P. D. James: A Moral Murder She Wrote

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Abstract

This thesis places P. D. James's detective novels within the historical and critical framework of the detective genre, and explores her particular contributions to it. James's awareness of the implications of a police investigation, coupled with her strikingly bleak and moralistic representation of our contemporary world are two of the main reasons she has achieved such widespread critical acclaim. Her novels also have a didactic dimension that ranges from an assertion of morally-correct modes of behaviour in an age without religion, to the constant reminder that, although they provide entertainment, murder mysteries must never be taken too lightly. These signature features of James's fiction have become more pronounced over the years, and reached their apotheosis in such novels as Death of an Expert Witness, A Taste for Death, and Devices and Desires. As a result, these texts are the principal analytic focus of this thesis.

Résumé

Cette thèse situe les romans policiers de P. D. James dans le cadre historique et critique de la littérature policière, et étudie ses contributions particulières à ce genre. Sa conscience des implications d'une enquête policière, jointe à sa représentation morale et remarquablement morne de notre monde contemporain sont les deux raisons principales pour lesquelles elle a atteint une si grande acclamation. Ses romans ont aussi une dimension didactique qui s'étend d'une assertion des formes d'attitudes moralement correctes à une époque où la croyance religieuse s'affaiblit, a un constant rappel que, bien qu'ils fournissent du divertissement, les romans policiers ne doivent jamais être pris à la légère Ces traits signés James sont devenus plus prononcés au courant des années, et ont atteint leur apothéose dans de tels romans que Death of an Expert Witness, A Taste for Death, et Devices and Desires. Par conséquent, ces textes sont les points analytiques de cette thèse.

Introduction: Murder Needs an Introduction

At a wedding reception several years ago, an old friend and I compared our favourite "comfort books"--tattered copies of novels that go everywhere with us, reread especially at times when comfort is needed. When I told her that P. D James's A Taste for Death was on my list, she gaped at me and asked "How could you? She's so grim and depressing"

Unlike so many other detective novels, James's can weather multiple readings, and even continue to offer up new parallels, insights, and interpretations It was around the time that pages began falling out of my well-worn copy of A Taste for Death that I decided it might make good sense to devote my Masters thesis to a study of James's work. The aim of my thesis is to place James's detective novels within an historical and critical framework, while exploring what has always intrigued me most about her novels--their overtly moralistic tenor, and their awareness of the nasty implications of detection.

One of the most popular contemporary British detective novelists, P. D. James regularly tops bestseller lists with almost every new release. Her novels are both well-written and well-crafted, making for absorbing and suspenseful, 'I can't put this book down' reading. She provides both

compelling and intellectually stimulating reading, with clues laid in the poetry of Blake. Yet this widespread popularity is also somewhat surprising, for her books are permeated with a sense of grim evilness only slightly offset by ironic humour and the occasional honourable character. Indeed, most James fans readily admit to feeling almost relieved when they finish one of her novels.

James writes detective novels that provide far more than mere passing thrills. Instead, they have a didactic dimension that ranges from an implicit assertion of morally-correct modes of behaviour in an age without religion, to the constant reminder that although they provide entertainment, murder mysteries must never be taken too lightly. Indeed, James herself has described detective fiction as "the imposing of a moral order, where, apparently, there is none" (Bakerman 56). The mirror she holds up to the outside world reflects a society where people send each other poison pen letters, where lovers copulate in churches, and where fathers murder sons. It's a society where people have lost sight of God and his teachings. The result is an almost unrelentingly brooding, seething atmosphere only somewhat tempered by those few good souls who point the way towards a better world. What all the good characters in her novels have in common is a sustaining faith, be it religious or a belief in the basic goodness of humankind. James's preoccupation with good and evil, sin and death, is more pronounced in four of her more recent novels, Death of an Expert Witness, The Black Tower, A Taste for Death, and Devices and Desires, and for this reason I cite them frequently.

James also applies her moral code to the business of detection. In novel after novel, she stresses the intrusive nature of a police investigation

which strips all suspects of their privacy Further, she shows how damaging a criminal investigation can be to innocent lives Thus, in order to solve the mystery in Death of an Expert Witness, detectives John Massingham and Adam Dalgliesh are forced to destroy 16-year-old Nell Kennison's belief in her father Even so, the police are sometimes thwarted in their attempt to prove guilt In such novels as A Mind to Murder, Adam may have learned the story of the crime by the novel's close, but there is no satisfactory resolution because that story cannot be told in court with any credibility As a result, Eric Nagle, an accesory to murder and a blackmailer, eludes justice, his ego intact, and there is not a single thing Adam can do about it. An awareness of the implications of the criminal investigation and a strict moral outlook are two distinct reasons that James has achieved such a high degree of critical recognition, and I have chosen to devote a chapter to each of these facets of her fiction These preoccupations coupled with her complex characterizations have added a greater resonance to her detective fiction and contribute to her being considered a serious novelist who "happens to put her characters into mystery stories" (Newgate Callendar, qtd. in Gidez 5).

In the first chapter of this thesis, I look at the social climate that accompanied the rise and development of the detective story in the nineteenth-century While tracing the genealogy of the detective novel, I focus primarily on the contributions of four Golden Age authors who bear the greatest influence on James--Agatha Christie, Dorothy L. Sayers, Ngaio Marsh, and Margery Allingham. I look at some of the characteristics and assumptions of the Golden Age (1920s and 30s), and then examine some of the debts James owes this era's practitioners, as well as how she differs from them

From an historical perspective, I turn, in the second chapter, to some contemporary critical approaches to the genre of detective fiction For the most part, though, I follow a narratologic approach and attempt to answer the question Is the secret of the crime a narrative secret or a conceptual secret? And, finally, I attempt to account for the paradox that solving a crime seems to depend more on leaps of fancy than on the scientific, linear and logical path the genre has embraced since Edgar Allan Poe's armchair detective Auguste C. Dupin took the stage in 1841

The third chapter discusses the implications of a criminal investigation, where the police are granted the power to invade every aspect of the lives of victim and suspect. Police activity in detective fiction is also linked to the constant surveillance that historian Michel Foucault, in Discipline and Punish, sees as the price paid for increasing penal mildness in the nineteenth-century What makes James interesting in this respect is that she calls attention to the intrusive nature of police work and demonstrates that even when the crime is solved, no one can possibly remain unaffected I also attempt to account for a central contradiction in James's novels that she allows the crime to be solved despite the demonstrably high price of resolution

In the fourth and final chapter, I examine James's strikingly bleak vision of our contemporary world. Her novels are peopled with a host of thoroughly unpleasant characters who live in messy, crumbling, and decaying settings. Into this grim world, James injects intriguing digressions that take the form of moral cameos--teachings on death, on how to be content with one's lot, and on how to maintain faith in a faithless world

While the past decade has seen a proliferation of academic articles on P. D James, and indeed, on the genre of detective fiction as a whole, the coverage has been relatively patchy (James still tends to get more attention in newspapers and magazines, on radio and television) The James literature ranges widely in quality There's everything from an insightful comparison of A Taste for Death with T S Eliot's The Waste Land, to half a dozen virtually identical articles which herald her arrival as the new "Queen of crime" So far, only two books devoted entirely to James have been published. Norma Siebenheller's 1983 text, P. D. James, traces the moral and ethical makeup of James's characters through each of her novels The second, published in 1986, and also called P. D. James, by Richard P. Gidez, largely consists of plot summaries with some biographical details about James and a short discussion of Dorothy L. Sayers and Margery Allingham, two mystery writers who influenced her.

James's output has been comparatively slim--only eleven novels since her first novel Cover Her Face was published in 1962 Although the quality of these novels is by no means uniform, I have, for the most part, steered away from discussing their relative strengths and weaknesses I did, however, opt not to consider The Skull Beneath the Skin and Unnatural Causes in this thesis because neither novel had much to add to my discussion. As well, the structures of both novels don't hang together particularly well, and neither easily withstands many rereadings I also chose to omit Innocent Blood, even though it is one of my favourite James novels, because it is not a detective novel. I do include numerous citations from Cover Her Face and a few from A Mind to Murder since they serve as early exemplars of the themes that have increasingly preoccupied James throughout the past thirty years. For the

rest, if I rely more heavily on A Taste for Death, please excuse me for playing favourites.

Chapter 1: The Relevant Past

The troop of weekend guests make their way through the windswept driveway to their host's turreted old mansion. Over dinner, the guests are acquainted with the rules of a macabre "murder game" currently in vogue. But someone has taken the game one step further, and before it has even begun one of the guests lies sprawled with an ancient dagger sticking out between his shoulder blades. A quest to discover the author of this foul deed is launched. The shadow of suspicion lies upon everyone. All the guests have something to hide, for few were on good terms with the recently deceased The victim, while living, was a cad. Enter the police detective. He rigorously questions guests and servants alike, and hunts through the grounds for clues. Using logic, he discovers how, and then who, committed the crime. Case solved. Order is restored and life is returned to normal. (My synopsis of A Man Lay Dead, Ngaio Marsh, 1934.)

Echoing this summary of Marsh's "classical" detective novel, some fifty years later, P. D. James states her own approach as a detective novelist in her introduction to Crime Times Three:

> The old conventions may still be retained. There will be a violent death; a limited circle of suspects all with motives, means, and opportunity; false clues; and a tenable ending with a solution to the mystery which both author and reader hope will be a satisfying consummation of suspense and excitement but which the reader could himself arrive at by a process of logical deduction from revealed facts with the aid of no more luck or intuition than it is reasonable to permit to the detective himself. (qtd in Harkness 119)

With only these two brief descriptions to go by, readers unfamiliar with either Ngaio Marsh or P. D. James might think they produce virtually identical novels. In fact, they don't. James writes well-plotted but bleak novels with complex characters and complex outcomes set in a contemporary Britain shaped by its crumbling moral values. The bulk of Marsh's detective fiction belongs to the so-called "Golden Age" of the 1920s and 30s. Despite a theatrical sense of setting and sharply drawn, interesting characters, Marsh's novels emphasize the genre's intellectual aspects: the puzzle, the clues, the solution. However, regardless of these differences, both James and Marsh write within a genre bound by tradition and a lengthy list of do's and don'ts Indeed, by 1928, detective novelist S. S. Van Dine (Willard Huntington Wright) had itemized no fewer than twenty rules for writing detective stories. The rules stipulate that the reader have equal opportunity with the detective

for solving the mystery (cardinal rule #1); that "there simply must be a corpse in a detective novel, and the deader the corpse the better"; and that a servant must not be chosen by the author as the culprit, to name just a few rules (189-93). Although even Golden Age novelists such as Marsh violated some of these rules, they all adhered to Van Dine's first rule--the principle of "playing fair."

This seemingly static genre has its sociological and literary roots in the early nineteenth-century.[1] The first detective story leads back, by way of Edgar Allan Poe, to the autobiography of French detective Eugène Vidocq. The first official detective in the Western world, Vidocq turned to detecting after leading the life of a strolling actor, soldier, robber, gambler, dealer in illicit goods, and convict. Vidocq offered his services as a police spy in 1809, and by 1811, he became the first chief of the Paris Sûreté. Published in 1828, his Memoirs of Vidocq, Principal Agent of the French Police, provided Poe, William Wilkie Collins, and Conan Doyle with a rich source of mythology and fact. Vidocq's is the first insider's account of both the detective and criminal world.

The detective story as we know it dates from 1841, with the first publication of Poe's "The Murders in the Rue Morgue." Here, we not only have a crime but a detective to solve it. Enter C. Auguste Dupin, the progenitor of every amateur sleuth in detective fiction from Sherlock Holmes on. Of illustrious birth, the eccentric Dupin combines imagination and a keen analytical mind to solve puzzling crimes. Almost thirty years later, the first fictional police detective makes an appearance in Wilkie Collins's 1868 novel The Moonstone. Described by T. S. Eliot as "the first, the longest and the best of modern English detective novels," The Moonstone features the

celebrated Sergeant Cuff, whose appearance and mannerisms find echoes, to some degree, in his literary successors. Cuff is described as looking like a parson, or an undertaker, "or anything else you like, except what he really was" (133). The same is true of Ngaio Marsh's detective Roderick Alleyn, who, according to a character in her first novel A Man Lay Dead, "did not resemble a plain-clothes policeman. . . . He looked like one of her Uncle Hubert's friends, the sort that they knew would 'do' for houseparties" (44)

P. D. James's detective Adam Dalgliesh elicits similarly baffled reactions in Cover Her Face, her first novel. When Eleanor Maxie first sees Dalgliesh, she wonders: "Where have I seen that head before? Of course. That Dürer. In Munich was it? Portrait of an Unknown Man. Why does one always expect police officers to wear bowlers and raincoats?" (59). Sergeant Cuff's most eccentric quirk is an unusual and intense passion for roses When not off examining a footprint by the Shivering Sand, Cuff can be found arguing with the gardener over whether the white moss rose does or does not, require to be budded on the dog rose for it to grow well. Adam Dalgliesh is a published poet as well as a career police detective. This is not to say that writing poetry is any more eccentric than an absorbing interest in roses, but both are considered unusual occupations by other characters. For instance, in A Taste for Death, Lady Ursula Berowne says to Dalgliesh: "To be a poet and a librarian, even if unusual, has a certain appropriateness, but to be a poet and a policeman seems to me eccentric, even perverse" (108). Another of Sergeant Cuff's practices is the habit of whistling "The Last Rose of Summer" whenever deep concentration is called for. This signals the reader that a significant moment has been reached, and alerts us to the possible presence of a clue. This practice of alerting the reader is followed by Golden Age writers

Margery Allingham and Dorothy L. Sayers. Allingham's detective Albert Campion appears more vacant, bland and foolish at critical times. Readers of Sayer's novels know when her detective Lord Peter Wimsey is speaking to a key character, for his final consonants suddenly start disappearing, as is evident in Strong Poison when he says: "I'm not a lawyer, of course, but I'm tryin' to be as lucid as I can" (184).

