the castle of Udolpho, she is overcome with a sense of foreboding: “her imagination, ever awake to circumstance, suggested even more terrors, than her reason could justify... long-suffering and murder came to her thoughts” (228). The distinction between imagination and reason is emphasized in the passage. While Emily’s imagination is susceptible to her gloomy physical surroundings, her reason strives to combat her unjustified uneasiness. She later reproaches herself for “suffering her romantic imagination to carry her so far beyond the bounds of probability” (342), yet her initial fears are not entirely unfounded. A number of disturbing and violent events do take place during Emily’s tenure at the castle, but are ultimately revealed to be free from supernatural cause. Emily temporarily falls victim to the suggestive, eerie surroundings of Udolpho, but her rational investigative tendencies reassert themselves by the novel’s end. Emily’s skeptical outlook is eventually proven to be the correct perspective: by the conclusion of the novel, the mysteries of which Emily had been quizzical are shown to have causes that are entirely earthly, rather than supernatural.
Emily acts as a detective to discover the whereabouts and fate of her aunt upon her disappearance. Though Madame Montoni does not treat Emily kindly, Emily is motivated by bonds of familial affection to investigate what has happened to her. Emily’s sense of danger is substantial—the narrator reports that “pity for her aunt and anxiety for herself alternately swayed her determination” (343)—but she ultimately decides on a course of action as an active investigative figure once “the interest she felt for her aunt overcame other considerations” (343). Enlisting Annette as an accomplice, Emily escapes from her chamber with the intent of exploring the castle to find the place where Montoni has secreted her aunt. She follows the guidance of the untrustworthy Barnardine throughout decaying parts of Udolpho, spurred on by “pity and curiosity” (344) about the fate of her aunt. She is led through scenes of darkness and death, which include a ruined chapel and an open grave, and is left to await admittance in a desolated place with “rough stone walls… [and] spiral stairs, black with age” (346). Upon determining that she had been locked into the chamber, she swiftly convinces herself “that Madame Montoni had been murdered, perhaps in this very chamber,” and “that she herself was brought thither for the same purpose” (347). Her investigative instincts take over in a dangerous situation, for once she overcomes the shock of her situation, “she held up the lamp, to examine, if the chamber afforded a possibility of an escape” (347). As she explores the chamber, she encounters an iron chair, iron ring, and iron bars, which she believes to be “instruments of torture” (348). Though the discovery affects her physically (“an acute pain seized her head, she was scarcely able to hold the lamp” (348)) it does not inhibit her detective activity: she is determined to continue her investigation. As she
resumes her exploration of the room, she discovers “a dark curtain, which, descending from the ceiling to the floor, was drawn along the whole side of the chamber” (348). She is torn between a detective’s urge to discover, and in this case literally uncover the truth, and a fear of what horrid object may be concealed.

Emily’s inclination to be a detective in pursuit of the truth ultimately triumphs, as she finds herself “suddenly conjecturing, that it concealed the body of her murdered aunt” and “seized it, in a fit of desperation, and drew it aside” (348). Emily’s detective methods may not be calm or methodical, but she does consistently pursue truth and revelation in a narrative environment in which many things are concealed.

The revelation of the object behind the curtain leads to another layer of mystery. She does not discover her aunt concealed behind the curtain, but instead is shocked to see …a corpse, stretched on a kind of low couch, which was crimsoned with human blood, as was the floor beneath. The features, deformed by death, were ghastly and horrible, and more than one livid wound appeared in the face. (348)

Emily briefly exhibits a desire to examine the object more closely, as she “bend[s] over the body, gaz[ing] for a moment, with an eager, frenzied eye,” but her impetuous is fleeting as her emotions betray her and she falls “senseless at the foot of the couch.” (348). Despite her disgust while viewing the object, her curiosity remains: upon eventually reaching her aunt, Emily desires an explanation of the corpse.

Emily’s determination as a detective figure does result in her being able to locate her missing aunt. Her tribulations in the gloomy, blood-filled chambers of Udolpho are a necessary requirement for her to achieve this objective.
One of the mysteries in the novel involves the disappearance of a man from a locked room, a trope which would become widespread during the later growth of the detective story. A narrative told within this subplot links the novel to earlier tales of providential and supernatural detection of criminal activity. Ludovico, lackey to Cavigni, offers to “watch, during a night, in the suite of rooms, reputed to be haunted” (543). His Enlightenment rationalism is made clear: he pronounces that he “feared… no spirits,” and is convinced that the mysterious sounds emanating from the room in the night have human, rather than ghostly, origins. His materialist position is in opposition to the other, more superstitious inhabitants of Udolpho, who assert that Ludovico’s “sword cannot defend [him] against a ghost… neither can bars, or bolts; for a spirit… can glide through a keyhole as easily as through a door” (544). In spite of his avowed lack of superstition, Ludovico chooses to read a medieval ghost story, which was “strongly tinctured with the superstition of the times” (552), to pass his time while he is locked in the room overnight. The contrast between avowed rationalism and Ludovico’s guilty pleasure in superstition is echoed throughout the novel, and would go on to form the basis of the detective novel genre. Ludovico’s subsequent disappearance from the chamber appears to the inhabitants of Udolpho, and to credulous readers, to be the result of ghostly activity: a rational explanation for this event does not occur until near the close of the novel. Many later

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nineteenth-century detective novels present a seemingly supernatural mysterious occurrence which is later explained by the ratiocination of the logical detective figure. Although *The Mysteries of Udolpho* does not have such a central, effective figure (Emily’s success as a sleuth is only limited), the narrator steps in to perform the role.

Ludovico’s disappearance from the reputedly haunted chamber is another early example of the locked room trope which would become integrated as an extremely popular aspect of later detective fiction. In the logic puzzle, the sealed nature of the room is carefully noted:

…the door of the outer room also had been found fastened, with the key on the inside; it was impossible, therefore, for him to have passed through that, and all the outer doors of this suite were found, on examination, to be bolted and locked, with the keys also within them. The Count, being then compelled to believe, that the lad had escaped through the casements, next examined them, but such as opened wide enough to admit the body of a man were found to be carefully secured either by iron bars, or by shutters, and no vestige appeared of any person having attempted to pass them… (561)

Ludovico’s disappearance from the seemingly impenetrable chamber is revealed to have been caused by the activities of smugglers who used a secret passage (630-634). A character’s disappearance from a locked room marks *Udolpho* as a transitional text: the narrative element looks back to the tradition of the gothic novel, as well as looking forward to the locked room puzzles of the detective genre. Mark Madoff notes that “the Gothic is full of locked rooms, of one kind or another… the locked
room mystery is characteristic of the Gothic,” and suggests that parallels may be found between the locked room of the gothic and detective novel. When Ludovico reappears in the narrative, after escaping from the smugglers, superstitious Annette initially assumes that he is an apparition. She flees to Emily, exclaiming, “I have seen his ghost, madam, I have seen his ghost!” (629). Emily remains rational and analytical: she is “much interested, concerning the means, by which he had disappeared from the north apartments” (630) and asks Ludovico “to give a detail of his adventures” (630). Her questions focus on practical, investigative details such as how the secret passage was concealed (632), the motives for the smugglers to abduct Ludovico (633), and their reasons for entering the castle (633-634). The locked room scene in the narrative, combined with Emily’s investigative interests, marks the novel as an important transitional text in the history of the detective novel.

While spending the night in the chamber, Ludovico reads a story which is reproduced in full within the novel. The “Provençal Tale” bears a strong resemblance to widely available early modern tales which contained providential discoveries of murder. In the narrative, a stranger with “a noble air, but of a sorrowful and dejected countenance” appears suddenly in the chamber of an influential baron. After convincing the baron that his intentions are peaceable, the stranger reveals his identity to be that of “an English knight” named “Sir Bevys of Lancaster” and appeals to the baron to accompany him “to the edge of the forest, at a short distance from the castle walls” where he promises to “convince him, that he had something of importance to disclose” (553). The baron eventually agrees to follow, with a good

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20 Madoff, 49-50.
deal of trepidation: at this point, the suspense and mystery of the story consist in whether the knight is trustworthy, or if he intends to harm the baron. The expectations of the narrative are subverted, as it is revealed that it is the knight himself who has been a victim of crime: the knight leads the baron to a “deep recess of the forest” where there lay “the body of a man, stretched at its length, and weltering in blood; a ghastly wound was on the forehead, and death appeared already to have contracted the features” (556). When the baron examines the body, he determines that “the features of the corpse” were an “exact resemblance of the stranger his conductor” (556). Upon discovery, the knight promptly disappears. Tales of ghostly murder victims appearing in order to instigate investigation into their deaths had their precedent in early modern crime narratives. Ghosts often “advanced the action in murder stories” by appearing in order to issue “solemn injunctions to others that a magistrate should be alerted” to their suspicious death. The appearance of these spirits was explicitly linked to the work of providence, which was understood to use ghosts to provide evidence to earthly officers of justice, as an early modern text points out:

And indeed so certainly does the Revenge of God pursue the Abominated MURDERER that when Witnesses are wanting of the Fact, the very Ghosts of the Murdered-Parties cannot rest quiet in their Graves, till they have made the Detection themselves.  

21 Gaskill, Crimes and Mentalities, 217.  
23 A Full and True Relation of the Examination and Confession of W. Barwick and E. Mangall, of Two Horrid Murders (London: Isaac Cleave, 1690), 1.
Radcliffe’s integration of a story within the story—echoing, perhaps, the enclosure of Ludovico within the locked room—links *Udolpho* with these earlier popular narratives of supernatural and providential revelation of crime.

Emily’s most dedicated detective activities are reserved for the mystery of the black veil. This emphasis on the black veil is fitting, as this particular mystery of *Udolpho* is the most famous, and is the plot element most commonly associated with the novel. While exploring an abandoned gallery in the castle, Emily encounters a picture “concealed by a veil of black silk” (233). The object immediately awakens her investigative instincts: she is struck by a “wish… to remove the veil” though she briefly hesitates because of the “singularity of the circumstance” (233). Her more superstitious companion, her maid Annette, takes the opportunity to flee from the picture along with their lamp, forcing Emily to abandon her investigation temporarily. When Emily presses Annette to discover the source of her fears, Annette elliptically refers to suggestive rumors she had heard about the picture while in Venice:

I don’t know what is the reason, ma’amselle… nor anything about the picture, only I have heard there is something very dreadful belonging to it—and that it has been covered up in black *ever since*—and that nobody has looked at it for a great many years—and it somehow has to do with the owner of this castle before Signor Montoni came to the possession of it—and—

(233)

Emily, as the more rational of the pair, greets her maid’s explanation of the picture’s dark history with gentle humor and a smile, commenting “I perceive it is as you
say—that you know nothing about the picture” (233). Despite Annette’s superstitious fears, Emily’s desire to investigate the picture remains: “her curiosity was entirely awakened,” and she decides that “her questions might easily be answered” (234) by a more thorough examination of the picture. When she is presented with another opportunity to investigate the following evening, she eagerly seizes the chance to expose the object which had so “attracted her curiosity” (248). In her process of investigation, Emily reveals herself to be a nervous yet determined sleuth:

Emily passed on with faltering steps, and having paused a moment at the door, before she attempted to open it, she then hastily entered the chamber, and went towards the picture, which appeared to be enclosed in a frame of uncommon size, that hung in a dark part of the room. She paused again, and then, with a timid hand, lifted the veil; but instantly let it fall—perceiving that what it concealed was no picture, and, before she could leave the chamber, she dropped senseless on the floor. (248-249)

Emily’s fainting spell serves two purposes in the proto-detective narrative of the novel. First, it underscores the limits of her body as an investigative force. Second, it preserves the suspense surrounding the object concealed behind the veil until the mystery is revealed considerably later in the narrative. It is not until nearly the close of the novel that the object concealed behind the veil is revealed to the reader. The narrator belatedly announces that:

…on lifting [the veil], there appeared, instead of the picture [Emily] had expected, within a recess of the wall, a human figure of ghastly paleness, stretched at length, and dressed in the habiliments of the grave. What added
to the horror of the spectacle, was, that the face appeared partly decayed and disfigured by worms, which were visible on the features and hands. On such an object, it will be readily believed, that no person could endure to look twice. (662)

The terrifying object hidden behind the veil effectively halts Emily’s detective activity, at least with regard to the black veil: the narrator reports that “after the first glance… her terror had prevented her from ever provoking a renewal of such suffering, as she had then experienced” (662). Emily’s choice to stop her investigation of the veil results in her deriving false conclusions from the apparent evidence. Had she continued her quest for more data, despite the distasteful appearance of the object, her deductions would have been considerably different:

Had she dared to look again, her delusion and her fears would have vanished altogether, and she would have perceived, that the figure before her was not human, but formed of wax… A member of the house of Udolpho, having committed some offence against the prerogative of the church, had been condemned to the penance of contemplating, during certain hours of the day, a waxen image, made to resemble a human body in the state, to which it is reduced after death. This penance, serving as a memento of the condition at which he must himself arrive, had been designed to reprove the pride of the Marquis of Udolpho…(662)

Emily’s investigative tendencies lead her to act as a detective figure to try to solve the mystery of the black veil, but these attempts to solve the mystery are abortive. Her fear and disgust prevent her from continuing to gather the evidence needed for a
complete understanding of the mysterious object. Her partial investigation produces the erroneous conclusion that the object concealed behind the veil is truly a human corpse in an advanced state of decay, rather than simply an elaborate and grotesque *memento mori*.

Some critics attribute Emily’s limited success as investigator to the limits of her female body. Lisa Dresner, for example, contends that the failure of Emily’s body is the heroine’s most restrictive problem, as it “effectively denies her the possibility of fully investigating her hunches, particularly her hunches about dead bodies.” Dresner considers the heroine’s faltering body as a uniquely feminine problem:

Emily’s continual fainting spells signify her imprisonment in the world of the body—a world that the narrative constructs as intrinsically flawed because it is female. Whenever Emily reaches up to the arenas of vision and knowledge, the body pulls her back down, reasserting its superior claims on her by blocking her access to these arenas.

The physical limits of the human body, however, are not solely a feminine matter—the limitations of the investigating body are not unique to Emily as a female, but are, rather, shared with all mortal investigators. While Dresner contends that Emily’s inability to achieve full knowledge and understanding stems from her femininity, her failure as an investigator may instead be attributable to her human lack of omniscience, particularly considering the earlier view of providence as investigator. Male characters also suffer from failure of physical resilience to complete

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24 Dresner, 11.
25 Dresner, 11-12.
investigations successfully: Ludovico, whose brave exploration of the haunted chamber marks him as another proto-investigator, is similarly limited by superstition and limited bodily strength. While occupying the chamber, he “felt drowsy, and dropped asleep,” and later awakens in fear to spot “a man’s face within the dusky curtains,” a spectacle which causes his “heart to fail [him], in that instant” (631). Despite attempting to “snatch up [his] sword to defend [himself],” he is quickly disarmed, bound, and gagged: he resignedly laments in retrospect, “what could one man do against four?” (632). Ludovico, like Emily, attempts to investigate but suffers due to his limited mortal abilities. In the course of the transition from the providential discovery of crime towards secular, scientific, and forensic investigation, it was necessary to explore the limits of human skill, insight, and investigative ability in the literary depictions of criminal detection. In contrast to the all-seeing, impartial, moral eye of providence, human investigators were required to rely on luck as much as skill and knowledge. Unlike the fully cognizant figure of providence, human detectives could not see into the minds of those involved in the case: their insights could easily be spoiled by false testimony from witnesses or suspects.

**Providence as the Last Supernatural Force of the Enlightenment**

Radcliffe is acknowledged to be an expert practitioner of the explained supernatural, and she employs the technique to exceptional effect in *Udolpho*. After leaving the castle of Udolpho, Emily gently mocks the gothic hall of horrors from which she has escaped. In conversation with Blanche, she muses on her earlier
beliefs that Udolpho was haunted as well as her gradual discovery of the truths behind the myths: “I perceive,” said Emily, smiling, “that all old mansions are haunted; I am lately come from a place of wonders; but unluckily, since I left it, I have heard almost all of them explained” (491). By the novel’s end, Radcliffe has offered a rational, though improbable, justification for each seemingly supernatural event. Considered in the context of the early detective narrative, Radcliffe’s rational gothic novel signifies a link to Enlightenment scientific and forensic analysis, ultimately aiding in the development of Emily as an early detective figure.

Radcliffe’s use of the “explained supernatural” is one of her hallmarks. Radcliffe’s early readers were aware of the pattern in her writings. Her meticulous explanation of every mysterious occurrence within her novels was occasionally a source of annoyance and frustration to some early reviewers. Coleridge lamented that:

Curiosity is raised oftener than it is gratified; or rather, it is raised so high that no adequate gratification can be given it; the interest is completely dissolved once the adventure is finished, and the reader, when he is got to the end of the work, looks about in vain for the spell which had bound him so strongly to it.  

Scott similarly regretted Radcliffe’s explained supernatural, commenting that “Mrs. Radcliffe, a mistress in the art of exciting curiosity, has not yet been uniformly

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fortunate in the mode of gratifying it.” Yet Scott fair-mindedly noted that Radcliffe’s approach was instigated by the rationalist demands of late eighteenth-century readers who, “like children, demand that each particular circumstance and incident of the narrative shall be fully accounted for.” Modern critics have continued to comment upon Radcliffe’s use of the rational explanations for supernatural events. LeRoy Panek considers The Mysteries of Udolpho to be one of the leading examples of “a sub-group of gothic novels called ‘Tales of Terror’ which eschewed the supernatural conclusion and explained all of the… goings-on in the story by rational means,” noting that in Udolpho, Radcliffe “builds episodes of tension and release by creating events which seem supernatural but are not.” Robert Miles deems the explained supernatural to be a “central narrative principle” in Radcliffe’s gothic novels, while noting that she has been “much criticized” for her overreliance upon the feature.

Perceptive critics have noted that Radcliffe’s use of the explained supernatural imitates the historical progression towards greater scientific knowledge of the physical world itself. E. J. Clery asserts that the narration of Udolpho “echoes the history of the enlightenment itself. The reader progressively moves from the sense of mystery that encourages fearful, false ideas to full knowledge of the facts, intelligibility of causes, means and ends, and confirmation of the truth of reason: in

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27 Walter Scott, Sir Walter Scott on Novelists and Fiction, ed. Ioan Williams (London: Routledge, 2010), 83.
28 Scott, 83.
other words, reliving the passage from gothic to modern times.”

Similarly, Yael Shapira contends that “by providing a rational explanation for uncanny events, Radcliffe’s narratives didactically mirrored the move from superstition to enlightenment and thereby claimed a greater respectability.” The pattern of movement from confusion and darkness to knowledge and revealed truth is also a pattern of the detective novel. The active investigation of the detective results in clarity being achieved by the close of the narrative: the events, characters, and motivations which are unknown or murky at the outset of the text are revealed and resolved by the end of the novel. Over the course of the novel, Emily, who acts as a proto-detective figure, moves from a world of superstition and apparently supernatural occurrences to one in which the logical and pragmatic truth of these occurrences has been revealed. Radcliffe’s adept use of the explained supernatural laid the foundational structure for the form of the detective novel, in which the narrative moves from a state of confusion and concealment to revelation and clarity.

The blend of mysticism and rationalism in *The Mysteries of Udolpho* also mirrors the changes occurring within the Church of England during the Enlightenment period. The advances made in scientific knowledge over the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries required Christian apologists and theologians of the period to construct rationalist, scientifically-minded defenses and explications of religious beliefs. A group of Anglican clergy, the Latitudinarians, emerged as the most influential of the rationalist theologians: prominent members of the group

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included Edward Stillingfleet, John Tillotson, and Gilbert Burnet. Influenced by the earlier Cambridge Platonists, the Latitudinarians emphasized “an advocacy of ‘reason’ in religion” and possessed “certain connections with… science and the Royal Society.” Latitudinarian theology inspired late-seventeenth-century philosophical essays which attempted to defend Christianity on rationalist grounds, such as John Locke’s *The Reasonableness of Christianity* (1695) and John Toland’s *Christianity Not Mysterious* (1696).

Robert Mayhew has made a compelling case for understanding Ann Radcliffe as a latitudinarian thinker. Although she was born in 1764, her education was based on “ideas derived from the late seventeenth and early eighteenth century intellectual area,” and her education was specifically “imbued with the tenets of the latitudinarian school of Anglicanism.” Radcliffe’s writing demonstrates an interest in the intersection of reason, science, and faith, like that of earlier latitudinarian writers. Mayhew argues that these latitudinarian values inform Radcliffe’s “presentation of the issues of nature, the supernatural, and the providential in her novels.” Radcliffe’s latitudinarian outlook informs her use of the explained supernatural, as well as her use of providence as the last remaining supernatural force in the universe of her novels.

33 G. R. Cragg, *From Puritanism to the Age of Reason* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1950), 63-64.
35 Cragg, 114-116, 137-139.
37 Mayhew, 585.
In *The Mysteries of Udolpho*, Radcliffe created at least two recognizably latitudinarian characters. One of the hallmarks of latitudinarianism was the strong emphasis that the surroundings of the natural world acted as strong evidence for the existence of God.\(^{38}\) As the latitudinarian William Gilpin wrote in the late eighteenth century, “in the first place God speaks to us in the *works of creation*.”\(^{39}\) While Emily is ostensibly a French Catholic of the sixteenth century, she behaves like an educated protestant of the Enlightenment era.\(^{40}\) Emily is moved to a state of religious devotion by the sight of nature:

> The breezy freshness of the morning, too, revived her. She raised her thoughts in prayer, which she felt always most disposed to do, when viewing the sublimity of nature, and her mind recovered its strength. (242)

In an appropriately latitudinarian turn of events, Emily’s religious devotion and appreciation of nature results in a calming of her rationalist mind. Blanche, too, appreciates nature through the lens of religious fervor. The formerly cloistered Blanche is emotionally moved by the prospect of the “luxuriant shores of Languedoc and Provence” and by the “majestic Pyrenées” (469), leading her to deliver a passionate speech on the devotional attributes of the exploration of nature:

> Every peasant girl, on my father’s domain, has viewed from her infancy the face of nature; has ranged, at liberty, her romantic wilds, while I have been shut in a cloister from the view of these beautiful appearances, which were

\(^{38}\) Mayhew, 590.

\(^{39}\) William Gilpin, *Sermons Preached to a Country Congregation*, vol. 2 (Lymington: Cadell and Davies, 1799), 126.

designed to enchant all eyes, and awaken all hearts. How can the poor nuns and friars feel the full fervor of devotion, if they never see the sun rise, or set? Never, till this morning, did I know what true devotion is; for, never before did I see the sun sink below the vast earth! To-morrow, for the first time in my life, I will see it rise. O, who would live in Paris, to look upon black walls and dirty streets, when, in the country, they might gaze upon the blue heavens, and all the green earth! (472)

Blanche is later “cheered by the face of living nature,” prompting her thoughts to arise “involuntarily to the Great Author of the sublime objects she contemplated” and leading her to breathe “a prayer of finer devotion, than any she had every uttered beneath the vaulted roof of a cloister” (475). Continuing with her train of latitudinarian theology, upon viewing a daytime scene from her window, Blanche concludes that “God is best pleased with the homage of a grateful heart, and, when we view his glories, we feel most grateful… I need only look on all around me— to adore God in my inmost heart!” (475-476). Radcliffe’s latitudinarian tendencies are demonstrated in the repeated association of the appreciation of nature with religious devotion in the depictions of Emily and Blanche.

Radcliffe’s latitudinarian sympathies also led her to give providence primacy of place within her novels. As Martin Griffin notes, the concept of providence was united with scientific thinking by latitudinarian theologians, who believed that “the rational evaluation of scientific demonstration would inevitably enhance belief in divine providence.”

E. J. Clery has argued that providence is the only remaining

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41 Griffin, 75.
supernatural force in Radcliffe’s gothic narratives. After virtually all of the ghostly or mystical elements in Radcliffe’s gothic narratives have been stripped away through her use of the “explained supernatural,” the one remaining invisible force is the hand of providence:

The most obvious residue of the spiritual after all supposed apparitions have been cleared away is Providence… The appeal to an ‘invisible hand’ was of course a common narrative strategy at the time… But… the lessons of Providence found an ideal vehicle in Gothic fictions where invisible agency constitutes a key mystery to be solved… The bizarre coincidences that are produced to explain the supernatural are not just a technical convenience… but evidence of a higher supernaturalism that ensure every ‘accident’ has its rightful place in the schema of Divine Justice.42

The structure of this mode of gothic writing is a comforting one: the narrative works towards a state of closure and clarity as the apparently ghostly events are explained in actuality to be circumstances of extreme coincidence. This brand of gothic writing thus echoes the early modern “murder pamphlets” in which “divine guidance lies behind the revealing of guilt,”43 as well as anticipating the later organized closure of detective stories, in which the suspicions are cleared away and the truth is revealed. The effective use of the explained supernatural in The Mysteries of Udolpho combined with Emily’s investigative actions marks the novel as a significant text in the history of the literary detective figure. Radcliffe’s use of providence links the early detective narrative to early modern tales of the providential detection of crimes.

42 Clery, 111-112.
43 Knight, Crime Fiction, 4.
Since providence still occupies an active place within the space of the novel, Emily’s failure to elucidate all of the mysteries of the castle does not result in a complete disordering of the developing proto-detective figure. In the context of *Udolfo*, there is still textual space for the explicating force of an investigating providence. Unlike early modern criminal narratives, providence does not appear as an overt, intrusive presence: instead, as argued by Clery, chance and coincidence quietly and neatly explain away the mysteries of the novel.

The *Mysteries of Udolfo* contributed a number of significant elements to the development of the literary detective figure. Emily’s scientific education and rationalist perspective in the midst of superstition depict her as a logical sleuth who is motivated to reveal the true sources of purportedly supernatural occurrences. Her courage in exploring unknown and potentially dangerous regions of the castle of Udolfo adds the attribute of adventure to this early depiction of a literary detective. Emily’s curiosity is not merely an intellectual one: it is paralleled by physical acts of investigation and bravery. Despite her determination, Emily is not able to uncover the truth behind all of the mysterious occurrences within the narrative: the proliferation of mysteries in the novel proves to be too much of a hardship for the emerging literary detective figure.

To fill the void, Radcliffe reintroduces a modified version of the early modern concept of providence, a force which is able to offer improbable, though not impossible, explanations of those mysteries which Emily, as detective, has not been able to provide. As such, it remains within the narrative as the last remaining supernatural force in this post-Enlightenment narrative after the author has swept
away all other ghostly, spiritual, or superstitious explanations. Radcliffe’s inclusion of this concept was probably motivated by her own latitudinarian beliefs, a theological position which posited ongoing providential intervention in human affairs. While Emily remains in the narrative as the central active investigative figure, her success as a detective is limited. Radcliffe employs the theme of providence as investigator, imported from early modern crime narratives, in order to counteract the void left by the developing and thereby not yet fully effective, literary detective figure: this theme is a less prevalent but still present narrative force in this early example of detective fiction. The comforting presence of providence as a benign investigating force is absent from another piece of early detective fiction published in the same year as Udolpho. In Caleb Williams, the early modern concept of the all-seeing eye of providence is co-opted by unethical earthly investigators, who use their omniscience to persecute the innocent.
Caleb Williams (1794)

William Godwin’s *Things As they Are; or, The Adventures of Caleb Williams* (1794) is widely considered to be an early integral text in the history of detective fiction by those critics who delve earlier than Poe in search of the roots of detective fiction. Two early critics of the detective novel genre, Régis Messac⁴⁴ and A. E. Murch,⁴⁵ deem the work to be a proto-mystery novel mainly because of the investigative work of Jones. Julian Symons concurred with these earlier critics, commenting that “the characteristic note of crime literature is first struck in *Caleb Williams*.”⁴⁶ Ian Ousby was the first critic to consider Caleb himself as the central detective figure of the novel, deeming him to be “the first important detective in the English novel.”⁴⁷ Ousby’s assessment of the novel’s significance in the development of the detective novel has been echoed by numerous other critics. Stephen Knight notes that Caleb has “the intelligence, the skills and the determination to be a disciplinary detective,” even though he “has no institutional place from which to operate.”⁴⁸ Philip Shaw considers the novel to be “a significant landmark in the history and genre of early crime fiction,” and suggests that it be “read as a foundational text for the deductive preoccupations of the nineteenth-century ‘detective’ novel.”⁴⁹ Lucy Sussex notes that the text is “hailed as the first novel to

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⁴⁷ Ousby, 20.
feature a detective.”⁵⁰ Charles Rzepka acknowledges the novel’s place as “one of the first English ‘detective’ novels,” which “features a murder, a cover-up, and the framing and execution of two innocent people by Caleb’s otherwise honourable employer.”⁵¹ Michael Cohen views the novel as prophetic, arguing that it “is a remarkably accurate anticipation of what is to come in mystery and detective fiction.”⁵²

The author’s own comments on his method of composition of the novel support the classification of Caleb Williams as an early detective novel. In his 1832 account of the composition of Caleb Williams, Godwin reported that he “invented first the third volume of [his] tale, then the second, and last of all the first.”⁵³ Godwin’s approach to plotting was praised by a later practitioner of the detective story genre. Edgar Allan Poe, writing in 1846, opened his essay on “The Philosophy of Composition” with an anecdote of Charles Dickens mentioning Godwin’s method of composition of Caleb Williams, and proceeded to comment on Godwin’s chronology of writing:

Nothing is more clear than that every plot, worth the name, must be elaborated to its dénouement before any thing be attempted with the pen. It is only with the dénouement constantly in view that we can give a plot its

⁵⁰ Sussex, Women Writers and Detectives, 19.
⁵¹ Rzepka, 55.
indispensable air of consequence, or causation, by making the incidents, and especially the tone at all points, tend to the development of the intention.\textsuperscript{54}

Godwin’s attention to plot resulted in a novel which was successful in holding the attention of contemporary readers: Joseph Gerald reported that he “had received [\textit{Caleb Williams}] late one evening, and had read through the three volumes before he closed his eyes.”\textsuperscript{55} Gerald’s rapid consumption of the novel anticipates W. H. Auden’s twentieth-century confession of his voracious devouring of mystery novels: “if I have any work to do, I must be careful not to get hold of a detective story for, once I begin one, I cannot work or sleep till I have finished it.”\textsuperscript{56} The plot of \textit{Caleb Williams} contains many elements which would ultimately become established features of the detective novel genre, such as suspected murder, concealed secrets, a sleuth figure, and accusations.

Of all the eighteenth-century proto-detective novels considered in this study, Godwin’s offers the most morally fraught representation of investigative activities. Caleb, as narrator, presents himself as an honourable detective figure motivated purely by the pursuit of truth, but the relish with which he receives the opportunity to spy on his employer complicates his status as a completely admirable hero. Beyond the ambiguous characterization of Caleb as detective, Godwin also dramatizes a number of other problematic topics in criminal inquiries during the period, such as the abuse of power in investigations and the problems surrounding evidence. The

\textsuperscript{55} Godwin, “Appendix D: Godwin’s 1832 Account of the Composition of \textit{Caleb Williams},” 352.
absence of providence as a positive detective force working on behalf of justice is felt in the novel: even though Caleb is innocent, he has no powerful, positive omniscient force advocating for him. Instead Falkland, with the assistance of the ever-present Jones, becomes a negative perversion of the all-seeing hand of providence as he relentlessly pursues Caleb. Godwin’s gloomy depiction of detective activities reflects the influence of contemporary events such as the debate over appropriate limits of police power in the 1780s and 1790s. The ethically ambiguous depiction of detective activity in the novel underscores the difficulties in moving from a providential mode of literary detection to an earthly one.

Caleb’s Investigative Nature

Godwin emphasizes Caleb’s inherent curiosity and investigative nature. Despite being given very little education, Caleb has “an inquisitive mind” which “neglect[s] no means of information from conversation or books” (3).57 When describing Caleb’s original employment for Falkland, prior to the commencement of his sleuthing activities, Godwin uses the language of detection and discovery: Caleb is tasked with writing letters dictated by Falkland, many of which “consisted of an analytical survey of the plans of different authors, and conjectural speculations upon hints they afforded, tending either to the detection of their errors or the carrying forward their discoveries [emphasis added]” (5). Caleb’s latent investigative inclinations are aroused after he stumbles upon Falkland looking into a chest and making “a deep groan expressive of intolerable anguish” (6). When Falkland

discovers him, he accuses Caleb of intruding into his personal matters: “you set
yourself as a spy upon my actions” (7). Ironically, while Caleb’s initial discovery of
Falkland was accidental, the situation spurs Caleb to transform himself into a
detective to discover Falkland’s secrets. Caleb’s curiosity prompts him to ask a
fellow servant, Mr. Collins, about Falkland’s past. The first volume of the novel,
while still narrated by Caleb, is purportedly based on the narrative of Falkland’s life
provided by Mr. Collins. Caleb relates the history of the youthful Falkland, in which
his good character is strongly emphasized. Falkland had developed an enemy in
Barnabas Tyrrel, a neighbour who acted callously towards his tenants and relations.
Falkland became highly regarded in the community as he acted to correct Tyrrel’s
immoral actions. Tyrrel’s villainy reaches its peak in the narrative when he imprisons
his blameless niece and ward, Emily Melvile, solely because of her affection for
Falkland. Her incarceration ultimately results in her death. At Emily’s funeral, Tyrrel
physically attacks Falkland: later the same evening, Tyrrel is found murdered in the
street. Falkland is initially considered to be a suspect in the murder, but defends
himself largely on the basis of his good reputation. Incriminating evidence is later
found in the possession of two of Tyrrel’s former tenants, Hawkins and his son, and
the two men are found guilty of the murder. Despite his exoneration, Collins reports
that Falkland’s demeanour was irrevocably altered after the incident:

Though it be several years since these transactions, the impression they made
is for ever fresh in the mind of our unfortunate patron. From thenceforward
his habit became totally different. He had before been fond of public
scenes… He now made himself a rigid recluse. He had no associates, no
friends. Inconsolable himself, he yet wished to treat others with kindness. There was a solemn sadness in his manner, attended with the most perfect gentleness and humanity. Everybody respects him, for his benevolence is unalterable; but there is a stately coldness and reserve in his behaviour, which makes it difficult for those about him to regard him with the familiarity of affection. (102)

Collins attributes Falkland’s newly reclusive nature to his embarrassment over being initially suspected, even though his reputation was ultimately cleared of suspicion: he notes that “no man had ever held his reputation so dear to him as Mr. Falkland” (96) and assumes that his odd demeanour “may be supposed to attend upon an accusation of murder” (102). Caleb seems less charitably inclined than Collins, and slowly begins to suspect that his employer was not as innocent as Collins believes.