Not surprisingly, the rise of the detective novel in Britain didn't begin until after the establishment in 1842, of the Detective Department, the precursor of Scotland Yard. As Sayers points out in her 1929 article, "The Omnibus of Crime," detectives cannot flourish either in print or in fact, until the public has an idea of what constitutes proof (Sayers 55). This is not the sole factor in the genre's development, however. Also necessary was the shift in public sympathy over to the side of law and order, away from a glorification of the criminal outlaw. Important too was the rise of science, which reduced apparent miracles to mechanical marvels. Other factors include the rise of a middle class with increasing leisure and literacy.

Detectives such as Sergeant Cuff and Sherlock Holmes replaced criminal-heroes in literature and popular imagination. Latter day Robin Hoods were to be hunted rather than glorified. So, too, cunning and astute villains were seen as opponents to be overcome by an omnipotent detective. In the place of the adventurer and the knight errant, popular imagination hailed the doctor, the scientist, and the policeman as saviours and protectors (Sayers 56). For instance, compare William Wilkie Collins's 1860 novel The Woman in White with his later novel The Moonstone. In the former, it is Count Fosco, the fat, foreign, cunning villain who emerges as the novel's most exciting character. Indeed, Fosco and Marian Halcombe are the main

reason the novel sustains many readers' interest With the Moonstone, a mere eight years later, the "bad guy" Godfrey Ablewhite is banal, even in his duplicitous villainy, compared with the enigmatic and quirky Sergeant Cuff.

But if the nineteenth-century public glorified the police detective and the law enforcer, there is no doubt that the public was grateful for their existence. A burgeoning middle class (which comprised the bulk of detective novel readers) had a vested interest in preserving and protecting its accumulated wealth In Thrillers: Genesis and Structure of a Popular Genre, Jerry Palmer connects this desire for protection with the emergence of the thriller/detective hero. According to Palmer, the two main ideological notions that shape the genre are: the fear of conspiracy and competitive individualism. Combining the two permits the fictitious, ideological resolution of the contradiction between individuality and communality (149). The concept of competitive individualism is built into the theories of Hobbes and Locke, which assume that the basic unit of society is the individual Palmer argues that the cornerstone of Locke's system is the assumption that all men want to accumulate ever-increasing amounts of property. Locke's argument, he says, is fundamentally designed as a justification of unlimited property rights, unrestricted by natural needs (155) The desire for accumulation can only lead to something akin to Hobbes's state of 'war against all' because men exist in a state of scarcity, and are incapable of cooperation outside the framework of justice deployed by a state controlled by property owners (158). Palmer's argument is that it is the mentality of competitive individualism which in the nineteenth century acquired a universality and central importance, that explains the appearance of the thriller hero (180). The fear of conspiracy is the second element that

dominates the thriller. During the nineteenth century, the propertied classes came to see the civil order as a natural order. And thus, offences against property and order came to be seen both as offences against a natural order and as public wrongs. Therefore the only difference between offences against property and offences against the person is in the degree of malignancy involved, and in the degree of plausibility with which it can be claimed that a given offence is in fact an offence against the natural order (201).

Small wonder, then, that a charge frequently levelled against the genre is that it is inherently conservative, that it unquestioningly upholds and glorifies state apparatuses of law and order. No other era in the history of detective fiction is as susceptible to this charge than the Golden Age. Spanning the 1920s and 30s in Britain, the period produced an abundance of detective novels of manners of variable quality. What is particularly striking about novels of this period is their insularity, unreality, and class consciousness. The General Strike of 1926 never took place, trade unions did not exist, and when sympathy was expressed for the poor it was not for the unemployed but for those struggling along on a fixed inherited income (Symons, Bloody Murder 108-09). To further quote Symons on this era's detective fiction, he says in The Detective Story in Britain:

> In a social sense the detective story expresses in an extreme form the desire of the middle and upper classes in British society for a firm, almost hierarchical, social order, and for an efficient police force. Classical detective stories, with their strict rules, their invariable punishment of subtle and intelligent wrongdoers, and their bloodhound policemen supplemented when necessary by private

> detectives of almost superhuman intelligence and insight, are the fairy tales of Western industrial civilization (9)

Central to the classical detective story of this period is the assumption that the world is a limited and ordinary place where all things can be known. The mysterious, when it does occur, is only a temporary condition, one which will always yield to reason if only one is persistent and intelligent enough (Hubly, "The Formula Challenged" 512) Thus, no matter how many corpses accumulate in the course of a Golden Age novel, the assumption is that once the crime has been solved, everything goes back to the way it was before Thus, the novels end with the identity of the guilty party, and the narrative of the crime. The criminal justice system with its varying forms of punishment lies outside the book's realm. As well, at the end of the book, we are usually left to guess how the novel's characters will be affected by the knowledge that their fiancés, siblings or parents have been unveiled as murderers. For instance, in Ngaio Marsh's A Man Lay Dead, the novel closes with Alleyn's reconstruction of Arthur Wilde's murderous actions. Wilde's trial and punishment, and Mrs. Wilde's life as a convict's wife are not even hinted at It is in these areas that P. D. James differs from earlier British practitioners of the genre. Her closed communities are breeding grounds for evil Innocent characters all suffer from the consequences of the murder well beyond her books' close. Indeed, the world of her novels is basically a disorderly and evil place, in which good, when it does occur, is the temporary aberration.

As a rule, the classical detective story closes with the detective's self-congratulatory summary of the crime--how it took place, how the detective pieced together the story of the crime, and how he arrived at his invariably correct conclusion. Such neat and formulaic closure is noticeably absent from

almost all of P D James's novels. An exception is James's first novel Cover Her Face, where Adam Dalgliesh stages a drawing room reconstruction of the crime. This revelation is, however, followed by some very un-Golden Age events and reflections We read that Eleanor Maxie, accompanied by a woman police sergeant "went to enjoy the comfort of a last bath in her own house" (203); that her son Stephen feels acute misery; and that Adam and the murderer's daughter Deborah Riscoe will probably continue to see each other on a social or perhaps even a romantic basis. From Cover Her Face on, closure in James's novels becomes increasingly uncertain. Adam is almost killed in the final pages of The Black Tower. In A Taste for Death, Inspector Kate Miskin's grandmother is taken hostage and then killed by the murderer Dominic Swayne. The novel closes with the grandmother's funeral. In An Unsuitable Job for a Woman, Cordelia Gray hides evidence from the police, thereby shielding the novel's second murderer. And, in Shroud for a Nightingale, Adam is never able to prove Mary Taylor's guilt, although "he had pursued the case as if it were a personal vendetta" (320).

Yet if P. D. James differs from her detective novelist forbears, it is also true that she owes them a debt. And it's a debt she acknowledges. Often given a separate chapter in books dealing with the genre, under titles such as "The Four Queens," it is Agatha Christie, Ngaio Marsh, Dorothy L. Sayers and Margery Allingham, who remain James's greatest generic influences. Another strong influence is Jane Austen: "I've always admired her; she's always been my favorite novelist, and I do see an influence on my writing . . . Her delicate irony, the detachment, the construction--those are the attractions for me" (Salwak 49).

Despite the fairly obvious differences between P D James and Agatha Christie, many crime fiction critics have unhesitatingly passed Christie's crown title of "Queen of Crime" on to James.[2] In interviews, James is hesitant about accepting this "honour." For example, she has said "Dame Agatha is dead, and perhaps people look around for someone to succeed her. . . . I think she was pre-eminently a fabricator of ingenious plots . But she can't be regarded as a serious novelist, and the characters are very pasteboard--the same ones used over and over again, really" (Salwak 49) There is no doubt that in the course of her eighty some-odd detective novels, Christie explored numerous highly ingenious crime puzzles. It is also true that she proved to be a resilient, flexible, and enduring writer, who has been consistently able to capture the attention of millions of readers And in doing so, she did much to create the niche for women mystery novelists that James and others have so easily slipped into in recent years. Briefly, the main differences between the two novelists lie in their characterization, moral outlook, and sense of criminal motivation In Christie's novels, character is largely subordinated to plot and puzzle. These contrasts, however, are in part due to the different eras which shape their writings. In "Death Deferred The Long Life, Splendid Afterlife and Mysterious Workings of Agatha Christie," David I. Grossvogel notes the "innocent" world within which Christie writes He accounts for her early popularity: "Her first readers read her in order to purchase, at the cost of a minor and passing disturbance, the comfort of knowing that the disturbance was contained" (4).

Many critics tend to link P. D. James most closely with Dorothy L. Sayers.[3] While there are numerous similarities, I do not believe them to be as strong as those between James and Ngaio Marsh or Margery Allingham. Yes,

it is true that both Sayers and James are literary detective novelists, with protagonists who can easily quote Blake, the Bible, and know their wines As well, each has written a novel set in a university--Sayers's Gaudy Night, which has detective novelist Harriet Vane solving the mystery of a series of poison pen letters at Oxford, and James's An Unsuitable Job for a Woman, where private detective Cordelia Gray is called upon to solve a murder in Cambridge. Despite these similarities, James delves far more deeply into character and motivation than Sayers ever does. As with Christie, the biggest differences lie in the characters of the writers' detectives. Christie's Hercule Poirot with his "little grey cells," egg-shaped head and manicured moustache, comes closer to Sayers's effete, aristocratic Lord Peter Wimsey than to the serious, professional, and aloof Adam Dalgliesh.

If Agatha Christie worked out some of the most ingenious puzzle-plots, the prize for inventive murders certainly belongs to Marsh. A woman shot by a piano? In the world of a Ngaio Marsh novel, that's not unusual. Along with providing numerous readable and absorbing police detective novels, Marsh's strong theatre background lends her novels a particularly vivid sense of setting that finds an echo in P. D. James's novels years later. The earlier Marsh novels (1930s) are imbued with a powerful conviction that it is possible, through the actions of her police detective Roderick Alleyn, to serve the cause of order and goodness. The solution of a murder and its associated crimes, then, leads not so much to the punishment of a single criminal as to an affirmation that it is possible to decrease the sum of evil in the world (Dooley and Dooley 45-46). Later (post war) Marsh novels are less confident in the power of good to conquer evil. In novels such as When in Rome or Grave Mistake; there is little or no suggestion that Alleyn's

detection of the murderer makes a significant difference to the community, or even satisfies him personally (Dooley and Dooley 46)

One of the most striking features of James's novels is the presence of evil lurking beneath seemingly orderly communities This was either absent or glossed over as an aberration in many Golden Age detective novels An exception is Margery Allingham, whose novels became increasingly concerned with manifestations of evil, especially after the Second World War. As Erik Routley asserts in The Puritan Pleasures of the Detective Story, Margery Allingham entered more fully into the dark mysteries of evil, unlike Marsh, Sayers, and others of their time, for whom it is an aberration (148). Allingham has said of her own books that they were novels "of the life of the time" in which a sudden death in mysterious circumstances often served to "make characters reveal themselves" (1949). This is especially true of her 1952 novel The Tiger in the Smoke, where she elaborates her own conceptions of good and evil, while at the same time calling attention to what she saw as an urgent contemporary issue: how do you rechannel the human propensity for violence during war, once the fighting is over (Martin 182). The novel, which makes for a far more frightening read than earlier Allingham books, centres on the violent character Jack Havoc. An ex-Borstal boy with a record of savage violence, a commando hero, army deserter and multiple murderer, "killing recklessly and all for nothing," Havoc terrorizes all of London. The one person immune to Havoc's villainy is Canon Avril, the good man of the novel. He's described as: "an impossible person in many ways, with an approach to life which was clear-sighted yet off-centre" Inevitably, the two meet in the novel's most compelling scene.[4] And yet, this is not just another rehashing of the perennial struggle between good and evil As Allingham

notes in her 1953 article "My Family Thought It Silly To Stop Writing," she attempts to tackle "the eternal problem of why Good is good and why Evil is evil" (qtd in Martin 186)

Allingham wasn't the only Golden Age writer to become increasingly preoccupied with evil and decay. In post-war years, Marsh and even Christie novels began to darken, becoming a little less insouciant and a little more serious For instance, Hercule Poirot was starting to express Christie's growing sense of dismay at the assertion and vulgarity of new money. Several late Marsh novels transmit a sense of a global web of criminality through repeated references to an international drug trade. Allingham's 1945 novel Pearls Before Swine (published as Coroner's Pidgin in Britain), is set in London during the last devastating stages of the war Albert Campion returns to London after three years on two warring continents "employed on a mission for the Government so secret that he had never found out quite what it was" (8). But the London he returns to is void of familiar landmarks, replaced instead by neatly tidied bombed-out avenues.