Caleb’s imagination is captivated by the story and, at the outset of the second volume of the novel, reveals his inclination to investigate Falkland’s character in greater detail. He analyzes Collins’s tale with the mindset of a thorough and committed sleuth: “the story I had heard was forever in my thoughts… I turned it a thousand ways, and examined it in every point of view” (103). His suspicion is initially spurred by the inconsistent behaviour of Hawkins. Caleb muses: “there was something strange in the character of Hawkins. So firm, so sturdily honest and just, as he appeared at first; all at once to become a murderer!” (104). He quickly turns his attention to Falkland, wondering, “was it possible after all that Mr. Falkland should be the murderer?” (104). Despite his earlier vocal claims about Falkland’s numerous virtues, Caleb swiftly announces his intention to “place myself as a watch upon my
Caleb’s determination to cast himself in the role of amateur detective seems impulsive. Godwin’s depiction of Caleb as detective is not one of a professional, confident sleuth, but a naïve, curious individual who is entering a world of secrets and danger for which he is quite unprepared.

Caleb’s determination to become a detective, or “spy,” is announced with almost childlike glee. He takes great pleasure in creating the role of private investigator for himself:

The instant I had chosen this employment for myself, I found a strange sort of pleasure in it. To do what is forbidden always has its charms, because we have an indistinct apprehension of something arbitrary and tyrannical in the prohibition. To be a spy on Mr. Falkland! That there was danger in the employment served to give an alluring pungency to the choice. (104)

Caleb embarks on a role as an investigator because he finds the allure of the illicit to be appealing. His lack of lofty or ethical motivations is notable: he does not comment on any desire to pursue truth or justice, but instead presents himself as being drawn to the role simply for the adventure. His naïveté is further demonstrated by his comfortable belief that since he was “conscious of meaning no ill,” if “things were brought to the test,” no one “could be seriously angry with me” (105). Godwin constructs Caleb as an immature sleuth who is unprepared to face the consequences of his inquiries.

Caleb’s main mode of detection appears to rely largely on his attempts to manipulate Falkland into incriminating himself. Caleb reports that “my remarks were therefore perpetually unexpected, at one time implying extreme ignorance, and at
another some portion of acuteness, but at all times having an air of innocence, frankness and courage” (105). Caleb’s “air of innocence” masking a mind bent on investigation anticipates the methods of fictional television detective Lieutenant Columbo, who dupes criminals into implicating themselves through his unkempt appearance and seemingly naïve demeanour: “Columbo, with his rumpled coat, beaten car, and bumbling air, evokes contempt from the individuals he is questioning—especially the killer."58 Caleb similarly attempts to create an environment of false security for Falkland: “by my manner he was in a certain degree encouraged to lay aside his usual reserve and relax his stateliness” (105-106), yet his lessened reserve does not extend to Falkland confessing himself as the murderer. Though Caleb is not able to glean any definitive answers from his inquiries to Falkland, he is consumed by his quest for the identity of Tyrrel’s murderer. He becomes addicted to his investigation, even when he has no proof to substantiate his suspicions, admitting “though I could find nothing that I could consider as justifying me in persisting in the shadow of a doubt, yet, as I have said, the uncertainty and restlessness of my contemplations would by no means depart from me” (119). His investigative compulsion swiftly becomes an all-consuming and unhealthy obsession. Caleb’s desire to discover is not matched by his detective prowess: he is unable to satisfy his curiosity through his own powers. Caleb’s limited ability to detect crime is a poor replacement for the all-seeing eye of providence.

Godwin demonstrates how Caleb’s activities as an investigative figure gradually take over his identity, as Caleb tenaciously pursues answers which he

hopes will satisfy his overweening curiosity. Caleb seeks the emotional rewards of intellectual and investigative inquiry, though he is impotent in his abilities to achieve these answers:

Curiosity is a principle that carries its pleasures as well as its pains along with it. The mind is urged by a perpetual stimulus; it seems as if it were continually approaching to the end of its race; and, as the insatiable desire of satisfaction is its principle of conduct, so it promises itself in that satisfaction an unknown gratification, which seems as if it were capable of fully compensating any injuries that may be suffered in the career. (119)

Though Caleb remains in a “constant state of vigilance and suspicion” (119), he is not able to find an answer to his own inquiries under his own power. Caleb’s investigation is ultimately satisfied through a coincidental occurrence which, in an earlier text, would have been overtly accredited to the hand of providence.

The circumstances of Caleb’s discovery of evidence which confirms Falkland’s guilt is filled with numerous convenient coincidences, none of which can be attributed to Caleb’s own skill as an investigator. When a fire in one of the chimneys threatens to destroy Falkland’s house, the servants are tasked with “removing the most valuable moveables to a lawn in the garden” (128). As Caleb participates in the evacuation, his “steps by some mysterious fatality were directed to the private apartment at the end of the library,” a room which contained “the chest mentioned in the first pages” of the narrative (128). The room also conveniently being stocked with “a parcel of chisels and other carpenter’s tools” (128), Caleb seizes the opportunity to break open the chest. His efforts are swiftly rewarded, as
“after two or three efforts, in which the energy of uncontrollable passion was added to my bodily strength, the fastenings gave way, the chest opened, and all that I sought was at once within my reach” (128). Caleb’s investigative triumph is immediately extinguished by the untimely appearance of Falkland, whose “eyes emitted sparks of rage” (129) as soon as he saw Caleb standing over the open chest. Interestingly, the incriminating contents of the chest are never revealed to the reader. Walter Scott admired Godwin’s “skill” with which he “kept up his story while nowhere revealing the contents of Falkland’s chest,”59 while Thomas de Quincey cynically wondered “of what nature could these memorials be? Surely Mr. Falkland would not keep in brandy the gory head of Tyrrel; and anything short of that could not proclaim any murder at all, much less the particular murder.”60 A modern critic has compared the contents of the chest in Caleb Williams to the red herrings used in Alfred Hitchcock detective thrillers: “the trunk, the contents of which are never revealed, functions in the narrative as a Hitchcockian McGuffin, an empty plot device around which the desires of the central characters circulate and towards which they are inexorably drawn.”61 Whatever the contents of the chest, they are enough to confirm to Caleb that Falkland is guilty of the murder of Tyrrel, and sufficient to persuade Falkland into admitting his guilt to Caleb. Falkland confesses, “I am the blackest of villains. I am the murderer of Tyrrel. I am the assassin of the Hawkinses” (131). A conventional text of criminal investigation would end at this point in the narrative: the suspect’s guilt has been confirmed by his own words. Yet Caleb’s

61 Shaw, 363.
investigative tendencies have led him into a reversal of roles. For the remainder of
the narrative, Caleb is cast in the role of the criminal through Falkland’s baseless
accusations, and is dogged by the pursuit of the thief-taker Jones, who prevents
Caleb from enjoying any liberty or security.

Caleb’s tenure as an amateur detective figure is limited in its accomplishments: his major discovery is made as a result of favourable circumstances, but does not occur as a result of his own ingenuity as an investigator. Nonetheless, his success as a detective figure is ultimately acknowledged by the subject of Caleb’s inquiry himself. Falkland admits at the close of the novel, during his conversation with an imprisoned Caleb, that “I stand now completely detected” (301). Though Caleb’s methods are rudimentary and often fruitless, his investigation does eventually result in Falkland’s admission of guilt. Falkland confesses his guilt to the magistrate, pronouncing that “I am prepared to suffer all the vengeance of the law. You cannot inflict on me more than I deserve. You cannot hate me more than I hate myself. I am the most execrable of all villains…” (302) as he commits himself to the custody of the state, and dies in prison within three days. Yet Caleb’s victory as a detective is hollow, as Falkland’s admission of guilt does not fulfill Caleb with the triumph that he had earlier predicted. Caleb ruminates:

I have been his murderer… I thought that, if Falkland were dead, I should return once again to all that makes life worth possessing. I thought that, if the guilt of Falkland were established, fortune and the world would smile upon my efforts. Both these events are accomplished, and I am miserable. (302)
Godwin troubles the comfortable narrative of truth being victoriously revealed through Caleb’s lack of satisfaction at the outcome of his investigation. In earlier providential narratives which revealed the identity of a criminal, the ethics were uncomplicated—the divine and moral hand of providence worked to produce an uncomplicated justice. In contrast, Caleb considers himself to have “wantonly inflicted upon [Falkland] an anguish a thousand times worth than death” (302) through his relentless investigation of his master’s past crimes while ignoring Falkland’s many virtues. In Godwin’s pessimistic narrative of detection, the human being investigating the crime is as fallible as the human being who had perpetrated it.

Godwin’s original, unpublished manuscript ending offers a significantly bleaker outcome to Caleb’s investigative activities. The alternate ending features Caleb accusing Falkland of his crimes in open court, in front of an unsympathetic magistrate who assumes that Caleb has made this legal appearance in order to “repent [his own] villainy” (305). In this version of the novel’s end, Falkland does not admit to the murder of Tyrrel: when Caleb asserts that he “had had the confession from his own mouth,” Falkland counters that “he had made no such confession, for he had no such confession to make” (307). D. Gilbert Dumas noted that the original ending “gives us a triumphant Falkland, secure in position and reputation, and an insane, broken Caleb,” a conclusion which supports “the political doctrine beneath the story’s surface” and accentuates “the work’s propagandistic impact” as Godwin’s critique of the legal system. In contrast, the revised ending emphasizes the novel’s role as an “example of the detective novel” as the “subject of

detection” is moved from Caleb to Falkland. The revised ending softens the impact of Godwin’s novelistic treatise on corrupt justice, but also has the effect of heightening the novel’s status as an early detective novel through its revelation of the guilt of the accused.

Subverting the Eye of Providence: The Secularization of Detection

Godwin’s post-providential narrative is informed by earlier literary representations of the providential detection of crime. Godwin himself notes that, amongst his other literary sources for the novel, he drew upon early modern tales of providential investigative activity:

I read other authors, that I might see what they had done, or more properly, that I might forcibly hold my mind and occupy my thoughts in a particular train, I and my predecessors travelling in some sense to the same goal… I turned over the pages of a tremendous compilation, entitled “God’s Revenge against Murder,” where the beam of the eye of Omniscience was represented as perpetually pursuing the guilty, and laying open his most hidden retreats to the light of day.

The conventional narrative of providentially-achieved truth and revelation is subverted in Godwin’s pessimistic narrative of the realities of eighteenth-century investigation and law enforcement. Godwin reverses an earlier trope: rather than providence pursuing the guilty in aid of justice, the guilty Falkland, who has

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64 Godwin, “Appendix D: Godwin’s 1832 Account of the Composition of Caleb Williams,” 351.
confessed his crime of murder, relentlessly pursues the innocent Caleb. Godwin’s use of a human in a dark variation of the role of providence is a significant transitional innovation which supported the development of the detective narrative in the period.

The extent of Falkland’s power and influence is virtually godlike. In an attempt to intimidate Caleb after confessing his crime of murder, Falkland casts himself in the role of an omnipotent and angry deity:

Young man, take warning! ... Why do you trifle with me? You little suspect the extent of my power. At this moment you are surrounded with the engines of my vengeance, and before you are aware they will close upon you. You might as well think of escaping from the reach of the omnipresent God, as from mine! (140)

His threat is not an empty one, as demonstrated by his relentless persecution of Caleb throughout the latter part of the novel. Falkland and his agent Jones fulfill his prophecy of omnipotent pursuit, resulting in Caleb’s decline. Caleb laments their apparently limitless power:

But the change of my name, the abruptness with which I removed from place to place, the remoteness and the obscurity which I proposed to myself in the choice of my abode, were all insufficient to elude the sagacity of Jones, or the unrelenting constancy with which Mr. Falkland incited my tormentor to pursue me. Whithersoever I removed myself, it was not long before I had occasion to perceive this detected adversary in my rear. No words can enable me to do justice to the sensations which this circumstance produced in me. It
was like what has been described of the eye of omniscience pursuing the
guilty sinner… No walls could hide me from the discernment of this hated
foe. (284)

Even though Falkland is the murderer in the narrative, the early modern eye of
providence does not follow him. Rather, it is Falkland’s own unrelenting gaze which
is fixed on the victimized Caleb. By reversing the early modern providential
narrative of criminal discovery, Godwin has created an early dystopian detective
narrative, in which there is no external recourse for the innocent to access legal
means of justice. The justice-seeking eye of providence in early modern tales of
criminal investigation has been appropriated by the guilty party, who uses
omniscience to torment the innocent.

Falkland’s association with the role of providence is not wholly evil:
Falkland’s innately good qualities suggest to Caleb, and the reader, that he may
eventually be persuaded to use his providential power to help, rather than hinder,
Caleb. The qualities of mercy and forgiveness, attributes commonly associated with
a benevolent providence, are hoped for in Falkland’s character as well. Caleb
perpetually anticipates pity from Falkland, as he views Falkland’s pursuit of him to
be contrary to his master’s innately virtuous character. In one example, Caleb muses:

I had always placed some confidence in the returning equity of Mr. Falkland.
Though he persecuted me with bitterness, I could not help believing that he
did it unwillingly, and I was persuaded it would not be for ever. A man,
whose original principles had been so full of rectitude and honour, could not
fail at some time or other to recollect the injustice of his conduct, and to remit
his asperity. (218)
This contrast between Falkland’s moral character and his actions echoes the inherent
contradiction in the legal systems of religious nations. Mr. Raymond, captain of the
band of thieves who takes in an injured Caleb, comments on the inconsistency
between the forgiving nature of providence and the inflexible nature of the English
legal system:

God, we are told, judges of men by what they are at the period of judgment,
and, whatever be their crimes, if they have seen and abjured the folly of those
crimes, receives them to favour. But the instructions of countries that profess
to worship this God, admit no such distinctions. They leave no room for
amendment, and seem to have a brutal delight in confounding the demerits of
the offenders. It signifies not what the character of the individual is at the
hour of trial. How changed, how spotless, and how useful avails him nothing.
(220-221)
Falkland does eventually relent and confess, though this event occurs only in the
published ending of the novel, and, as noted earlier, is absent from Godwin’s
alternate manuscript ending. Regardless, Falkland’s confession occurs too late in the
narrative to help Caleb’s suffering: by the novel’s end, Caleb is consumed with guilt
over his own investigation of Falkland’s criminal background, and laments his
“misjudging and abhorred intervention” (303) in his master’s affairs. Falkland’s
limited repentance is of little benefit to Caleb: while his power in pursuit of Caleb
easily matches the all-seeing eye of providence, the virtues of his character do not
likewise equal the mercy of a forgiving providential force for good. Similarly, Raymond’s comments on the inadequate compassion of the English legal system indicate that state-sponsored law enforcement cannot measure up to the providential ideal of both justice and mercy united in equal parts. This concern of keeping human-driven investigations balanced and honourable was a difficulty faced by English society over the eighteenth century, and Godwin dramatizes the problem in literary form in his proto-detective narrative.

Abuse of Power by Investigators

Godwin’s pessimistic narrative of eighteenth-century investigation emphasizes ethical issues in the practicality of criminal investigations: particularly, the abuse of power by the investigator. As the plot of the novel shifts to focus on Falkland’s accusations and pursuit of Caleb, the narrative presents a situation of a persecuted innocent who has no legal recourse to denounce unfair accusations made against him. Falkland’s wealth, position in the community, and prior reputation arm him with considerable social power. Even though his accusations against Caleb are baseless, he is able to construct such a convincing narrative of Caleb’s supposed villainy that Caleb’s reputation and, ultimately, life are ruined. Falkland’s fictional abuse of investigative power echoes the debates over the role and limits of state-sponsored police forces in England during the 1780s and 1790s.

Prime Minister William Pitt had introduced the 1785 London and Westminster Police Bill in an attempt to combat the rising crime rate and address concerns over public safety, particularly in the wake of the Gordon Riots of 1780.
The bill proposed sweeping changes to the structure of law enforcement in England, with the intention of “offering a comprehensive system of ‘vigilance and prevention’” through the formalization of the police force. Lobbyists in favour of an increased police presence envisioned “the establishment of a new police force that could increase the level of surveillance through the city [of London] and across the country,” supported by “a nationwide network of ‘police clerks’ charged with maintaining records of the residence and movements of every inhabitant.” The bill was met with considerable popular and political opposition, as citizens feared a powerful police force could be rife with the potential for abuse if it employed any corrupt individual law-enforcement officers. The Lord Mayor of London, for example, feared that if Pitt’s bill were successfully passed, it would create:

A system of police altogether new and arbitrary in the extreme, creating, without necessity, new officers, invested with extraordinary and dangerous powers, enforced by heavy penalties, and expressly exempted from those checks, and that responsibility, which the wisdom of the law has hitherto thought necessary to accompany every extraordinary power.

The fear of extraordinary power potentially held by the state echoes Falkland’s extraordinary power in his pursuit of Caleb. As Quentin Bailey notes, Caleb Williams reflects Godwin’s “concerns about the development of a shadowy new

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66 Bailey, 536.
67 Defense of the Police Bill: In Answer to a Charge Delivered by W. Mainwaring (London: John Stockdale, 1786), iii.
The novel reflects Godwin’s anxiety that pure power, rather than truth or justice, is more likely to flourish under the new proposed system of policing. Even though Caleb’s suspicions of Falkland are proved to be true, Caleb’s success as a detective figure is limited: in contrast, Falkland is highly effective in his dogged pursuit of Caleb, even though Caleb is innocent of any crime.

While Pitt’s 1785 bill was overturned, the 1792 Middlesex Justices Act was successfully passed two years prior to the publication of Godwin’s novel. This successor to the 1785 bill allowed “constables, watch men, or other interested parties to arrest ‘divers ill-disposed and suspected persons’ and have them summarily imprisoned as ‘Rogues and Vagabonds.’” Such an act had obvious implications for misinterpretation and abuse by corrupt investigative figures: Charles Fox warned that the new act created a “power pregnant with abuse” and argued that arresting a citizen based solely on reputation, without evidence, was “against all the principles of criminal justice whatever–repugnant to the very essence of the law of England.”

The potential for abuse of the Middlesex Justices Act is dramatized in Caleb Williams. Godwin satirizes the language and spirit of the bill when Caleb is arbitrarily arrested on the basis of his appearance:

It was clear that I was a vagabond and suspicious person… Perhaps after all I should turn out to be the felon in question. But, if I was not that, [the justice] had no doubt I was worse; a poacher, or for what he knew a murderer. He had

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68 Bailey, 525.
69 Bailey, 537.
a kind of notion that he had seen my face before about some such affair; out
of all doubt I was an old offender. (237)

The justice is not obliged to gather any proof of misconduct or evidence in order to
arrest Caleb. The lack of physical proof is in direct opposition to early modern crime
narratives, which emphasized the primacy of evidentiary proof. Within the early
modern narratives of providential investigation of crime, the involvement of
providence generally resulted in the convenient revelation of a key physical piece of
evidence, such as a murder weapon, footprints, or other incriminating proof, with
“hidden evidence seen only by God… thus externalized to make it visible to the eyes
of the law.”71 Though the discovery of such evidence may have had a supernatural
provenance, the evidence itself in these stories was clearly indicated to offer physical
proof of guilt. In Godwin’s post-providential narrative, Caleb is arrested solely on
the basis of his appearance, not as a consequence of any logical evidence or proof.
The arbitrary nature of Caleb’s incarceration paints a bleak picture of law-
enforcement practices in late-eighteenth-century England, suggesting that
Enlightenment advances in the gathering and analysis of evidence were being
ignored in favour of subjective judgments by those occupying positions of power.

Godwin’s Caleb Williams makes a number of notable contributions to the
development of the literary detective figure. Caleb chooses to pursue an active
investigation of Falkland, motivated purely by curiosity and a desire to discover the
truth in his self-appointed role as a “spy.” Falkland displays a negative omniscience,
which demonstrates a perversion of the early modern trope of benign providence as

an active investigator. Falkland’s abuse of power in his pursuit of Caleb echoes contemporary concerns related to the growing judicial powers of new forms of law enforcement in the 1780s and 1790s. In a broader sense, the novel troubles the developing narrative of the act of investigation as being inherently good. While Emily St. Aubert’s rationalizing influence is a welcome investigating presence in the myth-ridden *Mysteries of Udolpho*, the detective activities of both Caleb and Falkland are destructive and morally dubious. The investigative tendencies of both characters result in lives being spoiled without achieving any recognizable justice as a result of their investigations. Falkland does confess his crime to the authorities, but his confession occurs too late in the narrative to salvage the damage he has done to Caleb’s reputation and life. Investigation is demonstrated to be a destructive force within the narrative.

Godwin’s novel suggests that the literary detective figure has the potential to be impotent as a representative of ethical justice, and may instead uses his power to act as a destructive force upon those whom he investigates. The negative characterization of the literary detective figure is due in large part to Caleb’s lack of legitimate motives and his resulting lack of morally authorized investigative power in his investigation of Falkland. He is motivated not by ideals of justice nor personal involvement, but merely by intrusive curiosity.

As the literary detective figure developed, authors sought to insert either a personal or professional motivation to spur on their characters’ investigative activities. In two novels published in the closing years of the long eighteenth century,
their authors successfully created literary detective figures who, in contrast to Caleb Williams, possessed legitimate and laudable reasons to investigate.
Chapter 3: The Rise of the Professional and Amateur Detective

The anonymously published *Richmond; or, Scenes in the Life of a Bow Street Officer, Drawn Up from His Private Memoranda* (1827) was the first English novel to feature a professional sleuth as the protagonist. The eponymous sleuth investigates multiple different crimes, of varying severity, over the course of this picaresque novel. Edward Bulwer-Lytton’s *Pelham; or, the Adventures of a Gentleman* (1828) features the first amateur sleuth in English literature: he employs forensic knowledge as well as successful surveillance and evidence-gathering techniques in order to prove the innocence of a friend accused of murder. These two novels, published within a year of one another, helped to establish the dedicated detective figure as a viable main character for a novel.

The novels contain notable similarities beyond their time of publication. Both are narrated in the first person by the central sleuth character: this serves the dual function of making the protagonist sympathetic to the reader as well as restricting the reader’s knowledge in the narrative to only those items which the detective himself knows. While Richmond and Pelham are both perceptive investigators, the developing figure of the literary detective figure is limited in knowledge: though the figure occupies the narrative role previously inhabited by providence, the detective himself is not omniscient. Both detectives seek to rationalize the world around them through a narrative emphasis on physical evidence, adept interrogation, and physical bravery when faced with danger.

The early proto-detective figures of Emily St. Aubert and Caleb Williams achieved only limited success in their investigations: in contrast, Tom Richmond and
Henry Pelham are more fully developed detectives who are actively able to investigate, deduce, and reach accurate conclusions in their narratives. This development towards a fully functioning detective figure marks a significant achievement in the literary transition from the early modern, providentially-driven investigation of crime towards post-Enlightenment human detectives who employ new methods of detection, analysis, and forensic evidence.

*Richmond* is strongly influenced by the historical reality of policing as experienced by members of the Bow Street Runners. Tom Richmond is a likeable rogue, who transforms a youth filled with pranks, petty theft, and consorting with gypsies into a successful career as a Bow Street Runner. His criminal acquaintances and dubious background connect him with the earlier dual criminal-investigator character of Jonathan Wild, but Richmond is a softer, considerably more sympathetic detective figure. His high-mindedness, lack of mercenary motivation, and chivalry serve to characterize him as a more palatable public detective figure than Wild.

Bulwer-Lytton’s *Pelham* features a gentleman sleuth who, unlike Tom Richmond, does not pursue detective work as a profession. Instead, Henry Pelham is compelled to investigate a murder because his friend, and prospective brother-in-law, is accused of the crime. Pelham uses the knowledge gained through his education as a gentleman in order to collect evidence, discover witnesses, and display physical bravery by breaking into a house of thieves in disguise in order to abduct a key witness. The character of Pelham enjoys considerable advantages which are derived from his social standing and privileged background: while the character of Tom Richmond is still influenced by the literary connection to thief-takers, Pelham is able
to stand as a successful early detective figure who is socially above reproach.
Pelham’s respectability marks a significant change in the history of the literary
detective figure.
**Richmond (1827)**

*Richmond; or, Scenes in the Life of a Bow Street Officer, Drawn Up from His Private Memoranda* was published by Henry Colburn, a prolific publisher. The authorship of the novel is contested: it has been attributed to both Thomas Skinner Surr (1770-1847) and Thomas Gaspey (1788-1871).\(^1\) The protagonist, Tom Richmond, occupies an awkward cultural position. He is a quasi-rogue, quasi-judicial figure who, drawn from a background of petty crime, uses his existing abilities to propel himself into a career as a Bow Street Runner. Richmond represents a narrative innovation: the character of a sympathetic, successful, professional fictional detective figure. The rise of the professional detective in literature is of particular significance because it provided an orderly, state-authorized voice of lawful authority to the burgeoning genre of detective fiction.

A number of critics have commented upon Richmond’s significant role in the history of the development of the literary detective figure. Ian Ousby notes that the novel contained the earliest professional detective in English literature: “*Richmond* for the first time made a police detective the hero of the story and his work its main subject.”\(^2\) The editor of the twentieth-century edition of the novel, E. F. Bleiler, considers Richmond to be “the first conscious collection of detective novels in English,” and asserts that the author demonstrates a “clear perception of a new literary form.”\(^3\) Since the novel did not meet with substantial popular acclaim upon

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2 Ousby, 59.
its original publication, some critics have dismissed it as largely irrelevant to the
history of the detective novel. Heather Worthington regards the novel as “a juvenile
text… situated between the ‘infancy’ of policing in its semi-feudal form with parish
constables and watchmen, and its ‘coming of age’ as the New Metropolitan Police.”
Stephen Knight briefly takes note of Richmond in his survey of crime fiction from
1800 onwards, but dismisses the novel as “a false start in detective-focused crime
fiction,” based largely on its lukewarm contemporary reception. In contrast to the
position taken by Worthington and Knight, this study contends that the novel
contains significant narrative innovation, and represents a crucial link in the
development of the literary detective figure.

Tom Richmond occupies a liminal space: caught between the lawlessness of
eighteenth-century criminal narratives, he points towards but does not quite achieve
the tidy narratives of nineteenth-century criminal investigation. The novel
illuminates problems faced by Bow Street Runners in the pursuit of their
investigations, such as limited resources, social suspicion, and interactions with
criminal informants. The Bow Street Runners, founded by magistrate and novelist
Henry Fielding, exemplified the first attempt to regularize and centralize
investigative efforts in England. The character of Tom Richmond combines the
growing professionalization and legitimation of police work with the established
literary tradition of detective as rogue, cemented by earlier representations of the
thief-taker Jonathan Wild. These competing narrative tendencies in the

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characterization of Richmond result in his being depicted as a successful, methodical, ethical investigative figure who is nonetheless ostracized by polite society because of his chosen profession.

This section will provide a brief historical overview of the Bow Street Runners, and will consider to what degree Richmond’s fictionalized version of the work of the Runners was representative of historical reality. As the first professional detective figure in English literature, Tom Richmond is an inheritor of the earlier tradition of literary investigators, but this character also introduces crucial new elements to the literary process of solving crimes. Some of these narrative innovations were inspired by the actual police work undertaken by the Bow Street Runners.

The Bow Street Runners: A Brief Historical Overview

The earliest sustained fictionalized account of the Bow Street Runners did not appear until the sunset years of the organization: the Runners gradually began to lose their autonomy as a police force with the introduction of the Metropolitan Police Act of 1829. The Bow Street office continued to operate as a supplementary detective force for the following decade, though with diminished powers, and the office was ultimately disbanded in August 1839. When Richmond was published in 1827, it was a fictionalized memoir of a detective force which was already being displaced by a new structure of policing. The fact that the Bow Street Runners were gradually losing their cultural power may have contributed to the creation of a positive textual

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6 Cox, 218.
7 Cox, 219, 224-225.
representation of a professional detective figure for the first time: stripped of actual power and threat to the readership, Tom Richmond is able to relate his various crime-solving adventures for purely recreational, non-threatening purposes.

Tom Richmond was the first Bow Street Runner to appear as a fictional protagonist, but he was not the first to be featured within the pages of a novel. Bow Street Runner John Townsend, or Townshend, for example, was mentioned by name in Thomas Skinner Surr’s *A Winter in London; or, Sketches of Fashion* (1806): “Townshend, before whose piercing eye the disguised pickpocket, and the noble bearer of a forged ticket, tremble alike with terror of detection.”

Townsend was a particularly well-known Runner, who had begun his career as a principal officer in 1781 and was given responsibility for the security of the royal family during public engagements from 1792 to 1831. As one of the most famous members of the Bow Street office, Townsend may have served as an inspiration for Tom Richmond. Just as much of Tom’s success as an investigator is attributed to his connections to the criminal underworld, Townsend too had a “reputation for efficiency based on a detailed knowledge of the criminal fraternity.”

The Bow Street Runners were formed in the middle of the eighteenth century, in response to a public perception of swelling crime waves. They were established under the direction of Henry Fielding (1707-1754): Fielding became a Westminster magistrate in October 1748, and had charge of the magistrate’s house in Bow Street,
Covent Garden. His position as an urban magistrate was a particularly arduous one which exposed him to a wide variety of crime in the capital: he served as “a specially-appointed urban magistrate with a heavier workload and correspondingly higher level of government financial support and judicial power than his gentleman-amateur counterparts in the country.” Fielding oversaw a variety of troubling court cases, “a horrid parade of thieves and cheats, robbers and murderers, rapists… many who reveled in cruelty, who battered women and ravished children.” The levels of violent crime had increased from 1748 onwards, with the conclusion of the war of the Austrian succession: “the common experience in the eighteenth century that the end of a long war abroad meant an increase in prosecutions for property crime at home, much of it conducted with violence” was proven true, with many “robberies and other violent offences in and around the capital” occurring in the months immediately following the signing of the peace treaty. Nicholas Rogers notes that the exceptionally high rates of crime from 1748 to 1753 led to “new forms of containment and surveillance, including stipendiary magistrates, policemen, penitentiaries, and large workhouses.” The formation of the Bow Street Runners was part of a larger response to the social problem of sudden and extreme increased violence in London and beyond. Propelled by his own knowledge of violent crime in the capital gained as a magistrate, Fielding developed an interest in the reform of the

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law-enforcement system. He published *An Enquiry into the Causes of the Late Increase of Robbers, with Some Proposals for Remediying this Growing Evil* in 1751, in which he outlined his view of dramatic increase in crime in England, concluding with a fervent exhortation to action:

> Upon the whole something should be, nay must be done, or much worse
> Consequences than have hitherto happened, are very soon to be apprehended.
> Nay, as the Matter now stands, not only Care for the Public Safety, but common Humanity, exacts our Concern on this Occasion…”

In his own attempt to improve public safety, Fielding had begun to assemble “a group of men to devote themselves to seeking out and apprehending serious offenders and bringing them to Bow Street for examination and commitment to trial” in the winter of 1749-1750. Fielding had observed that victims received limited help from existing law enforcement, and that criminals had little fear of apprehension. To counteract the weakness of state-sponsored law enforcement, Fielding developed a police force within his Bow Street office composed of “men willing to undertake the dangerous task of finding and apprehending violent offenders.” The Bow Street Runners were developed and expanded under the direction of John Fielding (1721-1780), Henry’s half-brother and successor as magistrate of the Bow Street office after Henry’s death. The Bow Street Runners were the most influential police force in England for the second half of the

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eighteenth century, but their primacy was eventually displaced by the establishment of the Metropolitan Police near the end of the long eighteenth century.

Tom Richmond’s career as a Bow Street Runner, as narrated in his supposed memoirs, is a life full of adventure. The novel is constructed as a nostalgic view of an older type of law enforcement, under a model which was rapidly becoming obsolete by the time of the novel’s publication in 1827. The narrative distance allows the author to romanticize the protagonist as a roguish though sympathetic detective figure, who applies his irregular education to the task of investigating a wide variety of crimes during his career as a Bow Street Runner.