The war, as Robin W Winks writes in his introduction to Detective Fiction. A Collection of Critical Essays, enhanced our sense of the evil people do, and in doing so turned the detective novel more toward violence than reason, more toward personality than plot (8). Certainly, P. D. James was personally affected by the war, for her husband returned from it in a state of mental collapse from which he never recuperated. Thus, if P. D. James's work marks a departure from the earlier, novel of manners form of detective fiction, it is in large part because the genre functions as a mirror of society. And, if Dorothy L Sayers wrote of a world where people thought nothing of being anti-semitic or racist, it is because her novels are historical

manifestations of a time past, when the upper classes were the model to which the middle classes aspired and when the empire was intact (Heilbrun 280). "Detective fiction, then, continues to mirror society, not only in its concern, its moral awareness, and its language It also helps tell us who and where we are, as individuals" (Winks 9).

Chapter 2. Some Narrative Implications Of The Genre

In her 1929 article "The Omnibus of Crime," Dorothy L. Sayers, writing as both crime novelist and critic, asked: "How can we at the same time show the reader everything and yet legitimately obfuscate him as to its reading?" (73). The answer to this paradoxical question is one that both literary critics and detective fiction writers have spent the intervening years mulling over. The genre, founded as it is on a paradox, is rife with contradictions, culminating in the assertion that a pure narrative of detection cannot exist. There are many theoretical paths applicable to an analysis of the detective genre. I have opted to follow in the wake of Tzvetan Todorov, Uri Eisenzweig, and Donna Bennett, who argue most persuasively for a narratologic approach. As a starting point, these critics delineate the genre's dual narrative structure, where the story of the investigation only exists because the story of the crime is hidden. The implications of the genre's particular narrative structure provides a useful framework for my discussion of James's work which follows in the next two chapters.

Sayers's answer to her question in "The Omnibus of Crime" displays a greater regard for obfuscation than for legitimacy. One solution, she says, occurs when "the detective, while displaying his clues openly, will keep up his sleeve some bit of special knowledge which the reader does not possess" (73). Another option is to deliberately mislead the reader by telling what the detective has observed and deduced, "but to make the observations and deductions turn out to be incorrect, thus leading up to a carefully manufactured surprise-packet in the last chapter" (73) Such admissions on the part of a detective novelist certainly render doubtful the genre's claim to a logical, rational and scientific method of deduction. While Sayers's statements would surely disappoint mystery novel fans who delight in puzzling out the story of the crime, they only conform to Uri Eisenzweig's conclusion in his 1983 article "Présentation du genre," that a pure narrative of detection cannot exist.

In order to understand how Eisenzweig arrives at this conclusion, it is first necessary to analyze in greater depth the structure of detective fiction. To begin with, crime only has meaning in a detective novel when it is surrounded by mystery, a mystery which entails an investigation and a search for a solution. One of the main reasons the crime is usually murder, is that the witness (the victim) cannot testify, which makes the investigation all the more challenging. Another important reason why murder is usually chosen by a mystery novelist, is that there is a general consensus that murder is a heinous crime, one for which there is no reparation.

In the past fifty some-odd years, several critical approaches to the analysis of detective fiction have emerged.[5] These include a historical approach which concentrates on creating a genealogy of detective fiction that

has roots in the stories of crime and sin in the Bible, Greek tragedies, and even Chaucer's Canterbury Tales. Another approach is sociological in nature, viewing detective fiction through the optic of social and cultural change resulting from the rise of capitalism. This approach, which Eisenzweig calls "pretextual," is exemplified by the writings of marxist critics Stephen Knight and Ernest Mandel. For instance, Mandel sees the clash of wits between detective and criminal as a competition between "abstract intelligences," a competition that is "like that of the market place, where what is involved is a struggle over cost-prices and sales-prices, and not between complex human beings" (211). As well, there are the psychological analyses, by authors such as Charles Rycroft and Geraldine Pedersen-Krag, who apply Freud to the detective novel. An example of their conclusions is Pederson-Krag's assertion that murder is a symbolic representation of parental intercourse, and

> the victim is the parent for whom the reader (the child) had negative oedipal feelings. The clues in the story, disconnected, inexplicable, and trifling, represent the child's growing awareness of details it had never understood, such as the family sleeping arrangements, nocturnal sounds, stains, incomprehensible adult jokes and remarks. . . . (qtd. in Rycroft 229)

The critical path I intend to pursue in this chapter, follows an analysis of the genre's properties and narrative structure. I find Eisenzweig's argument for a narratologic analysis particularly persuasive. The answers to the questions--who killed? how? why?--can only be narrative in nature (Eisenzweig 9). For, as Robert Champigny writes in What Will Have Happened, "the mystery in a

mystery story is a narrative secret, not a conceptual mystery" (Champigny 13). Thus, a mystery is only mysterious so long as its narration is missing

The cornerstone of current generic and narratologic analyses of detective fiction rests upon a recognition of the genre's dual narrative structure. It is taken as a given that there are not one but two narratives coexisting within the novel's framework. The narrative we read is only the account of the search for the hidden narrative which tells the story of the crime and reveals the identity of the criminal. This fundamental concept was first articulated in Michel Butor's 1948 detective novel Passing Time (L'Emploi du temps). In the novel, George Burton, the author of many murder mysteries, explains to the narrator that "all detective fiction is based on two murders of which the first, committed by the murderer, is merely the occasion for the second, in which he is the victim of the pure and unpunishable murderer, the detective," and that "the narrative . . . superimposes two temporal series: the days of the investigation which begin with the crime, and the days of the drama which lead up to it" (qtd. in Todorov 44).

In "The Typology of Detective Fiction," Tzvetan Todorov picks up on Butor's innovative suggestion that there are two stories that unfold in opposite directions. The study of such generic fiction as detective novels is particularly suited to Todorov's own project of viewing individual works as examples of literary conventions and techniques, in order to find underlying structures. Genre is treated as a set of norms or conventions which makes the production of meaning possible, and the search is therefore for a principle operative in a number of texts, rather than for what is specific about each of them. He thus isolates the basic structure of the detective novel in order to

broaden his system of classification to include such sub-genres as the hard-boiled novel and the thriller.

In his exploration of the dual nature of the whodunit, Todorov insists on the coexistence of the two separate stories--the story of the crime and the story of the investigation. "The former, which ends before the second begins, never confesses its literary nature, while the latter not only takes the reality of the book into account, it is also precisely the story of that very book" (44-45). Or, as Donna Bennett further elaborates a decade later,

> the form is always built out of two largely separate narratives, one seen, the other unseen. The unseen narrative is the account of the commission of the crime. It is never visible to the reader in any full form, but it is more important than the narrative the reader does see, because it justifies all the action within the text. The second narrative is devoted to the reconstruction of the other, hidden narrative. (239)

Therefore, the first story, that of the crime, ends before the second begins, and it is this second story, the story of the investigation, that we read. Not much happens in this second story, for the characters, and especially the investigator, do not actually do anything; they learn. The hundred and fifty pages which separate the discovery of the crime from the revelation of the killer[6] are devoted to a slow apprenticeship, as both detective and reader examine clue after clue, lead after lead, in order to piece together that first and hidden story (45). Thus, when Adam Dalgliesh begins investigating a case, he moves "as if by a conscious act of will, into a world in which time was precisely measured, details obsessively noticed, the senses preternaturally

alert to sounds, smell, sight, the flick of an eyelid, the timbre of a voice" (Taste 17). The first story, that of the crime, is in fact the story of an absence, for it cannot be immediately present in the book. If it were, instead of the corpse on page one, there would be an account of who murdered and how and why. There would no longer be a mystery, for the narrative of the murder would no longer be hidden.[7] Because the story of the crime must be hidden from the reader, the narrator of the story of the investigation (the story we read), can neither transmit directly the conversations of the characters who are implicated in the crime, nor describe their actions. To do so would be to give away the secret. Instead, the narrator must employ the intermediary of a character who will report the words heard or the actions observed in the second story, and who serves as a mediator between the reader and the first story, that of the crime. "These two stories, of which one is present and the other absent, coexist in the continuity of the narrative" (45-46). Todorov does not go further, though, in considering the implications of the dual structure of detective novels. Instead, he employs the duality of absence and presence of narratives to account for his typology of detective sub-genres (hard-boiled and thriller). It is left to such critics as Donna Bennett and Uri Eisenzweig to take up where he leaves off.

Eisenzweig explores a number of implications that follow from this particularity of the genre. While I do not intend to deal with all of them here, there are a couple that are relevant to my own discussion of the genre, and in turn to P. D. James's novels. For instance, he notes that it is the absence of the narrative of the crime (that is, the mystery) that permits the unfolding of the narrative of the investigation, that is, that one narrative only exists because of the other's absence, or unnarratibility. This absence, Eisenzweig insists,

implies that the detective novel is founded upon the impossibility of narrating.

The second (or read) narrative is wholly concerned with the reconstruction of the other, hidden narrative, and this means that the criminal is the quarry who is pursued in the narrative we read. As such, the criminal functions as the product of the read narrative. At the same time, though, the criminal is also the originator of the hidden narrative, and the raison d'être of the read narrative. The text thus poses the identity of the criminal as constituting the origin of the narrative, rather than its product (Eisenzweig 13). It is the criminal who triggers the events, without experiencing their impact except, of course, after being discovered by the detective, at the end of the narrative.

The central paradox of the genre, however, rests in the detective novelist's imperative to furnish the elements of a solution that is at the same time difficult and surprising. For, if the clues really are obviously present in the narrative of the investigation, there would be no mystery for an attentive reader. And yet if they are not fully present, the results of the investigation can only be arbitrary, with no relation to true detection. Thus, the depth of the mystery can only be achieved at the expense of the narrative's logic. There is an incompatibility, then, between enigma and textual coherence. "A pure narrative of detection cannot exist" (my translation, Eisenzweig 14).

This paradox is also embedded in the complex relationship between the author, reader, detective and criminal. It is also the subject of Donna Bennett's excellent article, "The Detective Story: Toward a Definition of Genre." She writes that since the mystery is of the author's making, just as

the story of the crime is authored by the criminal, the relationship between author and reader is analogous to that of the criminal and the detective--one is responsible for the problem and seeks not to get caught, and the other desires a solution and pursues it throughout the text. As a result of this pairing, the reader identifies with the detective, and "figuratively moves into the text, in order to solve the mystery" (238). At the same time, however, the detective remains the author's creation, and his or her actions and openness with the reader are limited by the author's needs to delay the reader's comprehension Instances where detectives hide their conclusions from the reader, and even from their fellow police officers, abound in mystery novels. Take, for example, this conversation between Detective-Inspector John Massingham and Adam Dalgliesh in Death of an Expert Witness: "We know now who killed Lorrimer," Massingham says to Dalgliesh. The latter replies: "We think we know who and how. We may even think we know why. But we haven't a scintilla of proof and without evidence we can't move another step. At present, we haven't even enough facts to justify applying for a search warrant" (288). The novel is 352 pages long, the answer to the question whodunit? is still very much a mystery to the reader, and the detectives are certainly not sharing their deductions with their "ally," the reader. Even after having read this novel at least half a dozen times, I am still unable to figure out who killed Lorrimer and how, by the time Massingham and Dalgliesh do. Thus, as Bennett writes: "author, detective and text . . . all play a dual role: ostensibly their purpose is to enlighten readers, to help them discover the answers they seek. In reality, though, all three are bent on delaying understanding" (238-39).

In her analysis, Donna Bennett employs the terms histoire, discours, and scionarrative. She defines histoire as the narrated universe, similar to that of 'real life' and independent of artistic shaping, hence medium-free; discours as the artistic construction into which the histoire is molded with the help of such devices as point-of-view, temporal deformation, digression, and analogies. The detective story, because of its use of narrative that exists largely outside of the discours, has an histoire that consistently diverges from its discours more than most narrative genres tend to. The histoire contains the events of the criminal's narrative, followed by the events of the detective's narrative, which almost always comes into existence only after the crime. The discours basically contains only the second of these narratives. Bennett calls the narrative of the crime a scionarrative, a narrative which while not strictly within the text nevertheless has a fully discernible existence. Discours and scionarrative run in opposite directions (240-41).