“Well suited to my habits”: The Detective Education of Tom Richmond

The generally favourable depiction of Tom’s character and skills contribute to the progressively positive development of the detective figure: nonetheless, a few remaining roguish tendencies, along with his lower-class connections, link him to less savoury early detective figures such as Jonathan Wild. Tom is depicted as an adventurer who pursues a number of different paths before settling on his career as a Bow Street Runner. His previous employment proves to be useful to him during his later investigative work. Tom is suited to the life of an investigator since he enjoys a variety of exploits and appears to thrive in a changeable environment. In this text, the detective is constructed as an adventurer who works on the proper side of the law but nonetheless lives an unsettled life of vagary which may be perceived as being uncannily close to that of the criminals he investigates.
Early in the narrative, Tom demonstrates his preference for excitement and variety over stability. He chooses to abandon life as a merchant’s clerk, his father’s intended career for him, as he resents “regular hours in the counting house” and dislikes the “the very names of invoices, ledgers, and bills of lading… [and] long[s] to escape from their dry and revolting details” (26). He instead pursues employment as a strolling player, in order to achieve more adventure in his life. He is excited by the tales told by his acquaintance, actor Jem Bucks, and is drawn to pursue a career on the stage:

I listened to the stories he told of his adventures with the utmost avidity, and my highest ambition was to follow a similar career. I absolutely longed to get to some place where we could begin life… My longing for adventure was sooner gratified than I expected. (27)

Though Richmond does not stay long in his brief but successful career as an actor, his desire for excitement lays the foundation for his later career as a Bow Street Runner. He chooses to befriend a troupe of travelling gypsies, in whose company he experiences a number of adventures: “I spent more than a year among the gipsies, and several more in subsequent wandering and adventure” (125). His desire for an unusual mode of life contributes to his eventual selection of a career as a Bow Street Runner: his preference for a varied occupation portrays the detective figure as one who is willing to live outside socially conventional norms. Richmond’s desire for adventure is a single narrative thread which connects this picaresque novel, and it

19 Parenthetical citations in this section refer to Richmond; or, Scenes in the Life of a Bow Street Officer, Drawn Up from His Private Memoranda, ed. Gary Kelly (London: Pickering and Chatto, 2008).
ultimately leads him to the career of professional detective. When he eventually
decides to “obtain some settled occupation” which would prevent him from “the
uncertainty of a precarious livelihood” (126), Richmond is indecisive, as none of the
professions he considers fulfill his desire for adventure and freedom. Richmond’s
recurring desire for adventure marks the early detective figure as a heroic and
exciting, if irregular, character.

Tom’s selection of a career as a professional detective, which occurs at the end of the first volume of this three-volume novel, is largely predicated on his expectation that it will fulfill his desire for variety. His choice of occupation is once more influenced by Jem Bucks, who makes another brief appearance in the narrative in order to serve as a recruiter for the Bow Street Runners:

I was one day musing on these various prospects in St. James’s Park, when, to my great surprise, my old friend Jem Bucks came up to me, dressed in a spruce blue coat and scarlet waistcoat. I had not seen him since we parted in the alehouse at Lancaster…. Bucks, like myself, had soon left the players… and was now on the establishment at Bow Street.

On mentioning my present difficulties, he proposed that I should become one of them. This was precisely what accorded with the views I had been forming of a life, partly regular and partly adventurous. It was well suited to my habits, to what I may call the education I had been receiving, to my connexion with the gipsies, with whom I continued to keep up a good understanding; and I at once embraced his proposal. (126)
The life of a professional detective is presented in the narrative as an enterprising one, which does not require the regular schedule and office attendance of other professions. Tom’s desire for adventure motivates him to pursue the career of a Bow Street Runner, and thus to develop into the first professional detective in English literature. The early professional detective figure, thus, is inextricably linked with a desire for excitement as a primary motivator for investigation. A desire for justice is a secondary corollary of Tom’s choice of career.

The novel portrays Tom’s lower-class connections and experiences as integral to his success as a Bow Street Runner. The early professional investigative figure is thus portrayed as intrinsically plebeian. Tom possesses the useful ability to conceal himself, experience gained while in hiding during his boyish pranks: “I carefully and cautiously, therefore, threaded the narrow openings among the furze, and pried into every corner, as I used to do in my boyhood when bird-nesting” (143). Skills gained as a strolling actor or as a travelling companion to a group of gypsies assist him with his investigations. He shrewdly recognizes that his social connections to the gypsies would provide him with an advantage in gleaning information in his new role, as the gypsies, “from their wandering life, and their almost universal connections over the kingdom… had extraordinary means of procuring intelligence” (70-71). During his training as an actor, he developed the ability to don convincing disguises and adopt various accents. Tom regularly goes undercover, using his prior experience to take on convincing roles: “according to my invariable practice, I took care not to let Farmer Flindal know who I was, nor what business I was upon…” (176). Tom’s employment of disguises was not solely a fictional creation: it was
based in the reality of the Bow Street Runners. John Beattie reports that disguise was
used as an official part of the Bow Street Runners’ work and any costs associated
with it were reimbursed as work expenses: there are a number of recorded expenses
for “disguise habbits for the pursuers.”

The professional detective is represented as a working-class character in this novel, since it appears to be Tom’s lower-class
experiences and connections which make him successful as a Bow Street Runner.

The fictional construction of professional detective work as irregular and
adventuresome is reflective of public perceptions of detectives, for good and bad, of
the period. Bow Street Runners were regarded with some suspicion as a result of
their chosen occupation. The diverse background which the author created for the
fictional Tom Richmond bears some similarity to the actual background of an
average Bow Street Runner. Most of the Runners were drawn from modest
backgrounds, like that of Richmond: a few Runners were recruited because of their
previous experience as constables, while others were drawn from backgrounds as
divergent as those of apprentices, shoemakers, sadlers, pastry-cooks, and hatters.

As Martin Kayman notes, in Richmond “the Runners present a petit-bourgeois means
of modernizing the life of the rogue by furnishing an institutional context which
retrospectively justifies [Tom Richmond’s] roguish qualities.” The trope of life
education in preparation for later investigative work is also seen in Pelham, and will
be discussed in the following section of this chapter.

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23 Kayman, 112.
**Roguery and Detection: Richmond as Investigator**

*Richmond* is a picaresque novel, which features the hero in a number of loosely-connected adventures. The protagonist emphasizes his love for adventure, and thereby presents his detective exploits as fodder for excitement and entertainment rather than as serious cause for concern. He expresses a strong, “insatiable” desire for “mingling in the bustle of the world” and observing “the eccentricities of life” (132). His interest in being a Bow Street Runner is motivated primarily by opportunities for active investigative work, as he takes “but little interest in the petty routine of the office” (172). The episodic nature of the novel also lends credence to the claim of its being a memoir: it presents itself as being reflective of the reality of policing, which would feature numerous cases of uneven and varying interest or length. The multiple criminal cases investigated by Richmond offers a contrast to earlier novels, such as *The Mysteries of Udolpho* and *Caleb Williams*, which featured one main, central mystery to be investigated by an amateur hero or heroine.

Bow Street Runners were widely understood to possess specialized scientific investigative knowledge: as a fictionalized Runner, Tom also displays these analytical abilities. John Beattie reports that:

…by the late eighteenth century [the Runners] had as a group decades of experience of investigating crimes and chasing suspects across the metropolis and indeed the country… [Particularly complicated cases with] no leads were occasionally solved by the runners’ investigations of crime scenes—investigations in which experience and common sense were their most
important aids in turning up useful forensic evidence… Being frequently in the witness box and having to deal with the aggressive questioning of defence counsel must have developed the runners’ sense of the kind of evidence that was useful in court and thus taught them what to look for in investigations of crime scenes.”

Runners possessed “skills in examining crime locations, finding and interviewing witnesses, and checking alibis more carefully and systematically than had been done in the past.” They helped to regularize the emerging profession of policing through the application of their specialized knowledge. Richmond similarly displays considerable tact in interviewing witnesses, as well as having a realistic understanding of the limits of witness testimony: “I learned by degrees (for you can never get a straight-forward story in such cases)…” (133).

As an early detective figure, Richmond seeks to unite physical evidence with psychological motivation. The Bow Street Runners were regarded as thorough investigators and the fictional depiction of Richmond as a Runner mirrors their general reputation: the Runners’ “growing respectability enhanced their credibility… jurors knew that they were active and knowledgeable investigators... [high levels of detailed] investigation was expected of them, part of the persuasion that they possessed skill and special knowledge.”

Tom Richmond, likewise, displays forensic ability throughout his investigations. He pays particular attention to the details of crime scenes he investigates, noting that “every circumstance, however

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slight soever it might be, was now made ground of suspicion” (140). He collects clues and subjects them to detailed analysis:

Upon examining this, we found… that it was a boy’s cap, of elegant make and fine materials… my instructions bore that little William had a dark-blue cloth cap of this very fashion, with his name written on the silk lining. I had little doubt, indeed, that this was the identical cap… (139)

Richmond also places considerable emphasis on the issue of motive, asking, “But what could be the motives for such a deed?” (142) and noting that “the motive for the whole transaction was wrapt in mystery” (154). Charles Rzepka notes that the novel displays innovative detective techniques: “the author of Richmond is ahead of his time in the attention he gives to detection through inference and induction.”27 The author’s emphasis on clues results in Richmond being depicted as a product of scientifically-motivated Enlightenment thought, a literary detective figure who represents responsible police work through the gathering of incontrovertible physical evidence. This narrative construct is indebted to the earlier body of work on the Elizabeth Canning case, which emphasized the primacy of physical evidence and its interpretation.

The novel depicts members of the professional police as being dedicated and reliable. One of the notable innovations of the Bow Street Runners was their swift response to reports of criminal activity, and this commitment is noted in Richmond. Tom’s schedule as a Bow Street Runner is irregular, and requires that he be prepared to respond to reports of criminal activity at any time. In one case, he is sitting down

27 Rzepka, 67.
to a warm dinner when he is interrupted by his colleague who is summoning him urgently to the office:

I had ordered something hot for supper; and, alone as I was, intended to regale myself over a rummer of mulled ale, with a glass of brandy therein. I was not, however, destined to enjoy any of these good things; for just as I was about to send a despatch for my ale, I heard Jem Bucks on the stairs below…

“Tom, I say, Tom, my boy! You’re wanted at the shop in no time. Quick, I say!”

And in he bustled, panting and blowing; for in his haste he had outrun his wind.

“What is all this?” said I. “What is the matter?”

“Some great affair I take it,” said Jem. “There’s such a to-do, you’ve no notion… you’re to be in it, that’s all; and I was despatched express to find you.” (132)

The depiction of Tom being interrupted at any time in order to pursue an investigation is an accurate depiction of the work experience of the Bow Street Runners. The men who pursued this career needed to possess, like their fictional counterpart, a willingness to abandon regular work hours in favour of adventure. They worked an irregular schedule of shift work and were kept on notice to work at any time: “the runners commonly acted as soon as the report of an offence reached the office… Much of the successful detection and apprehension of suspected offenders by Bow Street officers depended on the rapid collection and
communication of information about the offence.”  

In 1754, John Fielding had placed a notice in the _Public Advertiser_ that promised that, when a crime was reported at Bow Street, “a ‘Set of Brave Fellows’ would be immediately dispatched in pursuit of the offenders, and not only to any part of London, but any part of the kingdom, and that on a quarter of an hour’s notice.”  

Tom, similarly, fulfills Fielding’s description of the Bow Street Runners, with his “brace of good pistols” (134) and his willingness to pursue an investigation with little advance warning. The novel’s depiction of Tom’s professionalism and dedication to his career contributes to the literary rehabilitation of the human detective figure. The responsiveness of a professional detective force, even if not matching the omniscience of early modern providence as an investigative power, represents improvement and growth.

Despite his commitment to serving the public at inconvenient hours and with little notice, Tom Richmond’s career as a professional investigator negatively influences his social status in the novel. Tom must deal with the nebulous class standing of his occupation as a state-sponsored policeman:

> I had an indescribable notion that I was now degraded and shut out from all society, as every body has a dislike and horror at the very sight of an officer – caused, no doubt, by the very general prevalence of private unfair dealing and villainy, and the secret dread of unexpected detection which these must always produce. (131)

The common suspicion of police officers was largely motivated by the earlier narrative heritage of corrupt investigators in the form of thief-takers, a misgiving

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28 Beattie, _The First English Detectives_, 60, 61.
29 Beattie, _The First English Detectives_, 24.
which had originally extended to include concerns about the ethics of the Bow Street Runners. The Runners had historically been regarded with some distrust as they conducted criminal investigations for financial rewards. They gradually proved themselves as an ethical police force: “despite their reliance on rewards for a good part of their income, the runners had successfully established a public and professional character which owed a great deal to Sir John Fielding’s efforts.”

Nonetheless, the inheritance of public wariness towards police may have influenced the lukewarm response to the novel: as Worthington writes, “the nineteenth-century reception of the text illustrates the lack of discursive space for a detective hero and the attitude, particularly that of the novel-buying upper classes, towards the activity of policing and the social status of those who policed and those who were policed” and suggests that the novel’s relative contemporary unpopularity “is evidence of… the distrust and the disdain that the text’s subject matter aroused.”

The unpopularity of Richmond stands in notable contrast to that of Edward Bulwer-Lytton’s Pelham (1828), which also features a detective figure, and which was published a year after Richmond to considerable acclaim and “huge commercial success.” Though both novels feature protagonists who are detective figures, Richmond’s modest background stands in sharp relief to Pelham’s life of privilege. The reading public of the late 1820s was apparently more receptive to the literary concept of a detective figure who investigated criminal activity for personal reasons, rather than being required to do so by financial necessity. Affluence absolved the detective of any hint

30 Beattie, The First English Detectives, 132.
of potential corruption: an independently wealthy sleuth would not have any reason to be swayed by mercenary concerns.

Perhaps as a result of the societal apprehension of professional investigative figures, Tom is markedly reticent about receiving payment for his investigative work. Though he is by profession a detective, he constructs himself as a chivalrous knight-errant, motivated by ideals of justice, rather than as a professional who expects to be recompensed for his labour without ethical qualms. Richmond’s activities demonstrate an idealized representation of the detective police figure, as honourable and protective:

He is as much the protector of the innocent and the unfortunate as the pursuer of the guilty. Richmond does not go out looking for crimes: their victims come to him for aid, and it is his feeling for their distress which motivates his investigations.”

Perhaps in an attempt to set him apart from earlier depictions of thief-takers such as Jonathan Wild, the character repeatedly expresses discomfort from being paid for his detective work. Upon being presented with payment from a grateful client, for example, Richmond expresses a reluctance to sully his pure desire for investigation and justice:

“What shall I give you?” Mrs. Manson continued. “What can I do for you? All I have is nothing to my dear little boy. But take this for the present,” holding out her purse, “and let me know in what way I can be of service to you.”

33 Ousby, 60-61.
I took the purse from her agitated hand with profound obeisance; more, however, from a wish not to offend her by refusal than from a desire for the money. The fine feelings which I had been the happy means of eliciting both towards the boy and towards myself, were an abundant reward to me. (171)

A situation where a victim of a crime offered payment to a Bow Street officer would have been familiar to readers of *Richmond*. The primary salaries of the officers were paid directly by the operating budget of Bow Street, but in cases which were “not sufficiently serious to move Fielding to send one or more of his men at public expense,” the victim of the office could offer a Bow Street officer private payment for his expertise and investigative skill. Tom’s reticence regarding the acceptance of payment for work has been commented upon by multiple critics: Ian Ousby notes that “[Tom’s] attitude to the rewards system provides a revealing index to his character… at several points in the book, [the author] stresses his own hero’s lack of mercenary motives,” while Martin Kayman asserts that “although Tom works for contract and reward, he is…personally scrupulous about the limits of his honourable activity.” Tom Richmond’s reluctance to accept payment for his work sets him apart as an admirable hero, in contrast to earlier mercenary detective figures.

Tom’s reluctance to receive pecuniary reward for his detective work marks him as an ethical investigative figure, but his connections to the criminal underworld remain similar to those of his thief-taking predecessors. As Heather Worthington

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35 Ousby, 60.
notes, Tom’s transition to the occupation of Bow Street Runner represents a shift in whom he is working for, but not whom he is working with: “in his transition from a semi-criminal, delinquent life on the margins of society to an equally marginal position that is technically on the side of law and order.”37 However, Tom uses his connections to solve crimes, not to perpetrate them. He is assisted in his investigations by intelligence procured by his former gypsy friends, though he does not reveal himself to be a Bow Street Runner: “Marshall showed every disposition to assist me in the inquiry. I took care, indeed, not to let him know what authority I now possessed, nor give him any hint of my official situation; otherwise he might have been shy of renewing our old acquaintance” (137). He is also able to question the highwayman Blore, who had witnessed a crime, without revealing himself as a law-enforcement officer:

I assumed a free, careless tone; told him I was an adventurer like himself, though I had not yet taken to the highway; and asked him with an indifferent and jocular air, what success he had lately met with, and what exploits he had performed. I knew this was rather a ticklish question; but I hoped, from the familiar manner I had put on, that I should throw him partly off his guard.

I succeeded in my manoeuvre. Blore was so little used to the kindly tone of friendship, that it awakened all his better feelings, (every ruffian has some of these slumbering in his bosom;) and I believe he would not have scrupled to tell me all the crimes he ever committed. (145)

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The literary trope of detectives having disconcertingly close connections to the criminal underworld had been part of the cultural currency since at least the early eighteenth century, as exemplified by the literary construction of Jonathan Wild. Socializing with unsavoury characters was still a part of the perception of police work near the end of the long eighteenth century: in an 1816 inquiry into the effectiveness of policing, Bow Street Runners openly admitted to a “willingness not only to tolerate, but to make use of ‘flash houses’, where suspected thieves and robbers were known to congregate…The runners…were happy to admit that knowing where offenders gathered was essential to detective work.”

Even though Tom’s method of using criminal networks as informants connects him to earlier thief-takers such as Jonathan Wild, his use of the information in pursuit of justice raises him above the earlier, more ethically-fraught detective figure of the early eighteenth century. His principled behaviour anticipates later sympathetic sleuths who are working firmly on the official side of the law. Tom may sully his social reputation by consorting with thieves, but he does not allow himself to be drawn into a life of crime or corruption as a result of these connections.

While the novel depicts Tom as a virtuous, conscientious detective figure, there are other law-enforcement figures in the novel who do not behave as admirably as him. The example of Richmond as an honourable detective figure stands in marked contrast to other examples in the text. During his youthful education, Tom encounters law-enforcement officers who behave in a corrupt manner. As a young traveller, Tom is arrested by a constable solely because he appears to be of doubtful

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character. Tom laments his unfair treatment, reporting that “this was horrible—to be hand-cuffed on mere suspicion!” (28). The episode is reminiscent of the arrest of Caleb Williams merely on the basis of being a “suspicious person” (237), as discussed in the previous chapter. Tom’s escape from the unjust officer is arranged by a bystander who deliberately creates a distraction. When presented with the opportunity, Tom originally protests that “I am not guilty of any offence… and an attempt to escape will be a confession that I am” (29). His helper, later revealed to be the highwayman Blore, cynically tells Tom that he “will not find it so very easy to prove your innocence as to escape now” (29). The encounter blurs the line between honourable and dishonourable characters in the narrative: while Blore is indeed a criminal, he also repeatedly displays kindness to others in the novel. The scene foreshadows Tom’s later willingness to work with petty criminals in order to acquire information in order to solve crimes of greater magnitude. Before his own career as a Bow Street Runner begins, Tom also encounters a dishonest law officer who is willing to take bribes in order to release prisoners in his custody:

> There was one way of escaping which the honest and upright officer had hinted at — namely, that if he were paid down a certain sum in the way of hush-money, he would keep the writ in his pocket while I escaped by the back passage, — pretend to his employer that I could not be found… (74)

These earlier examples of corrupt policing put Tom Richmond’s virtuous detective work into sharper relief. Richmond himself marks a significant improvement in the literary depiction of professional detective work, and a shift away from the earlier corruption of Jonathan Wild.
In this innovative novel of professional policing, the early modern force of providence-as-investigator is displaced by a skilled, organized police force as represented by Tom Richmond. Richmond is a sympathetic rogue, who transforms his youthful education into useful detective knowledge. The character of Tom grows out of the earlier examples of proto-detectives throughout eighteenth-century literature, and particularly draws on the example of criminal-as-investigator as exemplified by the characterization of Jonathan Wild. The literary depiction of paid police work is strongly influenced by the real-life experiences, practices, and reputation of the Bow Street Runners. In a novel which reflects the rapid professionalization of policing, there is little need for the presence of providence as an investigating force within the narrative. Instead, Richmond’s methodical detective work and analytical abilities result in justice being achieved through earthly, rather than divine, investigative processes.
Pelham (1828)

Edward Bulwer-Lytton’s *Pelham; or, the Adventures of a Gentleman* (1828) may be considered to be the first murder mystery novel in English literature. Tom Richmond of *Richmond* does investigate a murder as one of the cases he addresses as a Bow Street Runner, but it is merely one of multiple cases in his narrative. Henry Pelham’s activities as an amateur detective figure focus solely on the murder of Sir John Tyrrell—it is the only crime and mystery which occurs within the space of the narrative, and all of Pelham’s curiosity and investigative powers are exercised in relation to this particular crime for the length of the novel. Pelham displays tenaciousness, bravery, and an innate sense of curiosity as he attempts to discover the identity of the murderer of Sir John Tyrrell in order to clear the name of his friend, Sir Richard Glanville.

Bulwer-Lytton’s innovative development of the literary detective figure in *Pelham* has been noted by numerous critics. John Sutherland praised Bulwer-Lytton as “father of the English detective novel.”[^39] Stephen Knight notes that, in *Pelham*, “a gentleman was shaped as a recognisable quasi-detective, in the hands of Bulwer-Lytton.”[^40] Heather Worthington deems Pelham to be “a proto-detective” as he “follows the chain of evidence in pursuit of the real perpetrator.”[^41] Similarly, Lucy Sussex terms *Pelham* “a quasi-detective novel” which unites “crime content and

[^40]: Knight, *Crime Fiction*, 12.
whodunit narrative structure.”⁴² These critics have briefly considered *Pelham* as a detective novel in passing as part of larger studies, but the novel’s specific contribution to the development of the literary detective figure in English literature has not yet been considered in detail.

Sussex’s description of the “whodunit narrative structure” of *Pelham* is accurate: while the novel’s plot contains other elements, such as Henry Pelham’s social education in France and his embarking on a political career at home in England, the most compelling plot thread of the novel is doubtless the mystery of the murder. Even Henry Pelham himself, in his voice as narrator, refers to the murder mystery and investigation as “the main interest of my adventures” (438).⁴³ Keith Hollingsworth suggests that “large numbers of readers must have hastened through Bulwer’s demonstrations of integrity in politics and constancy in affection simply to find out who killed Sir John Tyrrell.”⁴⁴ The fact that Bulwer-Lytton based Tyrrell’s murder on the 1823 murder of John Thurtell by William Weare would have made the whodunit structure of the novel even more compelling to contemporary readers.⁴⁵ Henry Pelham is constructed as a dandified gentleman who has a naturally inquisitive disposition. Over the course of the novel, the gradual construction of Pelham “as criminal investigator”⁴⁶ eventually displaces his initial posturing as

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⁴⁵ Worthington, “Against the Law,” 57.

⁴⁶ Worthington, “Against the Law,” 57.
solely a dandified gentleman. Bulwer-Lytton’s contribution to the development of the English literary detective figure in the novel is not only restricted to the eponymous hero: other detective figures in the novel include state-sponsored law-enforcement officers, such as watchmen, Bow Street Runners, and magistrates, as well as the rogue turned thief-taker Job Jonson.

Henry Pelham is an early example of the amateur sleuth who uses his dandified background to assist him with his investigations. The novel itself contains many of the structural elements of the developing murder mystery plot: motives, suspects, suspense, and truth revealed through detective work. Though Pelham is an effective investigative figure, the novel still contains a few remaining echoes of the early modern narrative trope of the investigation of crime, particularly of murder, through the benevolence of providence as investigator.

**The Dandy Detective: The Development of Pelham’s Investigative Skill**

Pelham is described as the only child of a “younger son of one of our oldest earls… [and] the dowerless daughter of a Scotch peer” (303): this social background identifies him as the first upper-class detective figure in English literature. Pelham stands considerably closer to the top of his class structure than earlier detective figures: though he is removed from his role of heir presumptive through his uncle’s marriage, he has enjoyed an aristocratic, privileged, and well-connected upbringing. The emergence of an English detective who investigates crimes without monetary reward or direct personal gain is notable. Jonathan Wild was an astute businessman in his work as a thief-taker and restorer of lost goods; Richmond’s modest
background leads him to a career of paid detective work; and Caleb Williams is a servant who attempts to investigate his master. Emily St. Aubert is the only proto-sleuth of noble standing, like Pelham, but she enjoys only limited success as an investigative figure. Pelham’s efforts as a capable amateur sleuth are not motivated by mercenary concerns. His investigation into the murder of Tyrrell is of emotional benefit to him, as it benefits his friend and future brother-in-law Glanville, but it does not bring him any financial rewards. Roy Le Panek notes that the majority of detective figures in Bulwer-Lytton’s later novels are “contemptible people,” but that in the exceptional case of Pelham, his investigation acts as “part of the hero’s conversion from a frivolous to a useful life.”

Because Pelham does not need to act as an investigator for practical or pecuniary gain, his detective work is instead able to be used as part of an improvement process for the young gentleman. The plot of Pelham is a bildungsroman, with an upward trajectory of virtuous development for the title character. His detective work is a triumphant capstone to his maturation: “the unraveling of the murder mystery… represents the consummation of his moral development, since these events do not involve so much a process of personal growth as the revelation of an achieved condition.” The trope of detection-as-development is comparable to that of the an earlier proto-detective figure: Emily St. Aubert’s growth and evolution as a logic-based, Enlightenment figure helped bring truth and revelation to the dark world of the gothic novel.

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47 Le Panek, 22.
Pelham does not have the professional skills, network, or training that Richmond receives in his role as Bow Street Runner. However, Pelham’s innate inquisitiveness and intelligence serve him adequately in his role as amateur detective. The skills he gains earlier in the narrative become useful in his pursuit to prove the innocence of Glanville. His privileged social standing provides him with an innate advantage as an investigator, despite his lack of formal detective training:

“imperturbability and the amateurish acquisition of a range of skills to be held in reserve are often thought to be among the more immediately recognizable traits of British upper-class conduct and typified in the dandy detective—which Pelham is.”

Stephen Knight suggests that Pelham’s privileged background is precisely what allows the character to operate as a detective figure: “Pelham, gentleman as well as literary and parliamentary figure, has a position from which he can investigate… he has a location for disciplinary detection…” Bulwer-Lytton constructs his hero as a typical privileged gentleman of the Regency period, then builds upon these existing attributes to transform him into a detective figure.

Pelham is able to use many of the skills gained as part of his upper-class education in his role as investigator. His ability to learn foreign languages, demonstrated at Eton (7), serves him well when he is rapidly forced to acquire the ability to speak in thieves’ cant in order to penetrate a den of criminals as part of his investigation (404). Job Jonson, Pelham’s accomplice in his infiltration of the house, acts as Pelham’s tutor in this new language:

50 Knight, Crime Fiction, 15.
Job examined and re-examined me in my ‘canting catechism,’ as he termed it. He expressed himself much pleased with the quickness of my parts, and honoured me with an assurance that in less than three months he would engage to make me as complete a ruffler as *ever nailed a swell*. (410)

Jonson’s pleasure at his student’s rapid progress is a humorous reimagining of the praise Pelham receives for his earlier academic success at Eton as part of his privileged background.

Pelham’s skill in fencing and fighting proves to be of similar use. He is the victor in two duels in France early in the novel, and also demonstrates his dexterity in fencing: he is revealed to have, at “the age of thirteen, beat the Life Guardsmen at Angelo’s” (193), a competitive fencing room located in London, in fashionable St. James’s Street. When he is forced to fight his way out of a thieves’ den during an undercover investigation, he fights bravely, strategically, and competently:

A thought flashed upon my mind, and lent me new nerves and fresh speed; I flew along the passage, guided by the dying light. I was at the door of the sick thief—I burst it open—seized the sword as it lay within reach on the chair… and feeling, at the touch of the familiar weapon, as if the might of ten men had been transferred to my single arm, I bounded down the stairs before me… (432)

When he encounters a stubborn locked door during his escape, Pelham is easily able to hold off his opponents single-handedly thanks to his skill in swordplay: “while my left hand was employed in feeling the latch, I made such good use of my right, as to keep my antagonists at a safe distance” (432-433). Even his dancing lessons serve a
purpose: his lightness of foot enables him to walk quietly past the bed of a sleeping criminal undetected. When warned that he needs to “creep through” the room, Pelham retorts that “I am no elephant, and my dancing master used to tell me I might tread on a butterfly’s wing without brushing off a tint… he little thought of the use his lessons would be to me hereafter!” (430). Accomplishments of leisured gentlemen are used to give him success in his detective work. In contrast to the earlier model of the thief-taker turned detective, who uses the life skills gained in a lower-class, or even criminal, upbringing, Pelham transfers the skills gained in his life as a privileged dandy to his new role as detective.

Pelham’s naturally inquisitive nature prepares him to take on the mantle of the amateur detective. Long before the murder of Sir John Tyrrell, which occurs at the end of volume two, Pelham is interested in the behaviour of those around him. His curiosity is conveniently piqued by those characters who later become involved in the detective plot: he repeatedly comments on the appearances of Sir Reginald Glanville, Tom Thornton, Mr. Dawson, and Sir John Tyrrell during his time abroad. In an early example of investigative perceptiveness, Pelham recognizes a grief-stricken, thoroughly altered Glanville in a moonlit graveyard as his former schoolmate: “Notwithstanding the fearful ravages graven in that countenance, then so brilliant with the graces of boyhood, I recognized, at one glance, those still noble and chiselled features. It was Reginald Glanville who stood before me!” (21). When Glanville disappears from the neighbourhood shortly after being recognized by Pelham, Pelham successfully locates his rooming house through investigative work. Pelham’s curiosity as to Glanville’s appearance consumes him until he begins his
informal detective work: unable to “sleep the whole of that night” after his meeting with him in the graveyard, Pelham forms a “resolution of discovering where Glanville had taken up his abode” (22). He makes a journey of interrogation across the countryside, stopping first to question a neighbouring farmer, then at a small public house which he determines to be “just the sort of place… to hear something of Glanville” (23). His nascent detective work is successful: after questioning local residents, he discovers information about Glanville’s lodging. He also investigates the gravestone at which he had found Glanville weeping, but finds it marked only with the mysterious initials “G.D.” Pelham is disappointed to find “no clue for the labyrinth of surmise” (24), and is displeased with the results of his early attempts at active detective work: “I went home, more vexed and disappointed with my day’s expedition than I liked to acknowledge to myself” (24-25). His dissatisfaction with the limited success of this adventure signals his commitment to satisfying his inquisitiveness through critical analysis and active investigation. He also demonstrates a gift for accurate premonitions or hunches: he displays a disproportionate amount of curiosity regarding the identity of Thornton’s friend, Mr. Warburton, whom Pelham finds to be oddly familiar. Pelham’s instincts are correct, as Mr. Warburton is revealed to be Glanville in disguise.

Pelham possesses a self-described passion for mystery and a talent for keen observation. In the midst of a scene which reads like a criminal interrogation, Pelham offers a revealing comment on his passion for mystery, saying to Thornton, “truly… you have now excited my curiosity. Nothing, you know, is half so inviting as mystery” (100). In another instance, Pelham pronounces himself to be a dedicated
observer of human behaviour even in the midst of his early cultivation of dandyism:
“Careless and indifferent as I seem to all things, nothing ever escapes me: I have two peculiarities which serve me, it may be, instead of talent; I observe and I remember” (92). Such claims mark Pelham as a clear early detective figure: as Heather Worthington perceptively notes, these assertions “pre-empt those of Edgar Allan Poe’s proto-detective C. Auguste Dupin and Arthur Conan Doyle’s fully-formed detective, Sherlock Holmes.”51 Henry Pelham’s curiosity and commitment to observation equip him to actively and perceptively investigate the murder of one of the central characters of the novel.

**Clues and Motives: The Investigation of the Murder of Sir John Tyrrell**

*Pelham* exhibits numerous plot elements of the nascent murder mystery genre in its representation of the murder of Sir John Tyrrell. Emphasis is placed on physical clues and evidence; the novel is plotted with suspense and foreshadowing; there are multiple viable suspects for the murder that Pelham considers and questions; and the eventual revelation of truth is postponed until as late as possible in the narrative. As Lucy Sussex notes, Bulwer-Lytton was “a major developer of the techniques involved in sustaining a mystery plot at length.”52 Pelham’s innate ability to act as a strong detective figure, in contrast to the weaker, proto-detectives of earlier eighteenth-century narratives, allow Bulwer-Lytton to create and employ these new aspects of the developing mystery novel genre to greater advantage.