If readers were able to read the scionarrative, then there would be no mystery. As such it is imperative that the reader be unable to piece together the scionarrative fragments that do appear in the text. In order to delay the reader's understanding, the mystery novelist employs perspective to modulate the reader's perceptions. The use of limited perspective is important because it makes the exclusion of the criminal's activities from the discours a natural consequence. Just as detectives hide their deductions from the reader, omniscient narrators, such as the one employed by James, only selectively recount characters' thoughts and actions. The result is that the reader is given teasing fragments of carefully-edited thoughts, reactions, and feelings, which frequently leads to false conclusions. While it is true that the detective is not privy to all the characters' private reflections either, it is also

true that he isn't distracted by any such partial revelations. This narrative shielding is especially relevant when the criminal drifts into the narrative's focal centre. An instance where the narrative selectively transmits a murderer's thoughts occurs in the opening pages of James's Cover Her Face Here, Eleanor Maxie's memories of the murder about to occur at Martingale House, are the centre of the narrative's consciousness. She is looking back "years later, when the trial was a half-forgotten scandal and the headlines were yellowing on the newspaper lining of cupboard drawers" (Cover 5). However, a crucial fact is conveniently omitted: Eleanor Maxie was the direct cause of those newspaper headlines, for she had killed Sally Jupp. The omniscient narrator shields that particular reflection from us, though, and readers must wade through some 200 pages in order to discover her guilt. As well, because the novel opens with Eleanor Maxie's 'untainted' recollections, the reader is less likely to suspect her. While she is the narrative focalizer, the reader instinctively trusts her, for she is invested with narrative authority.

Another device for delaying the reader's understanding of the mystery, is the "red herring," or false clue. Overheard arguments, unexplained absences, fragments of letters--all are imbued with sinister import, and result in the reader's pinning guilt on first one, and then another character, during the course of a detective novel. As a result, perfectly ordinary objects and traces (footprints or smudges), acquire new and potentially frightening meanings. For instance, the presence of an ordinary golden button, in the realm of the mystery novel, could be responsible for proving a criminal's identity. This is true in A Taste for Death, where a button, torn from Dominic Swayne's jacket, and subsequently found at the scene of the crime,

links him with the murders of Sir Paul Berowne and the tramp.[8] A clue, then, functions as a sort of sign, a sign, moreover, which is severed from what it signifies during the course of the detective novel. Clues become redundant once the crime is solved, and objects regain their familiar connotations. Thus, "once the crime is solved, sinister objects recover their banality, just as secret subjects resume their inconsequence" (Miller 42). The final explanation, then, not only discloses the criminal's story and provides the history of the detective's detection, but also "closes the meaning of both texts, stabilizing the meaning of all signs" (Hühn 458)

If the author, detective, and text all play dual roles, seeking at once to delude and enlighten us, it is true too that the reader is prepared for such duplicity even before cracking open a detective novel. From the way in which a mystery novel is promoted, the reader knows from the outset to expect sinister events and to distrust appearances. Think of all those jacket covers, featuring a pair of scissors dripping with blood, or a black revolver, or a sinister shadow looming over a lifeless body with blood trickling from its mouth. Senses are alert to nameless fears, to suspicion and guilt. Readers of detective novels are thus on the look-out for clues--for signs of who will be killed, of who will kill, and how. Consider, for example, the opening paragraph of Shroud for a Nightingale:

> On the morning of the first murder Miss Muriel Beale, Inspector of Nurse Training Schools to the General Nursing Council. . . . Already she had half registered the first familiar sounds of a new day: Angela's alarm silenced. . . the agreeably anticipatory tinklings of early tea in preparations. She forced open her eyelids, resisting

> an insidious urge to wriggle down into the enveloping warmth of the bed. . . . (1)

Here, phrases such as "Angela's alarm silenced," "insidious urge" and "enveloping warmth" have sinister connotations that heighten expectations of bloody deeds Later, when we read that· "Fallon's pale and individual face, blank eyes [were] still fixed on the television set as if unaware that the screen was dead" (Shroud 38), we realize that Nurse Fallon is likely to be the next murdered. It is the context that causes the reader to add extra and sinister meanings to the language of a mystery novel, turning a blank TV screen into a metaphor for impending murder.

Given the dual roles that author, detective, and text all play, how does the detective actually solve the crime and what are some of the implications that arise from this resolution? I intend to consider the detective's methods from narrative, structural and ideological points-of-view. In "The Detective as Reader: Narrativity and Reading Concepts in Detective Fiction," Peter Hühn considers that the initial crime functions as an uninterpretable sign, one that resists integration into the established meaning system of the community in which it occurs. As a result, it becomes vital for the community to uncover the hidden meaning and--by reintegrating the sign--to defuse it. The second story, the story of the investigation, therefore constitutes an attempt to ascribe meaning to the sign. The attempt to read the mystery in this way presupposes the existence of a text. In order to prevent detection, the criminal writes the secret story of his crime into everyday reality in such a form that its text is partly hidden, partly distorted and misleading. But some signs escape and inadvertently express their true

meaning, allowing the criminal to be detected (454). This textual indeterminacy, though, is

> only a temporary illusion caused by the lack of pertinent information on the detective's part. His task consists in delimiting the text by separating the relevant signs from the mass of nonrelevant facts around it, until he is finally able to reduce the polyvalence to the one true meaning, the true story of the crime. (455)

Hühn's conclusion, cited above, is virtually reiterated in the concluding pages of P. D James's The Black Tower, when the story of the crime finally slips into focus for Adam Dalgliesh. At this juncture, Adam reflects that "it was the neglected, uninteresting small segment which, slotted into place, suddenly made sense of so many other discarded pieces. Delusive colours, amorphous and ambiguous shapes came together as now to reveal the first recognizable outline of the finished picture" (258).

This continual rearrangement and reinterpretation of clues is the basic method of reading and understanding unfamiliar texts, the "hermeneutic circle." According to Hühn, the detective's eventual success in unravelling the mystery depends on his ability to question "preconceived notions" (Hühn 455). On the other hand, Kathleen Gregory Klein and Joseph Keller view the detective's success more as a matter of intuition than any ability to think rationally or break through preconceived notions. Like Hühn, they view the criminal's actions as generating a fiction, or allegory whose key is hidden. However, they go on to state that the detective's method results in an interpretation of this fiction, "a hermeneutic, the application of a hypothesis

whose initial impetus is a conjecture not entirely explainable by any rational process. At the beginning, the criminal's and detective's understanding of the case are poles apart. At the end, fiction and hermeneutic coincide" (Klein and Keller 162).

According to Klein and Keller, deductive detective fiction does not exist. This statement, certainly borne out by the methodology of detectives from Sherlock Holmes to Adam Dalgliesh, is not a new one. Regis Messac, the first to thoroughly examine the genre's reliance on science and scientific method, pointed out in 1929, that writers of detective fiction have been confused about what constitutes deduction since Edgar Allan Poe. In his introduction to "The Murders in the Rue Morgue," Poe used the word deduction erroneously to describe the ratiocinations of his detective, Dupin. Dupin solves the murders by thinking about clues rather than by reasoning from a premise. He thus reasons by induction, rather than deduction (Klein and Keller 155). In the past decade, semiologists such as Umberto Eco have proposed that fictional detectives like Holmes and Dupin are abductive rather than deductive. That is, that detectives, "like doctors and cryptanalysts, form hypotheses not by thinking about observed facts exclusively . . . but by imagining, conjecturing, or discovering a plausible explanation suggested by the facts which might explain the puzzling case" (157).

Thus, it is primarily the detective's imagination, rather than any deductive capability, that points to the truth. Certainly, this is true of P. D James's detectives Cordelia Gray and Adam Dalgliesh, both of whom solve their cases through a mixture of intuition and creative intelligence. Consider, for instance, Adam's moment of insight in Shroud for a Nightingale:

> he felt again that spring of excitement and anticipation, the intuitive sense that something important had been said. It was more than a hunch; it was, as always, a certainty. It might happen several times during a case if he were lucky, or not at all. He couldn't will it to happen and he was afraid to examine its roots too closely since he suspected that it was a plant easily withered by logic. (180)

This use of intuition is also evident in The Black Tower, where Adam has no reason to believe that someone has been murdered. And yet, only 60 pages into the book, Adam feels "the frisson of excitement along the blood . . . the quarry wasn't yet in sight nor his spore detectable, yet he was there. He tried to reject this unwelcome surge of tension but it was as elemental and involuntary as the touch of fear" (60). Such intuitions, then, enable fictional detectives to solve crimes even in the absence of all the facts. "In this respect, they are more like artists than logicians or scientists" (Klein and Keller 160).

P. D. James takes this discussion of the nature of detective work and incorporates it in fictional discourse during one scene in Death of an Expert Witness. Here we have the characters Brenda Pridmore and Dr. Howarth attempting to place the police investigation into a recognizable context. The enthusiastic Brenda, eagerly embracing science says "detection must be like science. The detective formulates a theory, then tests it. If the facts he discovers fit, then the theory holds. If they don't, then he has to find another theory, another suspect." Howarth qualifies his agreement, saying "but the temptation to select the right facts is probably greater. And the detective is experimenting with human beings. Their properties are complex and not susceptible to accurate analysis" (247). This response is akin to Klein and

Keller's assertion that the detective's creative guesswork "works only if the initial analogy fits the facts of the case, and only if the guess is not distorted by the kind of conscious idiosyncrasy or unconscious bias which inevitably slants the reasoning process" (158).

On the narrative level, then, the detective solves the mystery by reading, by piecing together fragments of the hidden narrative until he arrives at the truth. On a structural level, the genre succeeds because it appears to reflect a dominant cultural myth. "Deductive detective fiction, like its milieu, is male, linear, scientific, and objective in its self-representation although not in reality" (Klein and Keller 165). And, on an ideological level, resolution in the detective novel can also be seen as a metaphoric triumph of logic, law and order, over the aberrant or mysterious. This is a conclusion popular amongst such critics as Mark Freiman, Peter Hühn and Ernest Mandel. Freiman concludes that the detective's ability to restore social harmony by discovering the identity of the criminal through the exlusive use of logic can, symbolically, be seen as "a question about the ability of existing institutions to deal with challenges to the status quo" (61-66). Hühn states that by reintegrating the aberrant event (the crime), the narrative reconstruction "restores the disrupted social order and reaffirms the validity of the system of norms" (452). Frederic Jameson, in "Reification and Utopia in Mass Culture," has noted that a primary function of detective fiction as popular literature, is to contain our more archaic fears, fantasies, and desires by first arousing them and then, through skillful "management," laying them to rest. The detective's successful unravelling of the mystery appeases threats to personal safety, to family and friends, and the archaic fear of death, aroused by the detective novel.

Yet if social norms are being upheld and protected in the detective novel, it is also true that the reader's sympathies are engaged in this task. For, mystery novel readers are drawn into the sleuth's hunt for the criminal. They become allied with the forces of law and order that a police investigation entails, and hence the ideology upheld by the detective's success. Thus, if the reader succeeds in solving the mystery created by the author, the reader then confirms the claim that reason can solve the kinds of problems that are being posed. "Even if the reader fails, the fact that the contest has been, at least superficially, governed by the rules of 'fair play,' demonstrates that the solution is at least possible for the reader to deduce" (Freiman 64).

The reader's sympathies are engaged not only because he is drawn into a battle of wits with the detective, but also because the detective is frequently the focus of the narrative's consciousness. As Donna Bennett has noted, when the perspective is that of the detective, "the reader is invited to place a much greater degree of confidence in the viewpoint character" (Bennett 250-51). In P. D James's novels, the narrative shifts from character to character, observing them in turn and recounting, to a certain extent, their thoughts and feelings. For the most part, though, the narrative focuses on Adam Dalgliesh, his investigation, his character, and what the others think about him. In An Unsuitable Job for a Woman and The Skull Beneath the Skin, Cordelia Gray is the detective, and it is she who is at the centre of the omniscient narrative during the course of the novel. As a result, the detective's perspective is invested with more authority than that of any other character. For, as Shlomith Rimmon-Kenan writes in Narrative Fiction: Contemporary Poetics, "the ideology of the narrator-focalizer is usually taken

as authoritative, and all other ideologies in the text are evaluated from this higher position" (Rimmon-Kenan 81). And, if we gain pleasure from observing the mastermind's work because our moral sympathies are engaged by his task, then the detective story is about the "ethical and eristic conflict between good and evil" (Auden 16). Further, if a "mystery is construed and enjoyed by the reader as mysterious and threatening because he adopts the perspective of the hero--the desirability of a solution" (Palmer 96).

Chapter 3: The Police Investigation: A Very Nosy Business

All detective novels tend to share the same story line and sequence of events--a mysterious crime followed by a search to unravel the mystery, and an eventual solution. Detective novels are read because of their capacity to remain faithful to the genre's tradition and at the same time to reinvent it in unexpected ways. Novelty is thus to be found not in the novel's action, but in digressions such as social commentary, minutiae of daily lives and detailed settings (Porter, The Pursuit of Crime 55). At least half of P. D. James's novels run to some four hundred pages in length. Much of that space is filled with her characters' reflections, their commentaries on contemporary life and questions about faith, love and trust. She spins moral truths into the lives and communities that inhabit her novels. It is with such digressions that James has made her mark as a "serious" detective novelist. These digressions will be discussed in detail in the following two chapters.

This chapter will examine her preoccupation with police methods in criminal investigations. The story of the crime is inscribed in everyday reality, and in order to read that story, the police must sift through all the private and hidden facts that make up the lives of victim and suspects But the police's reading activities are only achieved at a high price--the price of privacy. James repeatedly calls attention to the price tag that accompanies the reconstruction of the hidden narrative. In doing so, she appears to be criticizing the investigation that is the very staple of her fiction. James begins stressing the less than salutory effects of a criminal investigation in her very first novel, Cover Her Face. However, it is with the publication of such later novels as Death of an Expert Witness and A Taste for Death, that the police investigation itself becomes a theme. For this reason, I chiefly focus on these texts.

The police, in detective fiction, function both as representatives of an ideological order and as interlopers. As detectives seeking to unravel the mystery, the police confer and extract meaning from the morass of relevant and irrelevant detail surrounding the crime. They function as the agents of a total gaze, and are granted the power of interrogation. Yet, what an all-seeing, all-informed police force implies is a system of total, even totalitarian power (Miller 40). However, in the detective novel (and James is no exception), their use of this power is justified because they ultimately solve the crime. What makes James interesting is her clearly-stated awareness of the intrusive nature of police work. She indicates that if "murder is the first destroyer of privacy" (Taste 30), then the police force is the second. Her novels repeatedly indicate the moral ambivalence of police-work which assumes the power to invade every aspect of the suspects' lives. While her police superintendent

Adam Dalgliesh stands outside the community's social order, he is nevertheless given the authority to rupture that order, just as the murderer did. Despite this, however, his presence is necessary if the murderer is to be identified and punished. Justification for the presence of detectives such as Adam Dalgliesh and Cordelia Gray is also provided by the exemplary, ethical and upright lives they lead, in marked contrast to the frequently messy and sordid lives of the suspects that can be found in all James's novels.

The intrusive nature of police work is noted in characters' private reflections that are transmitted by the omniscient narrator, and in the course of spoken dialogue between various characters. It is remarked upon by Adam Dalgliesh just as he steps in to investigate Josephine Fallon's murder in Shroud for a Nightingale, that this is the "first confrontation of the protagonists in a murder case with the outsider, the alien expert in violent death who has come among them, an unwelcome guest, to demonstrate his invidious talents" (65). Right from the beginning, then, the very presence of the police constitutes an intrusion As well, during the course of their investigation, they engage in further intrusions which range from post mortem examinations to interrogations. They are all to varying degrees justified in the text, for without them, the case would not be solved.

Once the police have been called in, James presents in harsh, grotesque detail, the forensic team's virtual assault on the victims' "still-warm" dead bodies. We have the description of: "Kerrison's gloved fingers, sleek as eels, busying themselves at the body's orifices. Explaining, demonstrating, disgarding" (Death 54); of a corpse "systematically dismembered in the cause of justice, or science, or curiosity, or what you will" (Shroud 51); and instances where the corpse would be an exhibit "tagged, documented, dehumanized,

invoking only interest, curiosity or disgust (Taste 34). With only one exception, it is Adam Dalgliesh who observes and reflects on the pathologists' procedures. It is he who transmits a sense of the indignity of this first step in a murder investigation. For Dalgliesh, it is not the post mortem examination that upsets him, rather it is "this impersonal examination of the still warm female body which he couldn't stomach. A few short hours ago she would have been entitled to some modesty, to her own choice of doctor, free to reject those unnaturally white and eagerly probing fingers" (Shroud 51). This feeling of indignation recurs in A Taste for Death, while he watches pathologist Miles Kynaston's examination of Sir Paul Berowne and the tramp Harry Mack, "this violation of the body's orifices, preliminaries to the scientific brutality to follow, had always make him feel uncomfortably like a voyeur" (76). And yet, what is Adam, if not a voyeur?

The central tenet of Adam Dalgliesh's philosphy of detection is "Get to know the dead person. Nothing about him is too trivial, too unimportant. Dead men can talk. They can lead directly to their murderer" (Unsuitable 35) Thus, in James's first novel, Cover Her Face, the narrator notes that "Sally's room was kept locked. Only Dalgliesh held the key and he gave no explanation for his frequent visits there nor of what he had found or hoped to find" (106). For, Sally and her room hold the key that Adam believes will unlock the mystery. As the investigator, Adam has assumed the right to enter her locked room at will, and penetrate its mysteries And yet, were she alive, Sally Jupp would no more allow Adam into her room than Josephine Fallon would allow Miles Kynaston to poke about in her body's orifices. This image of the detective entering the body, mind and life of the victim recurs throughout James's novels: "There was a click, an explosion of light, and the

image of the dead girl leapt up at them and lay suspended in air, burning itself on Dalgliesh's retina" (Shroud 49). And then there is the more graphic description of Adam trying to resuscitate Maggie Hewson (The Black Tower), murdered by hanging When he discovers Maggie's still-warm body, he "pumped his breath into her, fighting an atavistic repugnance. It was too like raping the dead" (222) This method of detection is handed down to Cordelia Gray via Bernie Pryde, and, in An Unsuitable Job for a Woman, results in her living in the rented gardener's hut that Mark Callendar inhabited before his murder, cooking with the same cooking utensils, sleeping in his bed, wearing his clothes, and even falling in love with him.

Getting to know the victims entails a thorough examination of every sordid or even banal detail of their private lives. Thus Adam, in Death of an Expert Witness, is characterized in the narrative as a man "accustomed to perusing the private pornography of murdered lives" (189). This image of Adam "reading" the victim's life, is yet another instance where the detective is shown piecing together scionarrative fragments which appear in the text. Like the narrator, Adam is aware that he is rooting out private facts that the victim would never have revealed while living. For instance, while reading Lorrimer's emotional and sentimental letters to Domenica Schofield, he says to Massingham: "Given the choice, Lorrimer would probably have preferred his murder to go unavenged than for any eyes but his to have seen these letters" (Death 190). This awareness reaches its pinnacle in A Taste for Death, though, when Adam is called in to investigate the murder of Sir Paul Berowne, a man whom he'd known and liked. Adam is faced with the realization that for the first time he will be discovering facets of Sir Paul's private life that would not have been revealed to him under normal

circumstances. And further, "it seemed to Dalgliesh an ironic twist of fate that it should be he, whom Berowne had shown a disposition to trust, who should now be travelling to begin that inexorable process of violation" (30). This situation forces Adam to face up to some of the implications of his job, more so here than in any of the previous Adam Dalgliesh novels. As a result, the novel is liberally peppered with passages detailing how murder, and the resulting police investigation, shatters any illusion of privacy. Comments such as "murder destroyed privacy, laid bare with brutal thoroughness all the petty contrivances of the dead life" (290) abound And we even find Adam wondering why "a man morbidly sensitive about his own privacy should have chosen a job that required him to invade almost daily the privacy of others" (240-41). Significantly, it's a question he never does answer, for it is inexorably bound up with the question as to why James herself chooses to write detective novels. James allows her mysteries to be solved and yet at the same time demonstrates the high cost of resolution--for the victim, the people around them, and even for Adam himself, as he seems almost to hate himself at the end of the more recent novels.

Murder in the detective novel can neither be hidden nor disguised within a closed community. Murder necessitates calling in the police, society's enforcers of law and order. They are called on the scene after the crime, in response to an already demonstrated need for them. Thus, in both senses of the word, 'hey go 'after' the criminal (Miller 37). But often, though the police may be needed, they are not wanted. Throughout her novels, James takes care to point out that the police represent an almost alien, and certainly unwanted, presence. At Sally Jupp's funeral in Cover Her Face, "police and suspects faced each other across the open grave" (122). In A Mind

to Murder, the police are described as bringing "with them the paraphernalia and skills of an alien world" (31). They make the Steen Clinic staff "feel that their familiar ground had been taken over by strangers and that they were caught up in the inexorable machinery of justice and being ground forward to God knew what embarrassments and disasters" (31-32).

In the limited-suspect type of murder mystery, such as James's, the assumption the police make, is that anyone can be guilty of the crime. Thus tainted by suspicion, all the characters' private lives become subjects for police scrutiny. Outraged suspects reflect what "thorough little scavengers the police are" (Shroud 155), and that "it was pointless to try to keep everything private from them" (Shroud 166). Adam would probably agree with Sister Brumfett, whose outraged thoughts were quoted above. He always does manage to learn most of the interesting tidbits about his suspects' private lives. His reactions to such discoveries is sometimes self-satisfied and smug. However, especially in more recent novels, he has become more cynical and even disgusted with the image of himself ferreting around in other peoples' lives. In Devices and Desires, he even gets a taste of his own medecine, and is for once himself interrogated, an experience he little enjoys: "this sense of privacy violated, of virtuous outrage which the most innocent of suspects must feel when faced with police interrogation" (196). And in A Taste for Death, Adam reflects that:

> The victim's privacy was the first to go, but no one intimately concerned with murder was left unscathed. . . . But for the living, to be part of a murder investigation was to be contaminated by a process which would leave few of their lives unchanged. But at

> least, he thought, it had the merit of democracy. Murder remained the unique crime. Peer and pauper stood equal before it. (290-91)

Adam's finding solace in the thought that murder is at least democratic, strikes a singularly cynical note. It also strikes a false note, for Adam's actions have a certain class-consciousness that undermine his assertion that peer and pauper suffer to the same degree. Consider the two murders in A Taste for Death. The tramp Harry Mack and the Baronet Sir Paul Berowne, are murdered together, each with their throats slashed. And yet, the investigation is wholly concerned with Sir Paul's murder. Indeed, Adam is only called in because of Sir Paul's important stature in society. It is difficult to imagine Adam, with his new "serious crimes squad" paying such attention, and at tax-payers' expense, to a tramp. Also, the attitudes of both Adam and the rest of his squad differ markedly when they question Lady Ursula Berowne from when they interrogate Dominic Swayne's lover Mattie, the Berowne's servant. It would be difficult to imagine Chief Inspector Massingham scornfully saying to Lady Ursula (Sir Paul's mother) what he says to Mattie: "Is that how he paid you, a quick half hour on your bed between his bath and his supper? He was getting it cheap, wasn't he, his alibi for murder" (458).

In James's first novel Cover Her Face, when Adam and his Detective-Sergeant arrive at Martingale House to investigate Sally Jupp's murder, Adam says "I'll see the body first. The living will keep" (49). This brief sentence is indicative of Adam's investigative methods and his very raison d'être at Martingale House. Further, not only is his first step to establish a relationship with the victim, but also it puts the suspects at a disadvantage. The Maxies, their two guests and servant, under strict injunction not to leave

the house, wait anxiously for the police to finish with the body. When Adam does appear, he announces his intention to "interview" them one by one, and even forbids them to go to the washroom unattended by a constable. Shocked, frightened, and perhaps even grieving over the murder, these characters have, in the space of a few short hours, lost all rights to their privacy, where every intimate detail of their lives can be construed as relevant to the police investigation.

The chief function of the police in a murder investigation, since they are operating after the fact, is interrogation. They learn by sifting through the mass of relevant and irrelevant details gleaned from all the suspects' interrogations--they're usually, but not always, called "interviews." The police also learn much through intimidation and manipulation. Adam is quite frank about his methods. For instance, in Shroud for a Nightingale, with calculated cruelty, he chooses to interrogate the young nursing students in the demonstration room where they had watched their colleague Nurse Pearce die a horrible death that very morning. His rationale? "If any of them were ready to be unnerved, this might do it" (59). In Cover Her Face, when Steven Maxie flippantly asks if the police would like a photo of the scratch on his cheek, Adam replies, "We've had something rather more serious to photograph upstairs" (65). Subsequently, he smugly avows to himself that "while he was in charge of this case none of his suspects need think that they could retreat into private worlds of detachment or cynicism" (65). Through Adam, we get a glimpse of the kind of power the police wield. Indeed, he says to Kate Miskin in A Taste for Death, "no one joins the police without getting some enjoyment out of exercising power" (213). And, later in the same novel, while interrogating Berowne's mistress Carole Washburn, he reflects

that "exploitation was at the heart of successful detection . . . you exploited the suspect's fear, his vanity, his need to confide" (294-95)

Detectives thus occupy a privileged position in the detective novel. They have the power to interrogate, to intimidate. Further, they are the privileged ones who know exactly what was said at each suspect interview,[9] what the pathology lab results are, and the identity of, say, that seemingly insignificant object Darren Wilkes picks up in the opening chapter of A Taste for Death. They are thus the agents of a total gaze, what D. A Miller calls "a panoptical surveillance extending from the gross fact of murder to the minute evidence of a matchstick" (40).