51 Worthington, “Against the Law,” 57.
Clues and forensic evidence play a significant role in the narrative. Upon investigating the murder scene, accompanied by Tom Thornton and Mr. Dawson, Pelham examines the wounds left on Tyrrell’s corpse by the murderer in considerable detail:

There was upon the head a strong contusion, as if inflicted by some blunt and heavy instrument. The fingers of the right hand were deeply gashed, and one of them almost disesevered: the unfortunate man had, in all probability, grasped the sharp weapon from which his other wounds proceeded; these were one wide cut along the throat, and another in the side; either of them would have occasioned his death. (291)

Pelham’s methodical medical examination of Tyrrell’s body to determine the cause of death highlights the growing emphasis on forensic and scientific analysis of criminal activity. He acts professionally, not betraying any notes of discomfort in his examination of the corpse, even though upon his initial discovery of the murdered Tyrrell, he had commented that “it is a fearful thing, even to the hardiest nerves, to find ourselves suddenly alone with the dead. How much more so, if we have, but a breathing interval before, moved and conversed with the warm and living likeness of the motionless clay before us!” (287). Pelham’s newly-found role as detective supplants any personal discomfort he may feel regarding the thorough examination of the corpse of a man he had known in life. Upon further investigation of the body, Pelham discovers a physical clue which provides a lead in the detection of the murderer:
In loosening the clothes, another wound was discovered, but apparently of a
less fatal nature; and in lifting the body, the broken blade of a long sharp
instrument, like a case-knife, was discovered. It was the opinion of the
surgeon, who afterwards examined the body, that the blade had been broken
by coming in contact with one of the rib bones; and it was by this that he
accounted for the slightness of the last mentioned wound. (291)

The clue of the broken blade proves to be of vital significance later in the narrative.
As a consequence of Pelham’s determined detective work, Dawson eventually
confesses that the murder had been committed by Thornton, with Dawson as
accomplice, in order to rob Tyrrell of the two thousand pounds in gambling winnings
which he was carrying on his person. Dawson reveals that Thornton had kept the
incriminating evidence of the broken blade handle with him, in order to conceal it:

“He took it with him,” answered Dawson, “for his name was engraved on a
silver plate on the handle; and he was therefore afraid of throwing it into the
pond, as I advised, lest at any time it should be discovered. Close by the shed
there is a plantation of young firs of some extent: Thornton and I entered, and
he dug a hole with the broken blade of the knife, and buried it, covering up
the hole again with the earth.” (426-427)

The existence of the hidden, broken blade, which is conveniently inscribed with
Thornton’s name, offers incontrovertible physical evidence of Thornton’s guilt
which complements Dawson’s confession. The revelation of the broken blade is a
vital clue, as it is the only piece of evidence that Thornton was unable to destroy.
According to Dawson’s testimony, Thornton had thoroughly and methodically destroyed all other physical evidence of his crime:

Thornton’s linen and hands were stained with blood. The former he took off, locked up carefully, and burnt at the first opportunity: the latter he washed; and, that the water might not lead to detection, drank it. We then appeared as if nothing had occurred… (427)

The scene of Thornton drinking the blood and water to conceal the guilt of his crime is grisly and repellent, helping to make the character thoroughly repugnant to readers. The critical testimony of Dawson is achieved through Pelham’s determined and active investigative work, and his bravery in extracting Dawson from a den of thieves.

Part of the hardship that Pelham faces as a detective figure is not simply the discovery of evidence, but the difficulty in interpreting what the evidence signifies. As a scientific detective figure, he has to gather the evidence and also evaluate it for the appropriate meaning. Pelham’s rational interpretation of physical evidence may be seen as an improved model of the conflicting interpretations of the Canning case: while Pelham originally misinterprets the significance of a piece of evidence, his careful analysis and investigation of character and motive result in his determination of the identity of the murderer. Through his investigative skill, Pelham discovers a blood-covered miniature near the corpse of Tyrrell: “I looked carefully among the fern and long grass, to see if I could discover any other token of the murderer… At the distance of some feet from the body, I thought I perceived something glitter. I hastened to the place, and picked up a miniature” (291). When he realizes that it
belongs to his friend Sir Reginald Glanville, he immediately concludes that Glanville must be the murderer. Though Pelham does cooperate with the authorities in general, and does reveal his witnessing of the cloaked figure fleeing from the scene of the crime, he conceals this key piece of evidence. Ironically, it is the murderer Thornton who encourages Pelham to conceal it when the pair recognizes the miniature: Thornton urges Pelham it “put it up… we will keep the secret” (291). Pelham’s belief that Glanville is the murderer is not entirely without foundation: Glanville is constructed as an inscrutable, mysterious figure throughout the novel and does indeed harbour murderous intent towards Tyrrell as a mode of revenge, though he does not have the chance to execute his plan. The evidence of the miniature therefore does not provide the proof of the identity of the murderer, as Pelham initially believes. The mere collection of physical evidence is not sufficient in this early detective novel: physical evidence must be subjected to analysis and contextualization before it can be usefully applied as proof.

The most intricate investigative work that Pelham does is his investigation into motive. Elsewhere in the novel, a philosophizing character says that novels should be concerned with “increasing our knowledge of the heart” (212). Bulwer-Lytton would later expand on the function of the novel in a critical essay, *On Art in Fiction* (1838):

In the portraiture of evil and criminal characters lies the widest scope for an author profoundly versed in the philosophy of the human heart… In the
delineation of a criminal, the author will take care to show us the motives of the crimes—the influences beneath which the character has been formed.\textsuperscript{53}

In order to succeed as a thorough investigator, Henry Pelham must investigate the motives, backgrounds, and secrets of the victim and suspects in order to determine the truth behind the murder. In the course of his murder investigation, Pelham uncovers another related mystery: the source of Glanville’s behaviour in the graveyard earlier in the narrative. Glanville wishes to kill Tyrrell as revenge for Tyrrell’s having raped Glanville’s beloved, resulting in her insanity and eventual death. Glanville’s hatred for Tyrrell unwittingly provides a cover for the real murderer, Thornton, who is motivated to murder Tyrrell simply to steal the two thousand pounds that he had won through gambling. When Thornton notices that a disguised Glanville is trailing Tyrrell, he realizes that the circumstance provides him with an ideal cover to commit the robbery and murder himself: Thornton surmises, “Should the worst come to the worst… we can make him bear the blame” (424).

Indeed, the circumstantial evidence pointing towards Glanville’s guilt mounts, becoming nearly insurmountable. Even the detective figure himself briefly doubts Glanville’s claim of innocence: Pelham admits that “there were moments, when the appearances against Glanville wore so close a resemblance of truth, that all my friendship could scarcely drive from my mind an intrusive suspicion that he might have deceived me” (390). Through Pelham’s determined detective work, the misleading but convincing circumstantial evidence is cleared away, and replaced by the first-hand testimony of the accomplice, Dawson. Pelham’s daring entrée into the

thieves’ den to procure Dawson removes the inconvenient evidence pointing toward Glanville. The bravery demonstrated in this episode also endorses the virtue of the detective figure: Pelham is willing to risk his own physical safety in order to secure evidence which proves the identity of the true criminal. Pelham’s detective triumph is completed in a dramatic courtroom scene in which Thornton’s attempts to escape confirm his guilt:

Thornton entered with his usual easy and staggering air of effrontery: but no sooner did he set his eyes upon Dawson, than a deadly and withering change passed over his countenance. Dawson could not bridle the cowardly petulance of his spite—“They know all, Thornton!” said he, with a look of triumph. The villain turned slowly from him to us, muttering something we could not hear. He saw upon my face, upon the magistrate’s, that his doom was sealed: his desperation gave him presence of mind, and he made a sudden rush to the door; the officers in waiting seized him. Why should I detail the rest of the scene? He was that day fully committed for trial, and Sir Reginald Glanville honourably released, and unhesitatingly acquitted. (437-438)

The scene does not occur until very close to the conclusion of the novel, which has the effect of preserving the suspense of the narrative. Pelham’s own insouciant comment, “Why should I detail the rest of the scene?” indicates that Bulwer-Lytton is aware that the main action and interest of the novel have been concluded through the arrest of Thornton. Pelham’s detective activities were successful, and his earlier avowed goal to reveal “circumstances in [Glanville’s] favour, which have not yet
been considered, but which I will pledge myself hereafter to adduce” (388) has been achieved.

**Guardians of the Night: Other Detective Figures in *Pelham***

Henry Pelham is not the sole detective figure within the novel bearing his name. He does occupy the central investigative role, and takes the lead in the investigation of the murder of Tyrrell, but he is supported in the narrative by other detective figures. The presence of these additional characters in the narrative serves to strengthen the emerging presence of the literary detective figure in English literature. Bulwer-Lytton takes a sympathetic view of state-sponsored police figures, despite the fact that they do not perform the primary detective function in the narrative. The inclusion of Job Jonson, a thief turned thief-taker, ties the novel to earlier representations of the rogue turned detective, particularly that of Jonathan Wild.

Law-enforcement officials of various levels are depicted positively within the novel. Unlike representations of corrupt or overly-powerful surveillance officers, as portrayed in *Caleb Williams*, the state-sponsored law-enforcement system is a beneficial force in the pages of *Pelham*. The difference may be attributed to the divergent social standings of protagonists and authors. Caleb Williams is a servant, while his creator Godwin had revolutionary leanings and Jacobin friends. Henry Pelham holds a high rank, with social connections to powerful and wealthy friends and family, while his creator Bulwer-Lytton similarly came from a well-established British lineage and privilege. While Godwin demonstrates the potential for abuse of
policing powers in *Caleb Williams*, the different levels of state-sponsored law enforcement are portrayed in a generally benevolent fashion in *Pelham*. The novel features watchmen, magistrates, and Bow Street Runners in supporting roles, though Henry Pelham unquestionably remains the central detective figure. Pelham refers to the night watchmen positively as “champions of the night” (197) and “guardians of the night” (198). He laments the lack of their protective and comforting presence when he descends into the seedy underworld of criminal London: “I listened eagerly for the sound of the watchman’s voice, in vain—that note was never heard in those desolate recesses” (412). The police force is represented as professional and dedicated to solving the murder of Tyrrell, despite their inconclusive results:

> All the myrmidon[s] of justice were employed in the most active research for the murderers. Some few people were taken up on suspicion, but were as instantly discharged. Thornton and Dawson underwent a long and rigorous examination; but no single tittle of evidence against them appeared: they were consequently dismissed. The only suspicious circumstance against them, was their delay on the road; but the cause given… was probable and natural. (292)

The investigation of the police is represented as thorough and fair, with appropriate levels of evidence, rather than pure suspicion, being required in order to detain suspects. The police also tirelessly pursue the clue provided by Pelham’s testimony, regarding the mysterious cloaked figure:

> All attempts, however, to discover [the cloaked man] were in vain. It was ascertained that a man, muffled in a cloak, was *seen* at Newmarket, but
not remarkably observed; it was also discovered, that a person so habited had put up a grey horse to bait in one of the inns at Newmarket; but in the throng of strangers, neither the horse nor its owner had drawn down any particular remark.

On further inquiry, testimony differed; four or five men, in cloaks, had left their horses at the stables; one ostler changed the colour of the steed to brown, a second to black, a third deposed that the gentleman was remarkably tall, and the waiter swore solemnly that he had given a glass of brandy and water to an unked looking gentleman, in a cloak, who was remarkably short. In fine, no material point could be proved, and though the officers were still employed in active search, they could trace nothing that promised a speedy recovery. (293)

The passage acknowledges the arduous work undertaken by the police officers, who spend many hours interrogating potential witnesses, only to be given conflicting testimonies and inconclusive accounts. Even Pelham’s eventual discovery that the cloaked figure is a disguised Glanville is not caused by any active detective work on his part: his friend freely confesses the disguise to him. The police’s failure to discover the identity of the cloaked man does not indicate incompetence, but is rather a realistic representation of the troublesome aspects of a human-driven, rather than divinely ordained, investigation. While providence may be able to use an all-seeing eye to determine clues, evidence, and guilt, human investigators are required to spend many hours sifting through and pursuing voluminous leads which may ultimately prove fruitless.
Though he operates as an amateur detective figure, Pelham appears content to work within the existing parameters of state-sponsored law enforcement. He has confidence in the ability of the police to apprehend and charge criminals, if supplied with adequate evidence. Pelham appeals to the magistrate to delay the charges against Glanville, pending additional evidence to be gleaned from the testimony of Dawson. He praises the fair and just nature of the “righteous magistrate” (389), commenting that “it is impossible to conceive a more courteous, and yet more equitable man, than the magistrate whom I had the honour of attending” (387-388). The magistrate demonstrates his role as a post-Enlightenment law-enforcement official by placing great emphasis on scientific evidence: Pelham’s promise to produce “stronger data” in support of Glanville’s innocence moves the magistrate to delay judicial proceedings so that Pelham can “ascertain any facts, to elucidate this mysterious crime, and point the inquiries of justice to another quarter” (389). Pelham exhibits confidence in the abilities of the Bow Street Runners to infiltrate a hidden thieves’ den and apprehend Dawson. When Job Jonson tells him about the dangers and complications of removing Dawson from the house, Pelham immediately appeals to the abilities and resources of the official police:

“My dear Mr. Job,” replied I, “there appears to me to be a much easier plan that all this; and that is, simply to tell the Bow-street officers where Dawson may be found, and I think they would be able to carry him away from the arms of Mrs. Brimstone Bess [the keeper of the thieves’ den] without any great difficulty or danger.” (403)
Pelham only agrees to infiltrate the thieves’ den himself, instead of appealing to the capable official police force, once Jonson explains that he does not want to expose the other inhabitants of the underworld home to potential seizure and arrest by the police.

Job Jonson is himself another supportive detective figure in the narrative. He provides considerable support and connections to Pelham during the latter’s quest to prove the innocence of Glanville. Jonson’s presence is reminiscent of Jonathan Wild, the thief turned thief-taker: in choosing to take Jonson into his confidence, Pelham quotes the maxim, “set a thief to catch a thief” (396). The roguish Jonson agrees to betray his criminal associates, discover evidence, and acquire a key witness in return for Pelham’s promised reward of £100 per annum. Though Jonson is operating purely on unapologetically mercenary motives, his dedication to the financial reward provides Pelham with a reliable and tenacious assistant in his detective work. Pelham employs Jonson as a contract investigator who, through his connections to the London criminal underworld, is able to gain information and contracts which are not directly accessible to Pelham himself. Bulwer-Lytton introduced Jonson earlier in the narrative as a criminal who seems incapable of retaining friends in circumstances where he has a chance to gain money:

His real name, when he does not travel with an alias, is Job Jonson. He is one of the most remarkable rogues in Christendom: he is so noted a cheat, that there is not a pickpocket in England who could keep company with him if he had anything to lose. He was the favourite of his father, who intended to leave him all his fortune, which was tolerably large. He robbed him one day
on the high road; his father discovered it, and disinherited him. He was placed at a merchant’s office, and rose, step by step, to be head clerk, and intended son-in-law. Three nights before his marriage, he broke open the till, and was turned out of doors the next morning. If you were going to do him the greatest favour in the world, he could not keep his hands out of your pocket till you had done it. In short, he has rogued himself out of a dozen fortunes, and hundred friends…(205)

Jonson’s predilection for choosing money above all other bonds of filial or romantic attachment is redirected for the purposes of law enforcement: he is willing to betray his criminal compatriots for a fee, which assists with proving Glanville’s innocence. The fact that his compatriots have committed murder, rather than the lesser crime of theft, also acts as a motivator: in this way, he mirrors the outlaw Blore from Richmond, who, “hardened as he was to crime… shuddered at this unexpected sight” of the body of a murdered boy (145). Bulwer-Lytton’s inclusion of Jonson as a thief-taking detective figure links him to earlier modes of policing, such as the “early entrepreneurial developments in informing, spying, and thief-taking” which were prevalent in the early eighteenth century.54 The presence of these additional detective figures in the novel indicates the firm place of the literary detective figure by the close of the long eighteenth century.

Pelham possesses strong detective abilities: as such, he is not required to rely on providential assistance in his investigation of crime. Nonetheless, remnants of the earlier trope of providential discovery of crime still linger in the text. As the latest

novel considered in this study, *Pelham* is the furthest removed, chronologically speaking, from the early modern narrative of providential discovery. Indeed, Heather Worthington suggests that one of the most important features of *Pelham* is “the introduction of a detective figure to track down the criminal, rather than the contemporary and conventional reliance on Providence to solve the crime… motivation and opportunity replace proximity and Providence.” Nonetheless, the early modern narrative trope of providence as an investigative force is still found embedded within this 1828 narrative. Sir Reginald Glanville credits an avenging providence with arranging the death of Sir John Tyrrell before Glanville himself is able to act upon his murderous plans, thus saving him from this sin. Glanville relates his experience upon encountering the freshly murdered body of Tyrrell:

I gazed upon the upward and distorted face, in a deep and sickening silence; an awe, dark and undefined, crept over my heart; I stood beneath the solemn and sacred heavens, and felt that the hand of God was upon me—that a mysterious and fearful edict had gone forth—that my headlong and unholy wrath had, in the very midst of its fury, been checked, as if but the idle anger of a child—that the plan I had laid in the foolish wisdom of my heart, had been traced, step by step, by an all-seeing eye, and baffled in the moment of its fancied success, by an inscrutable and awful doom. I had wished the death of my enemy—lo! my wish was accomplished—how, I neither knew nor guessed…it seemed as if, in the moment of my uplifted arm, the Divine Avenger had asserted his prerogative… and while he punished the guilt of a

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human criminal, had set an eternal barrier to the vengeance of a human foe.

(374)

The passage notably uses both the early modern imagery of the “hand of God” and “all-seeing eye” in its depiction of an involved providential force. In Bulwer-Lytton’s construction, the all-seeing eye of providence is a just one, who has arranged the murder of the rapist Tyrrell while benevolently allowing the injured Glanville to remain innocent of the crime.