A successful detective such as Adam Dalgliesh is all-seeing. As such, he fits into Bentham's Panopticon, the architectural figure that arranges spatial unities to make it possible to "see constantly and recognize immediately" (Foucault 200). Adam occupies the position of the unseen seer who stands "at the centre of the social Panopticon and employs his 'science' to make all things visible on behalf of the forces of order" (Porter, The Pursuit of Crime 124). The result, as Foucault emphasizes in Discipline and Punish, is that we enter a realm of supervision that "seeks ideally to reach the most elementary particle, the most passing phenomenon of the social body" (213-14). The implication of an all-seeing, all-informed police force, is, Miller writes, "a system of disciplinary power so total, even totalitarian, that the autonomies dear to the liberal state--the individual, the family, civil society--would find themselves practically abolished" (41-42). And yet, in the detective novel, the assumption appears to be that police surveillance is only a temporary state-of-affairs to be borne with forbearance. The corollary would

be the perception that everyday life is outside the network of policing power (Miller 43)

Foucault's central thesis is that such surveillance is the price paid for the new penal mildness. Like punitive practice in the nineteenth century, the detective story from Poe on confronted the atrocity of crime with the gentleness of reason The relatively new science of criminal investigation was based on bureaucratic techniques of description supported by a developing technology, that eventually included statistical analysis and forensic medicine (Porter, The Pursuit of Crime 124). The result was "to put as much distance as possible between the 'serene' search for truth and the violence that cannot be entirely effaced from punishment" (Foucault 56). Of the three ritual practices of the law, which are investigation, trial, and punishment, the nineteenth-century detective story usually retains only the first.[10] Thus it reflects the reformed legal system of its time to the extent that it, too, reversed a previous state of affairs by making the investigation public and hiding punishment and execution (Porter, The Pursuit of Crime 123).

Although P. D. James focuses her novels exclusively on the police investigation, on the pursuit of the hidden narrative of the crime, her solutions, or lack thereof, sometimes appear to question the very efficacy of that investigation. In her novels, it is not unusual for her criminals to go scot free, because the burden of proof is insufficent. And even if they are arrested and charged, the emotional cost to their innocent friends and family are staggering Although the ruthless Eric Nagle is exposed as an accessory to murder, an attempted murderer, and a ruthless blackmailer by the end of A Mind to Murder, we also know that he will neither stand trial nor be punished because the love-struck Jenny Pridmore is steadfastly lying to cover

for him. It's interesting that in this case, Adam was able to learn the story of the crime and tell it in the novel's narrative, but that he could not tell it in court as grounds for conviction This twist of justice thwarted recurs in A Shroud for a Nightingale. Once again, Adam learns the story of the two murders, and even confronts the murderer Mary Taylor. By the last few pages of the novel, he has successfully determined who killed Nurse Pearce and Josephine Fallon, how, and even why. And yet he fails, for he cannot prove what he knows to be true. Mary Taylor is never brought to trial, never subjected to the glaring eye of public disapprobation, and she never suffers the indignities of a women's prison cell. Adam fails, but certainly not for lack of trying. Indeed, he had pursued Mary Taylor "as if it were a personal vendetta, hating himself and her. And she had admitted nothing; not for one moment had she been in any danger of panicking" (319-20). In the end, Adam's only scrap of proof is her suicide note, and by then she was well beyond the grasp of the police, courts, and prison, with only the afterlife to contend with.

In representing crime and its punishment, whether evoked or anticipated, detective novels tend to reflect a social order and the implied value system that help sustain it. Only rarely do detective novels question the penal code--the law itself is usually accepted as a given (Porter, The Pursuit of Crime 121). P. D. James is one murder mystery writer who does at least raise some interesting questions about judicial and police procedures. If the investigation can be ruthless, invasive and even wrong, then so can justice. That justice is far from being fixed or objective is demonstrated in An Unsuitable Job for a Woman. In order to best serve her own concept of justice, Cordelia Gray is actually an accessory to murder after the fact, and she commits perjury. What's especially interesting here, is that readers tend to

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side with Cordelia. For, wasn't Sir Ronald Callendar a monstrous human being, and wasn't Eliza Leaming justified in killing this man who had murdered their son? Here, both readers and Cordelia are allied against Adam Dalgliesh who calls justice "a very dangerous concept" (196), and who seeks to know exactly how Sir Ronald Callendar died. He can't, though, because Cordelia "wouldn't talk, and in England there was no way in which he could make her" (196). Also, as Cordelia's mentor Bernie Pryde had told her, he'd "seen the most unlikely defence succeed simply because the accused stuck to his story. After all, it's only someone else's word against yours; with a competent counsel that's half-way to a reasonable doubt" (200).

P. D. James's novels thus go well beyond the era when tidily arranged endings used to be the norm, where the police investigator--Poirot, Alleyn, or Campion--neatly sums up the who and wherefore of the murder and then exits, leaving the characters to settle back into their familiar routines The criminals are, of course, apprehended and subsequently punished--a succession of events that does not always occur in P. D. James's novels. In addition, James's detectives do not always escape her novels unscathed. Adam only barely escapes with his life at the end of The Black Tower and Kate Miskin almost meets the same bloody end as her grandmother in A Taste for Death. But, more than anything else, James shows the human cost of a criminal investigation, a cost which extends well beyond the solution of the crime. The lives of the suspects in James's novels are irrevocably shattered even when the taint of suspicion is finally removed. For, as the Controller of the Forensic Science Service, Dr. Charles Freeborn says to Dalgliesh in Death of an Expert Witness, "Murder is like that, a

contaminating crime. Oh, you'll solve it, I know. You always do. But I'm wondering at what cost" (90).

The toll exacted by the crime's solution is evident from James's very first novel Cover Her Face. Here, Adam and his team enter Martingale House, the heart of the Maxie family's privacy. They leave only once they have fingered the guilty party, Eleanor Maxie, the family's matriarch. The narrator gives us a particularly poignant description of Eleanor taking her last bath in her own home. And then, in the novel's last few pages, Adam meets Deborah Riscoe, Eleanor Maxie's daughter, trying valiantly to carry on at the family home, keeping up appearances and struggling with her grief and shame.

But it's really with Death of an Expert Witness, and later with A Taste for Death, that James demonstrates the havoc wreaked to the living in a murder investigation. Take Nell Kerrison, 16, who has just broken her father's alibi. "Suddenly [Nell] gave a high despairing wail like an animal in torment, and yet so human and so adult that Dalgliesh felt his blood run cold. 'Daddy! Daddy! Oh no!'" (339). To break Doc Kerrison's alibi, it was first necessary to break Nell, to destroy her belief in her father's love. It's a double triumph for Adam, for Kerrison freely confesses thus clearing the way for a successful prosecution And yet, there's no satisfaction in it, neither for the reader nor for Adam. While the reader is left wondering what will become of Nell and her three year-old brother William, Adam is filled with a sense of bitterness and self-disgust, for he recognizes that though he broke the case "it was never the case that broke, only the people" (345).

In a typical Golden Age novel, the sense of evil that the crime engenders only lasts until the crime is solved In P. D James's novels, the effect is frequently not of evil contained, but of evil only temporarily contained, as though it is merely waiting to burst out again. For instance, in A Taste for Death, though Dominic Swayne is successfully captured, the success is hollow, for he kills Inspector Kate Miskin's grandmother, and seems oddly triumphant as he's led away, as though he is the real victor. He stares at Kate, his blue eyes "blazing, triumphant" (500). This sense of evil merely temporarily obscured is again evident at the end of James's latest novel Devices and Desires The novel's closing image is of the Larksoken nuclear power plant "screaming its terrible message over the headland" (503). Throughout the novel, the plant serves as a potent symbol of literal and metaphorical pollution of the surrounding environment and the scientists it employs. Larksoken is a symbol too "of the intellectual and spiritual arrogance which had led Alice to murder" (503). And, in this same final paragraph is the suggestion, even the probability, that it's only a matter of time before other serial murderers will take the Whistler's place: "evil didn't end with the death of one evildoer. Somewhere at this moment a new Whistler could be planning his dreadful revenge against a world in which he had never been at home" (503).

P. D. James writes novels which seem to question the very efficacy of the criminal investigation--the bedrock of a detective novel. Her novels often result in irreparably damaged lives, in criminals going scot free, and with the sense that solving a crime is merely a temporary bandaid, a sop to momentarily appease outraged sensibilities, but which is in the long run, ineffective. This obviously begs the question why write detective novels in

the first place?[11] There can, of course, be no definitive single answer to this question. It is possible, though, to locate some explanation in James's aspirations as a novelist, and in her moral stance--a stance echoed by Adam Dalgliesh, whom she has described as having many of the qualities that she herself admires in men (Cooper-Clark 29).

James's detectives, in particular Adam and Cordelia are endowed with many laudable character traits. This is not to say that either is perfect; however, both are portrayed as caring, dedicated and sensitive individuals. As "models of right conduct" (Porter, "Detection and Ethics" 17), these detectives mitigate the havoc wreaked in the course of a murder investigation. For if, as James demonstrates, it isn't possible to do police work without giving pain, at least one can do it honestly as Adam and Cordelia do. So, if a police investigation is necessary, then let it be someone like Adam who once worked "eighteen hours a day for a month until the case was solved. And his next book of poems had contained that extraordinary one about a murdered child" (Death 178).

In interviews, James has always said that when she turned to writing professionally, in her late thirties, she chose the detective genre because it would serve as a "marvellous apprenticeship" (James 6) for eventually writing "serious" novels. It was only after writing several detective novels, though, that she realized it was possible to be a "serious" novelist within the genre itself. Indeed, she now says: "I like the constraints of the genre. . . . But I am trying, I think, within those constraints, to write a book which has claims to be regarded as a serious novel" (Salwak 37). James's deviations (and perhaps inadvertent questioning) of her adopted genre may therefore stem from her attempts to inject a greater degree of the realism and complex

psychology she seems to associate with so-called "serious" novels This could certainly account for James's avoidance of neat closure She has also made a point of setting her novels in a contemporary world where faith in divine order has been lost along with any assurance that the pattern will turn out right in the end. In such a world, closure itself is incompatible. But then it's also true that closure is simply out of fashion these days

There seems to be something essentially tragic about James's detective novels, a sense that once the detecting machine is set in motion, the characters are powerless to stop the forces of law and order, despite the havoc they wreak. Indeed, right from the outset of his investigations Adam frequently reflects that by the time he's through no lives will remain untainted by the process Why, then, allow Adam to destroy the lives of the two Kerrison children in Death of an Expert Witness? In a rather lame response, James has said of the havoc wreaked upon the Kerrison family: "the problems are solved, Dalgliesh is successful, but. . . . Things are not the same afterwards. It isn't as simple as that to solve the problem, the problem may be solved but other problems are left unsolved, because these are problems of the human heart and problems about which perhaps nothing can be done" (Cooper-Clark 19). I believe, though, that a closer answer to this question lies in James's rigid belief in morality and retribution, in her credo that "murder is uniquely wrong because human life is sacred" (James 9); and that however unpleasant, evil, or disagreeable a person may be, "he still has the right to live his life to the last natural moment" (Cooper-Clark 19). Such a deeply-rooted outlook informs the whole moral tenet of James's novels, and is frequently echoed in Adam Dalgliesh's private reflections and discussions with others. Consider, for example, Adam's debate with Nell

Kerrison on crime and its punishment. For Nell, having the murderer go to jail is "silly," for it "won't put things right," and "it won't bring Dr. Lorrimer back" (Death 251). Although Dalgliesh agrees that imprisoning the murderer for life won't necessarily right a wrong, he argues that it is necessary because "Life is precious. . . . No-one has a right to take it away" (252). Elsewhere, Adam also raises the notion that the "process of detection dignified the individual death, even the death of the least attractive, the most unworthy" (Devices 188). Yet, in the very same paragraph where Adam affirms that detection dignifies the individual death, he goes on to say that all detection ever really does is to provide: "a comforting illusion of a moral universe in which innocence could be avenged, right vindicated, order restored. But nothing was restored, certainly not life, and the only justice vindicated was the uncertain justice of men" (Devices 188).

But although James does appear to be questioning the efficacy of the penal code, she nevertheless ends up affirming and upholding it. James may raise criticisms about our forces of law and order, but she goes no further. Ultimately, like Adam, James believes that: "All these problems are easier for people who believe in God," but "those of us who don't or can't have to do the best we can. That's what the law is, the best we can do. Human justice is imperfect, but it's the only justice we have" (Death 252).

Chapter 4: Murder and Morality

> I have known a much gentler and more united country in the sense of a more homogeneous country . . . it's obviously a more violent society, which I find displeasing. It's dirtier too; we're messier than we used to be, and these things are bad. (Stewart 182)

Readers familiar with P. D. James's novels would find little to be surprised at in the above passage. Indeed, even a quick read of her books merely to figure out 'who done it' does not fail to reveal either the messiness of contemporary society, or James's displeasure with it. Her settings emphasize the crumbling of an older order whose passing she laments For example, the community living on a remote Norfolk headland in Devices and Desires is overshadowed by a looming atomic power plant, while, to the south lie the ruins of a Benedictine abbey. Whether set in a deconsecrated chapel or an isolated home for the disabled, James peoples her novels with characters who have a propensity for evil. This evil is manifest both in her characters' ability to murder and in their indifference to others--they scorn love and charity. Thus, Sir Ronald Callendar in An Unsuitable Job for a Woman is capable of murdering his son Mark to further his own career and the advancement of science. On the other hand, James's sympathetic characters, such as Meg Dennison, Cordelia Gray and Adam Dalgliesh all share a faith in charitable love and sacrifice of self. It is in such 'good' characters as these that James seems to place any faith for our future. It is true too that in finally providing an explanation for the story of the crime,

detective novels reaffirm a moral order that was initially eclipsed by the crime For these reasons, I argue, in this chapter, that James has not only a moralistic, but also a didactic bent to her writings. Her novels have become increasingly righteous over the years, which is why I have centred my discussion on her novels published since Unnatural Causes. I have also found articles by Erlene Hubly and Dennis Porter to be particularly useful in this context.