*Pelham* is a transitional text. Joseph Fradin has suggested that, in his novels, Bulwer-Lytton was attempting to bring fictional order to a complicated and changing world:

Indeed, for all his dandyism and his uncertainty whether the business of writing novels was a gentleman’s game, Bulwer believed in the work a novel could do: his novels represent a genuine attempt to come to grips with the complex world in which he lived. They are, by and large, created out of tension; underlying them is a vivid sense of crisis, an awareness of dramatic social changes and new scientific ideas which compelled him to make critical adjustments in the way he looked at himself and his world. Bulwer’s novels, in fact, express a world view, murky at the edges… but created out of need, the need to find a substitute for a lost faith or some moral center that would give meaning and coherence to a fragmented perplexing world.56

As a practitioner of the early detective novel, Bulwer-Lytton attempts to reflect the changing world of criminal investigation and justice in England during the period.

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Pelham embraces and incorporates the early modern trope of providential investigation, while simultaneously putting forth a capable, ethical, and successful fictional detective as protagonist.
Conclusion

The history of the development of the detective figure in eighteenth-century English literature is one of gradual formation and reformation, with successive authors collectively creating a literary character who could successfully occupy the textual role of investigator with the narrative integrity and investigative achievement formerly achieved by providence. The history of the detective figure in eighteenth-century literature is one of gradual displacement and cultural negotiation: the early modern narrative of providence as investigator was progressively replaced with new narratives featuring human detectives who employed logic and scientific analysis in their investigation of crime.

The Enlightenment desire to replace providential intervention in the detection of crimes with human-driven, scientific investigation finally became a practical possibility with the scientific advances which occurred in the nineteenth century. As scientific understanding of the natural world continued to develop, detective figures were able to integrate scientific analysis into their investigations in a more robust fashion. New investigative technologies developed over this period such as fingerprinting, blood type analysis, and ballistics matching offered seemingly incontrovertible, physical, detailed proof of criminal activity. Authors were swift to integrate new forensic knowledge into their mysteries: detective narratives increasingly included scientific advances in policing such as lie detectors, mug shots, fingerprints, and magnifying glasses.1

1 See: Lawrence Frank, Victorian Detective Fiction and the Nature of Evidence: The Scientific Investigations of Poe, Dickens, and Doyle (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009); James O’Brien, The Scientific Sherlock Holmes: Cracking the
The role of providence would eventually be largely eliminated from the detective novel genre. In later crime writing, “although ‘Providence’ or chance continues to play a role, human investigation becomes more efficient, indicating the erosion of religious belief in an increasingly secular society.”

As the hand of providence was gradually removed from the detective novel genre, the superhuman detective took its place. The mortal detective’s capability to gather evidence, decipher clues, and deduce motive improved considerably from the limited investigative prowess of Caleb Williams, Emily St. Aubert, Tom Richmond, and Henry Pelham. Literary detectives over the course of the nineteenth century continued to improve upon the abilities of their forerunners. The rationalization of the detective novel, which had its origins in the eighteenth century texts examined in this dissertation, arguably found its apex with the creation of Arthur Conan Doyle’s Sherlock Holmes. The character of the superhuman detective reached its apogee with this alarmingly prescient character: Holmes uses his powers of scientific analysis and keen observation in order to mimic the early modern all-seeing eye of providence. Robert S. Paul writes of the nearly omnipotent detective abilities of Holmes:

> The great detective was essentially the supreme reasoner in the classical tradition of detective fiction, but Holmes handed on the legacy in another distinctive way: it was not only in the logical facility, but the extent to which he had it. There is something awesomely godlike in the character of the central figure that is conveyed to the readers. The character of Sherlock

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Holmes seems to be too intense, too committed, too unfailingly correct in his reasoning to be described as a personality-- or even to be regarded as human in any of the ways lesser mortals recognize humanity in themselves and others.\(^3\)

Holmes’s godlike level of observation and interpretation is the natural extension of the earlier replacement of providential investigation by human detective figures. The eighteenth-century sleuths examined in this study worked within an environment where providential intervention, while waning, still existed: in contrast, Holmes embodies the role of a fully post-providential sleuth.

It was the application of scientific knowledge and rationalism which allowed earthly investigators to begin replacing providential intervention in the detection of crime: as scientific knowledge increased, the literary result was a human detective who achieved providential-like knowledge through a meticulous, systematic application of knowledge and observation. Conan Doyle emphasized the role of empirical analysis applied to criminal investigation in the genesis of Holmes:

About the Sherlock Holmes stories… I had of course scientific training. And I used occasionally to read detective stories. What annoyed me was how in the old fashioned detective story the detective always seemed to get at his results either by some sort of lucky chance or fluke, or it was quite unexplained how he got there… I began to think of turning scientific methods, as it were, onto the work of detection… So, having once conceived

\(^3\) Paul, 57.
that line of thought, you can well imagine that I had, as it were, a new idea of
the detective, and one that interested me to work out. While eighteenth-century proponents of scientific advances and Enlightenment reforms would have applauded Holmes’s methods, the scientific knowledge which was available to Conan Doyle in the late nineteenth century had not yet been discovered in this earlier period. Once these strides in scientific understanding had been made, the roles of chance and providence in the literary depiction of criminal investigation were consequently diminished.

Beyond the collective Enlightenment effect of the eighteenth-century proto-mystery texts examined in this study, each individual text continues to influence the depiction of the literary detective figure and the mystery novel genre. Real-life criminal cases have been re-told and re-invented as popular mysteries. Characters have inspired literary successors. Novels have become foundational texts for subgenres of detective fiction.

Jonathan Wild has been cited as an early influence on literary representations of the criminal underworld: “the literary invention of Jonathan Wild contains the seeds of the modern myth of organised crime… [Wild’s activities are] at once mysterious and sinister yet rational and efficient.” Wild has also appeared in contemporary mystery fiction under his own name: a fictionalized version of Wild is a supporting character in David Liss’s *A Conspiracy of Paper* (2000). The actions of

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Sephira Pryce, the fictional female, American thief taker antagonist of D. B. Jackson’s historical mystery *Thieftaker* (2012), are described in a manner reminiscent of Wild’s activities: “At least half the gems and jewelry and other riches she returned for reward were first stolen by men in her employ. She took with one hand, gave back with the other, and was paid handsomely for doing so.” The author has mentioned in multiple interviews that he indeed was inspired by Wild in his creation of Pryce. Wild has also been proposed as an inspiration for Sherlock Holmes’s nemesis, Professor Moriarty: Conan Doyle’s reference to Wild in the context of Moriarty in *The Valley of Fear* (see page 29 of this dissertation) potentially lends credence to this suggestion.

The Elizabeth Canning case continued to influence the detective novel well into the twentieth century. The case itself served as direct inspiration for at least four popular twentieth-century mystery books, including Arthur Machen’s *The Canning Wonder* (1926), Lillian de la Torre’s *Elizabeth is Missing, or, Truth Triumphant* (1945), Bernard Darwin’s *Elizabeth Canning and the Gipsies* (1966), and John Treherne’s *The Canning Enigma* (1989). These writers resurrected the case for the benefit of the post-Golden Age mystery reading public, presenting it as an intriguing “cold case” to be analyzed by a sage modern mind. The most famous twentieth-century use of the Canning controversy is Josephine Tey’s retelling of the story in *The Franchise Affair* (1948), in which Elizabeth Canning becomes Betty Kane, a crafty teenager who concocts a convincing story of having been kidnapped in order to conceal an affair with an older, married man. More recently, historical mystery

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novelist Bruce Alexander included a subplot in *The Price of Murder* (2003) which was based on Elizabeth Canning’s disappearance. This contradictory case, with its cast of compelling characters, has continued to fascinate and confound readers from the eighteenth century to the present.

Ann Radcliffe’s *Mysteries of Udolpho* has become a foundational text in the subgenre of gothic mystery fiction. Radcliffe’s gothic novel has been cited, for example, as an influence on Carolyn Keene’s Nancy Drew series of mysteries, which have been described as possessing a “mixture of active and suspenseful exploration of some unknown criminal scheme” and a “strong Gothic undercurrent that aligns these novels with that genre of horrific fiction that began with Ann Radcliffe’s *The Mysteries of Udolpho*.”

Like Emily, Nancy repeatedly finds herself “perpetually caught up in a cycle of chasing (or being chased), confinement in scary circumstances, and escape by means of strenuous struggle.” The Nancy Drew books also contain seemingly-supernatural occurrences reminiscent of *Udolpho*, such as ghostly footsteps, secret passages, and disembodied voices. Other inheritors of Radcliffe’s gothic mystery tradition include Anna Katharine Green, whose *The Leavenworth Case* (1878) is “full of gothic obtrusions and energies,” and Mary Roberts Rinehart, who used “the gothic trope of seclusion or imprisonment within a

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8 Billman, 116.
9 Billman, 116.
house”11 in her supernatural mystery The Circular Staircase (1908), as well as her later gothic mysteries. The cover art of twentieth-century editions of the novels of Keene and Rinehart emphasize their continuity with Emily’s nocturnal explorations of mysterious staircases (see Figures 4-7). Conan Doyle’s The Hound of the Baskervilles (1901) may be the most famous progeny of Radcliffe’s explained supernatural in the mystery genre: in the novel, Holmes proves that murders were committed by a human heir bent on claiming his inheritance rather than, as initially supposed, by a ghostly, cursed dog-monster. Baskervilles makes overt homage to its eighteenth-century roots, as the secret curse of the Baskerville family is supposedly the result of an eighteenth-century kidnapping attempt, and is revealed to Holmes in an “old manuscript” from the “early eighteenth century.”12

Udolpho’s most significant legacy to the mystery genre may be its influence on Jane Austen’s work. Despite its own popularity in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, The Mysteries of Udolpho is today best known for having inspired Austen’s gothic satire, Northanger Abbey (completed 1803; published 1817). Like Emily St Aubert, Catherine Morland seeks to unearth the (non-existent) mystery she feels convinced must be contained within the Tilney family’s titular estate. In addition to lending Northanger Abbey its spooky gothic setting, Udolpho supplied the young novelist with an interest in concealment and mystery which is found in her later novels. Ellen Belton notes the influence of Udolpho on Austen’s plotting: “like

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Figure 4 - The Circular Staircase, 1908 edition

Cover art from Mary Roberts Rinehart, *The Circular Staircase* (Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merrill, 1908.).
Figure 5 - *The Circular Staircase*, 1952 edition

Figure 6 - *The Hidden Staircase*, 1930 edition

Figure 7 - *The Hidden Staircase*, 1959 edition

the Gothic thrillers devoured by her heroine [Catherine Morland], Austen’s novels make extensive use of the sense of mystery as a structural narrative element.”¹³

Numerous critics, including mystery novelist P. D. James, have commented upon Austen’s use of mystery in her novels, particularly in *Emma* (1815).¹⁴ It has also recently been noted that Mr. Bennet’s attempt to locate Wickham and Lydia via the number of their hackney-coach during their elopement in *Pride and Prejudice* (1813) significantly predates Sherlock Holmes’s use of hackney-coach numbers to track a suspect in *The Hound of the Baskervilles* (1901).¹⁵ Austen’s suspenseful plotting and careful attention to minor details in her novels are at least partially attributable to the influence of Radcliffe’s early detective text.

*Caleb Williams*, in addition to being an early detective novel, may also specifically be considered the first noir mystery. The first-person narrative of *Caleb Williams*, which relates Caleb’s struggles in a world tilted in favour of the powerful Ferdinando Falkland, is reminiscent of the corrupt backdrop of noir thrillers. As such, the novel may “be read as… a harbinger of the existential concerns of twentieth-century *noir* or hard-boiled fiction.”¹⁶ Both Godwin’s eighteenth-century novel and the twentieth-century “hard-boiled strain of detective fiction” share a

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¹⁶ Shaw, 361.
similar preoccupation with the themes of “power, crime, and justice.” The hypocritical twentieth-century urban setting described by mystery novelist Raymond Chandler in his 1944 essay, “The Simple Art of Murder,” may as easily be describing eighteenth-century England as depicted by Godwin:

The realist in murder writes of a world in which gangsters can rule nations and almost rule cities, in which hotels and apartment houses and celebrated restaurants are owned by men who made their money out of brothels… and the nice man down the hall is a boss of the numbers racket; a world where a judge with a cellar full of bootleg liquor can send a man to jail for having a pint in his pocket… where no man can walk down a dark street in safety because law and order are things we talk about but refrain from practising…

Caleb’s attempts to prove Falkland’s guilt are stymied by the corruption of his environment: due to Falkland’s financial assets and standing in the community, he is able to manipulate the legal system to protect himself. By involving himself in investigative activities, lower-class Caleb opens himself to false accusations and persecution because he does not possess any social capital. Similarly, the noir mystery fiction of the twentieth century portrays a dishonest milieu within which the detective figure must operate. Caleb, with his attempts to investigate and illuminate criminal activity within a corrupt system, is a forerunner of later hardboiled sleuths such as Dashiell Hammett’s Sam Spade and Raymond Chandler’s Philip Marlowe.

17 Cohen, Murder Most Fair, 50.
Tom Richmond was the first professional detective in English literature: as such, this makes *Richmond* the earliest example of the substantial body of mystery novels featuring police officers as the protagonist. This subgenre, termed “police procedural” by New York Times mystery critic Anthony Boucher,\(^1\) features an official law-enforcement officer who investigates crimes as his main mode of employment. The protagonist of a police procedural often shares Richmond’s sense of social ostracism based on his or her choice of career, but, like Richmond, he is generally motivated by a strong sense of professionalism and moral duty. Notable examples of contemporary characters who may be considered descendants of Tom Richmond include Colin Dexter’s Inspector Morse, Reginald Hill’s Detective Superintendent Andrew Dalziel and Detective Sergeant Peter Pascoe, and Ian Rankin’s Inspector Rebus. Tom Richmond may also be considered a precursor of the numerous fictional Bow Street Runners who appear in contemporary mystery novels. Richmond’s successors include Richard Falkirk’s Edmund ‘Beau’ Blackstone in the *Blackstone* series (1972-1977); J. G. Jeffreys’s Jeremy Sturrock who, like Tom Richmond, narrates his adventures as a Bow Street Runner in the first person (1972-1987); Kate Ross’s Peter Vance in *Whom the Gods Love* (1995); T. F. Banks’s Henry Morton in *The Thief-Taker* (2001) and *The Emperor’s Assassin* (2003); S. K. Rizzolo’s aptly-named John Chase in *The Rose in the Wheel* (2002) and *Blood for Blood* (2003); and James McGee’s Matthew Hawkwood (2006-present). While *Richmond* may or may not have served as a direct inspiration to all of these novelists, the novel’s preservation of Tom Richmond as an early professional detective ensured

that the figure of the Bow Street Runner would remain a part of literature and popular culture.

_Pelham_ is widely accepted, alongside Benjamin Disraeli’s _Vivian Grey_ (1826), as a foundational example of the “silver fork” school of novels, a genre which focused on life in high society and usually related the picaresque adventures of a titled hero.\(^20\) Significantly, it is also the first murder mystery novel in English literature to feature an aristocratic sleuth. Bulwer-Lytton describes his hero as the younger son of “the younger son of one of our oldest earls” who has a genteel upbringing which includes an education at Eton and Cambridge.\(^21\) Henry Pelham was reputedly modeled on Bulwer-Lytton’s own patrician college friend, George William Frederick Villiers (1800-1870), the fourth earl of Clarendon.\(^22\) Given his noble descent, Henry Pelham may be considered the original forerunner of titled, better-known literary detectives such as Emma Orczy’s Lady Molly Robertson-Kirk, daughter of the earl of Flintshire; Dorothy L. Sayers’s Lord Peter Wimsey, second son of the fifteenth duke of Denver; Margery Allingham’s Lord Rudolph K——, who adopts the alias of Albert Campion for his detective work; Ngaio Marsh’s Roderick Alleyn, the younger son of a baronet; and Elizabeth George’s Detective Inspector Thomas Lynley, who is also Viscount Lynley, eighth earl of Asherton. Moreover, Pelham is the first literary detective who is driven to become an amateur investigator for personal reasons (in his case, in order to prove the innocence of a


\(^{21}\) Bulwer-Lytton, 1, 5, 9.

\(^{22}\) Bulwer-Lytton, xii.
friend), rather than being motivated by financial gain or professional recognition. Creating a personal motivation for amateur detective work, such as a desire to clear a friend or family member’s name, has continued to be liberally employed by mystery novelists in order to lend credence to an amateur sleuth’s investigative activities.

Given the political and social turmoil taking place during the long eighteenth century, particularly in the latter decades, it is unsurprising that the roots of the orderly genre of detective fiction began to take shape in the period. This literary genre, which would eventually offer comfort and certainty in a shifting world, developed partially out of the literary tradition of the explained supernatural, which promised a logical, rational, comforting explanation for seemingly supernatural, disordered events. The detective novel promised readers a further step of comfort: the literary detective figure would provide a rational, organized solution to crimes of a temporal nature, would carry out justice, and would protect the virtuous while punishing the guilty. As the moral compass of the story, the literary detective figure needed to undergo a complete transformation from his roguish, semi-criminal roots into a character who could replace the ethical force of providence within the investigative narrative. This transformation was accomplished in the eighteenth-century texts examined in this study, a process which enabled the literary detective figure to appear as a central, trustworthy character in later detective fiction.
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