The English detective novel of manners, with its sense of class proprieties and rigid hierarchy, reflected how English readers wanted to perceive their society in the Golden Age of detective fiction. Today, however, P. D. James, John le Carré, and those who depict a society of cynics, an England bereft of empire, are as reflective of our times as were the mysteries of the "blood-stained tea cosies" of theirs (Winks 7). Small wonder then that James's novels frequently provide more a frisson of recognition than an escapist read, depicting as they do, a sordid, rootless society where a faith in science has replaced a faith in God.

Although James's novels clearly belong to and reflect contemporary Britain, she nevertheless focuses primarily on what remains of the old order inherent in the Golden Age of detective fiction. For instance, while Adam Dalgliesh is not of the same class as Marsh's Roderick Alleyn or Allingham's Albert Campion, he is nonetheless a member of the educated upper middle class. Crimes either take place in, or are investigated in, households that can afford live-in servants, such as Martingale House in Cover Her Face and the Berownes' Camden Hill Square home in A Taste for Death. As well, titles are still inherited, such as Sir Paul Berowne's baronetcy which came to him after his brother Hugo's death at the hands of the IRA. Despite what seems like

nostalgia, or perhaps a reluctance to part with the upper middle class, James does depict a fair amount of social mobility in her novels. Thus, just as she herself rose to the top of the British civil service, a man such as Sir Ronald Callendar in An Unsuitable Job for a Woman could become one of Britain's most renowned scientists despite his humble beginnings as a gardener's son Then there's Inspector Kate Miskin, 27, who achieves her rank on the strength of her courage, intelligence and ambition. That Miskin is illegitimate and a woman to boot does not bar her from a rapidly rising career in the metropolitan Criminal Investigation Department (CID). And yet, one change in contemporary England which is strangely absent from James's novels, is the presence of immigrants. All her characters, even the most humble, can claim a wholly British pedigree probably stretching back for centuries.

In most of her eleven novels, James uses setting to signify the degradation of English values and traditions. For instance, in Death of an Expert Witness, a three-storey brick mansion, an "excellent example" of late seventeenth-century domestic architecture, houses not a country squire, but Hoggatt's forensic Laboratory. It seems only fitting, therefore, that such an environment dedicated to the analysis of death through sealed bottles of stomach contents and carefully dissected pieces of liver and intestines, should be the site of a vengeful murder. Even the sea in The Black Tower is ugly and threatening, "sluggish and opaque, its sloping waves pitted with rain and awash with shifting patterns of floating foam (107-8). There is also the Larksoken nuclear power plant, which dominates the Norfolk community depicted in Devices and Desires. The potency of the atomic power plant, with its "great, grey bulk" is repeatedly contrasted to the ruined Benedictine abbey

nearby. Standing on the shore, characters can turn "simultaneously from contemplating the glittering lights and look south to the decaying symbol of a very different power" (Devices 102). Here, the plant comes to represent, not only a blight on the shoreline, but both a literal and metaphorical polluter of the surrounding environment and of the scientists it employs. Larksoken's director Alex Mair, chooses not to reveal experimental results showing inadequate safety precautions, an act that first leads to the suicide of the guilt-ridden brilliant young scientist Toby Gledhill, and then to blackmail, and finally to murder.

What is also striking about setting in a James novel is the uses her characters find for churches. Especially in her more recent novels, churches no longer serve as sacrosanct places of worship. Instead, in James's hands, they can just as easily serve as convenient sites for brutal murder or illicit sex. Given the complex roles which religion and faith play in virtually all of James's most recent novels, we are meant to be jolted if not shocked by the thought of the Wren chapel on Hoggatt's grounds being used for Domenica Schofield's liaisons in Death of an Expert Witness. If our sensibilities aren't offended by the thought of sex in a chapel, then we should at least be put off by this example of yet another offense against seventeenth-century architecture. Readers tend to identify (and I believe they are meant to) with Adam Dalgliesh's perspective on the chapel, which is described as looking "purely secular, unconsecrated," and enshrining "man, not God; reason, not mystery" (299-300). Attempting to fathom the attraction for Domenica and her lover Dr. Lorrimer having sex in a chapel, Dalgliesh wonders: "whether she had dragged the velvet cushions to the sanctuary, whether it had added to

the excitement to make love to Lorrimer in front of that denuded altar, the new passion triumphing over the old" (301).

In keeping with such external symptoms of decay, it is not surprising that James peoples these settings with characters whose power struggles and jealousies inevitably result in murder. All of her novels portray closed communities, where a small group of people either live together in an isolated area, or are forced upon each other in a working environment. According to James, this provides her not only with a closed circle of suspects, but also with an opportunity to examine a microcosm of human interactions She has said: "I think the interaction of human beings in a closed society is absolutely fascinating: the power struggles, the attempt to establish and retain one's own identity, the way in which people group defensive or offensive alliances, particularly against strangers" (Bakerman 56) While this interaction is a feature of all James's novels, it is particularly striking in some. Take, for example, the community of student nurses and their matron-teachers living in Nightingale House in Shroud for a Nightingale During the course of Dalgliesh's interviews with all the suspects, what becomes clear is "the stultifying lack of privacy, and of the small pettinesses and subterfuges with which people living in unwelcome proximity try to preserve their own privacy or invade that of others" (Shroud 128). But it is the microcosm James creates in The Black Tower that is the most stultifying and vicious Here, she provides a striking instance of what can go wrong when a small group of people stricken with progressive paralysis is tucked away from sight in a charity home (Toynton Grange) on a remote headland. Adam Dalgliesh describes the community as a: "claustrophobic, self-regarding community dedicated to love and self-fulfilment through suffering, where people sent

each other poison pen letters, played at childish and malicious pranks or got tired of waiting for death and hurled themselves into annihilation" (166). The only wonder in this novel is that it is not one of the inmates who is the murderer

From cloistered communities with a liberal sprinkling of unpleasant, if not downright evil or ruthless characters, it's a short step to the grisly corpse James is well aware of how nasty the people she's creating are. Indeed, she has admitted to interviewers that: "My dear departed mama used to say, 'Oh, darling, why can't you write a nice book about nice, happy people?'" (Stewart 180). James explains that: "If people are generous and pleasant and courageous and likable, they are seldom surrounded by a group of people with strong reasons for getting rid of them. So nearly always the victim is difficult, to put it mildly" (Salwak 47-48). James's victims are killed because they threaten others, either through blackmail, or merely by the dangerous knowledge they are thought to possess. There's Nurse Pearce in Shroud for a Nightingale, who sought out the weaknesses and vices of her fellow student nurses, and used her discoveries to exercise power over them. A typical description of Pearce's behaviour that emerges during the investigation into her death runs along these lines: "Pearce liked to exercise power; but even more she enjoyed indulging in moral rectitude" (303). To create the suspense of 'who done it', James surrounds the victim with people who had good reason to feel threatened by the victim. She says: "the circle of suspects must be people whom the writer feels would possibly be capable of that crime. They are unlikely to be happy, well-adjusted, or living together in a very peaceful way" (Stewart 180). What is astonishing is that there are characters who are portrayed by the omniscient narrator and other characters

as being good, honest and upright Not surprisingly, the few likable or honourable characters in a P. D James novel shine like beacons of hope and charity in a moral wasteland.

In virtually all of James's novels, the victims are unpleasant characters, sometimes to the extent that having them murdered almost seems perfectly inevitable. This makes the deaths by suffocation of Grace Willison and Father Baddeley (whom Adam Dalgliesh had known as a child) in The Black Tower all the more surprising, for they are portrayed as harmless, gentle and accepting characters. Their murder is very different from the others in James's detective novels Usually, we stumble on an already dead body just as unwittingly as do the suspects and police. The exception is nasty Nurse Pearce's murder by a gastric feed filled with corrosive poison in Shroud for a Nightingale Here, the reader, along with Pearce's fellow students and several of the sisters, actually witness her shockingly violent and graphic death:

> One second she was lying immobile, propped against her mound of pillows, the next she was out of bed, teetering forward on arched feet in a parody of a ballet dancer, and clutching ineffectually at the air as if in frantic search of the tubing. And all the time she screamed, perpetually screamed, like a stuck whistle. (19-20)

What makes Grace Willison's end unusual is that unlike Pearce's, there is a shift in narrative point-of-view, so that rather than being detached spectators, we are almost experiencing her death with her. This shift to her viewpoint is evident in the following passage: "Unresisting, since that was

her nature and how could she resist, she did not die ungently, feeling at the last through the thin veil of plastic only the strong, warm, oddly comforting lineaments of a human hand" (Black Tower 188). The contrasts in their ways of dying are as striking as the lives they led, for the deeply religious Grace Willison seems as accepting of death as she was of her lot in life. The suggestion seems to be that although murder is clearly death by human hand, if one has a strong spiritual communion with God, death is quietly accepted. Although Father Baddeley is already dead by the time Adam reaches Toynton Grange, Julius Court gives us an account of Baddeley's death. "I think he knew about two minutes after I entered that I would kill him There wasn't even a flicker of surprise when I pressed the plastic against his face" (226). This account is similar to Sir Paul Berowne's murder in A Taste for Death, after his mysterious spiritual experience in the vestry of St. Matthew's church As the murderer Dominic Swayne describes it, Sir Paul: "didn't even look surprised. He was supposed to be terrified. He was supposed to prevent it happening. But he knew what I'd come for. He just looked at me as if he were saying 'So it's you How strange that it has to be you' " (497).

It is difficult to believe that James has created a host of nasty principal characters simply because it's easier to peg them as suspects. Some patterns emerge in the course of James's novels--of incest, of the lack of love between parent and child, and of the absence of religion as a unifying force in contemporary society--that, coupled with James's views on contemporary society, make it obvious that her characterizations go far beyond convenient plot devices. Short of an exhaustive catalogue of each character's merits and detractions, I prefer to loosely group a number of the principal characters into three categories for the purposes of my discussion: the murderers; those who

indirectly cause the crime by fueling the community's tensions and jealousies; and the few characters generally presented in a favourable light

Throughout her novels, and in her interviews, James makes it clear that murder is an unacceptable act "murder I regard as the ultimate crime, the one for which you can never make reparation" (Salwak 31) In many of her novels, the murders are ingenious and carefully premeditated The motives James provides for her murderers vary, from greed to fear, to a wish for power--the power to give or take life, which Dominic Swayne so exultantly claims for himself in A Taste for Death Despite this strong feeling that such violence is totally reprehensible, James does not shrink from providing some of her murderers with strong and understandable, if not morally laudable, motives. In explaining this, she has said "With the modern detective story and with mine, you do want the reader to feel some sympathy, to feel at the end of the book that, given the circumstance, the character, the temptation, 'I can see that they did it and I myself might have been tempted' " (Stewart 180) But even when armed with a strong motive, the murderers are never allowed to escape justice This is true even in An Unsuitable Job for a Woman where Eliza Leaming is not tried for her murder of Sir Ronald Callendar, the man who killed their son Mark in cold blood Cordelia Gray, an accessory to murder here, protects Miss Leaming by lying to the police. But Cordelia cannot protect her from the author, who kills Eliza Leaming off in an extra-narrative car crash at the very end of the book

Along with her murderers, James portrays a number of people who, either through an excess of moral rectitude, or complete indifference to others, indirectly cause the murder. Such characters also fuel the day-to-day pettiness, misery and evil that characterize so many of James's closed settings

There's Jennie Pettigrew who writes twisted poison pen letters to the other inmates at Toynton Grange There's Stephen Lampart, a doctor who illegally aborts female foetuses for his wealthy clientele There's Ivor Garrod, head of an underground communist cell who stoops at nothing to further his cause And then there are Barbara Berowne (A Taste for Death) and Domenica Schofield (Death of an Expert Witness)--both women are distractingly beautiful, but totally unscrupulous where private, sexual gratification is concerned. Barbara gets her "kicks" by "watching masked and gowned, while [her lover's] hands cut into another woman's body. The erotic charge of the medical priesthood" (203) Domenica takes her sex life one step further, and makes a habit of meeting her lovers in a chapel. The two women are also portrayed as caring little for anyone else but themselves. Thus, Domenica's first gaze upon Dalgliesh is "remote yet speculative" (208). And Domenica's response, when handed Lorrimer's tortured, unsent love letters, is merely to say. "it's extraordinary how unattractive misery is" (210). Why did she break off with Lorrimer? She coolly says. "I'm not sure there was a reason. . . . Let's say I was tired of him" (211). While not directly responsible for her former lover's fate, it was her break-up with Lorrimer and brand new affair with Dr. Kerrison that ultimately led to Lorrimer's death. Yet, under questioning by Adam Dalgliesh, Domenica says: "I'm not responsible. Even if he killed himself I shouldn't feel that it was my fault. As it is, I don't believe his death had anything to do with me" (213). While not as intelligent as Domenica, Barbara Berowne shares her complete self-absorption and detachment from the ramifications of her own actions. The following physical description doubles as a moral and spiritual description as well:

> Barbara Berowne turned her remarkable violet-blue eyes on Dalgliesh . After the first fleeting glimmer of curiosity the glance was deadened, almost lifeless, as if he were looking into coloured contact lenses Perhaps after a lifetime of seeing the effect of her gaze she no longer needed to animate it with any expression other than a casual interest (Taste 118)

Alex and Alice Mair, Domenica Schofield and Maxim Howarth, Barbara Berowne and Dominic Swayne--each pair represents a brother-sister relationship with incestuous overtones. Alice Mair kills to protect her brother in Devices and Desires It's a death she claims she "owes him." When they were teenagers, Alex watched their father bleed to death without lifting a finger to help, in order to avenge the unwanted sexual acts their father was forcing on Alice. Dominic Swayne insists that one day he'll tell his sister "Barbie" how he killed her husband Sir Paul for her In the meantime, for the better part of A Taste for Death, Dominic sleeps in Sir Paul's bed, wears his dressing gown, eats his food, bathes in his bath and fawns over Barbara Maxim Howarth and Domenica Schofield differ from the other pairs of brothers and sisters, in that neither actually murders But their complete emotional detachment from everyone else is portrayed as being almost criminally negligent. This is evident in Howarth's sole comment on Stella Mawson's death by hanging in the Wren chapel "I wonder where she knew how to find the cord. And why choose here?" (Death 305) The only time Howarth is roused to any sort of passionate feeling is when he thinks about his sister's relationship with Lorrimer. "the thought of Lorrimer in his sister's bed had been intolerable" (22).

The nuclear family does not fare well in James's novels. All too frequently, her novels feature characters who are orphans, illegitimate, or neglected and abused children, raised by foster parents, nuns, or grandparents Cordelia Gray was raised by a succession of foster parents. Adam Dalgliesh lost his wife and newborn son, an event that profoundly marked him and accounts for much of his aloofness Dominic Swayne's father rejected him and questioned his paternity. The illegitimate Kate Miskin, whose mother died in childbirth, was raised by a resentful grandmother. Even when an entire family is depicted, instead of kinship, we find distrust and enmity. This is true of the bereaved Berowne family in the afte nath of Sir Paul's death. Meeting the family for the first time, Dalgliesh notices their alienation from each other and wonders. "whether they were so used to living their lives under one roof but apart that even in a moment of high tragedy neither could cross the psychological barrier represented by that caged lift, those two floors" (Taste 118). The Maxie family in Cover Her Face is an exception, for Eleanor Maxie and her children Deborah Riscoe and Stephen Maxie form a close-knit, and caring family. And yet, it is in order to maintain the family's status quo that Eleanor Maxie kills Sally Jupp, the outsider who threatens their unity. In novels such as Shroud for a Nightingale and The Black Tower, where characters are forced by circumstance and geography to live together in a communal arrangement, the results are disastrous. The inmates of Toynton Grange in The Black Tower, have been abandoned there by their own families. Grange owner Wilfred Anstey tries to create a 'family' out of his disabled charity cases, and presides over them much as a benevolent but inflexible paterfamilias would. But what he creates instead is a false family, where closeness and friendship are replaced by brooding, seething dislike.

There is certainly nothing new about portraying the disintegration of the family in contemporary fiction. But what is novel here, is the length to which James goes in depicting the consquences of this breakdown For instance, in Death of an Expert Witness, the chain of events culminating in Lorrimer's murder begins with Dr. Kerrison's divorce proceedings and bitter battle with his ex-wife for custody of their two children In other James novels, an absence of familial love frequently results in murder Consider An Unsuitable Job for a Woman, where this absence, coupled with an over-weaning ambition make Sir Ronald Callendar into the monster who can murder his only son Mark The confrontation between Sir Ronald and Cordelia Gray illustrates how cut off from emotion and feeling he is. Cordelia asks Sir Ronald how he could kill Mark, and "what is the use of making the world more beautiful if the people who live in it can't love one another?" (162), to which Callendar replies.

> 'What do you mean by love? That human beings must learn to live together with a decent concern for each other's welfare? The law enforces that The greatest good of the greatest number. Beside that fundamental declaration of common sense all other philosophies are metaphysical abstractions. Or do you define love in the Christian sense, caritas? Read history, Miss Gray See to what horrors, to what violence, hatred and repression the religion of love has led mankind. . . . ' (162).

Cordelia's anguished reply is also the potential remedy for what ails all the spiritual orphans and broken people who inhabit the world of a P. D. James novel: "I mean love, as a parent loves a child" (162).

Yet if James takes care to show us society's ills resulting in such a disastrous crime as murder, she nevertheless shows that individuals who resort to murder bear personal responsibility for their own actions. Thus, for every Dominic Swayne turning towards a life of violence, there is a Cordelia Gray, living her life in order to help others. Rejected by his parents as a child, Dominic Swayne grows up to be an emotionally and intellectually impoverished adult. His childhood proves to be a breeding ground for his murderous tendencies. In a flashback to her youth, Barbara Berowne recalls her parents arguing about her brother Dominic, because neither wanted custody of him She remembers her father saying: "If there was anything of me in that boy I'd have recognized it. He's grotesque" (Taste 182) This is what Adam realizes when he recognizes Dominic Swayne for what he is: "a man who has felt despised and inferior all his life but who will never feel inferior again" (Taste 411). For, as Auden writes in "The Guilty Vicarage," "murder is negative creation, and every murderer is therefore the rebel who claims the right to be omnipotent. His pathos is his refusal to suffer" (19).

But if Dominic Swayne had a deprived childhood, Cordelia Gray did not fare much better. Cordelia's life growing up is described as a "succession of foster mothers, the unexplained incomprehensible moves from house to house, the changes of schools, the concerned faces of Local Authority Welfare Officers and school teachers desperately wondering what to do with her in the holidays" (Unsuitable 27). And yet, "Gradually out of a childhood of deprivation she had evolved a philosophy of compensation" (19). In other words, by being content with her lot, Cordelia has become an emotionally mature woman with sound instincts for doing good. Similarly, Millicent Gentle, the old-fashioned romantic novelist in A Taste for Death, makes the

best of what she has Comparing Millicent Gentle to her own grandmother, Kate Miskin says "I know an old lady who, in her place, would say 'No one wants my books, I'm poor, I'm lame, and I live in a damp cottage with only a dog for company.' [Millicent] says. 'I've got my health, my pension, my home, Makepeace for company, and I go on writing" (410)

A propensity for evil, or at least an indifference to others, characterizes the "bad" characters in James's novels. It is their lack of feeling towards the rest of humanity that creates a climate ripe for murder, if not the murder itself. The Barbara Berownes and Alice Mairs are judged and found wanting by such laudable characters as Adam Dalgliesh and Meg Dennison. Similarly, those who are good in a James novel, are held to be so largely because they stand up to scrutiny. Their shocked reactions to manifestations of evil are documented, as are their acts of faith Thus, Chief Inspector Terri Rickards in Devices and Desires, described by Dalgliesh as a "conscientious and incorruptible detective" (72), is in turn just as pleased with Meg Dennison "Rickards approved both of her appearance and of the distress. This was how he expected a woman to look and behave after a particularly brutal murder" (262). As well, Rickards would probably approve of Miss Emily Wharton in A Taste for Death, when she expresses the full horror of the two corpses she discovers in the vestry of St. Matthew's church.

> Their throats had been cut and they lay like butchered animals in a waste of blood. . . . She saw again the severed vessels, sticking like corrugated pipes through the clotted blood. . . Thus mutilated, it seemed to her everything human had drained away from them with their blood; life, identity, dignity. They no longer looked like men. And the blood was everywhere. (10)

Good characters in James's novels consistently serve as foils to the malevolence of others. They function as beacons of hope in a landscape of despair and decay. They are the sympathetic characters in whom faith in our future is placed A horrified reaction to a brutally butchered corpse is just one indicator of correct behaviour in a James novel. Laudable characters also seek truth, have a faith in and love for others, and can distinguish between right and wrong. As such, upright characters serve as a locus for the moral tenor of P. D. James's novels. For instance, Meg Dennison (Devices and Desires), uses and understands the word sin. In contrast, Meg's friend Alice Mair, cannot: "Meg, you continue to astonish me. You use words which are no longer in the general vocabulary, not even in the Church's. The implications of that simple little word are outside my comprehension" (479). It is Alice Mair who commits murder; Meg does not.

The most sympathetic characters in James's fiction tend to share, to some degree, the attitudes of Cordelia Gray, who is diagnosed as "incurably agnostic but prone to unpredictable relapses into faith" (Unsuitable 177).[12] Dennis Porter writes in "Detection and Ethics: the Case of P. D. James," that in a world without God and the rewards and constraints of a religiously grounded morality, one is left with a "form of caritas, of Christ without Christianity. The only salvation for all those teeming, lost souls that P. D. James's intrigues of crime and violence uncover in contemporary society is a religion of love, of devotion and sacrifice of self, the love of a parent for a child" (17). Thus, in the confrontation cited earlier between Sir Ronald Callendar and Cordelia Gray, our sympathies remain with Cordelia and her impassioned plea for love. The same is true in a remarkably similar scene in Devices and Desires, where the religious, old-fashioned, almost anachronistic

Meg Dennison discusses human nature with Alice Mair. The cornerstone of Meg's belief is "that at the heart of the universe there is love" (128) It is this firm belief in love that, later on in the novel, leads Meg to her attempt to comprehend Alice Mair's murder of Hilary Robarts. That murder would be unthinkable for Meg, but possible for Alice, is clear in the following passage We see how at odds their view of the universe is, when, a third of the way through the novel, Alice states:

> 'At the heart of the universe there is cruelty. We are predators and are preyed upon, every living thing. Did you know that wasps lay their eggs in ladybirds, piercing the weak spot in their armour? Then the grub grows and feeds on the living ladybirds and eats its way out, tying the ladybird's legs together. Whoever thought of that has, you have to admit, a peculiar sense of humour.' (128)

Thus, Alice Mair, Sir Ronald Callendar and other such characters, all share a world view that is a pared-down Darwinian survival-of-the-fittest, coupled with a belief that to sacrifice one for the greater good of all is justified

Characters such as Sir Ronald Callendar, Alex Mair and Steven Lampart all substitute a belief in God for a belief in science and reason. While this is certainly nothing new in our twentieth-century, what is interesting is that, in the name of science, these scientists dabble in questionable ethics which are certainly damned in James's fictional world. For instance, when confronted with his illegal abortions of female fetuses, Stephen Lampart's response is:

> 'what surprises me about those who claim to have faith is that they seem to think that we can find out scientific facts behind God's back.

> That first myth, the Garden of Eden, is remarkably persistent. We always feel we haven't the right to use it In my book we've the right to do anything we can to make human life more agreeable, safer, less full of pain' (Taste 374)

In Stephen Lampart's argument, there is a distinct echo down the centuries of Francis Bacon's own call for scientific knowledge for human advancement. I am inclined to believe that the critique here is of scientific pursuits stripped of faith. It is left to Brenda Pridmore, the enthusiastic young secretary at Hoggatt's Laboratory in Death of an Expert Witness, to point out what these scientists, blinded by reason, have chosen to ignore: "It was odd, she thought, that scientists so often weren't religious when their work revealed a world so variously marvellous and yet so mysteriously unified" (50). The awe she feels stands out in marked contrast to the ruthless quest for science and glory that fills not only Death of an Expert Witness, but all James's other novels. What becomes clear, then, is that in James's fictional realm, science stripped of faith can and does corrupt. This does not, however, mean that the subject is never dealt with ironically or with any degree of complexity. For instance, there's the example, in Devices and Desires, of Agnes Poley, burned at the stake for heresy, on August 15, 1557. According to Adam, his aunt researched Agnes Poley's past and came up with this account:

> 'She went to the stake, apparently, for an obstinate adherence to her own uncompromising view of the universe. She couldn't accept that Christ's body could be present in the sacrament and at the same time physically in heaven at God's right hand. It was, she said, against common sense. Perhaps Alex Mair should take her as patron of his power station, a quasi-saint of rationality.' (106)

Throughout the novel, the image of Agnes Poley's fate is linked to the Larksoken power plant, to science, and to Alice Mair's self-immolation for her own 'heresy,' murder.

Yet if P. D. James's novels warn against living entirely without faith, there is also her black-humoured account, in The Black Tower, of the pitfalls of a religious faith based on delusion. When Wilfred Anstey is miraculously cured of multiple sclerosis during a pilgrimage to Lourdes, he fulfills a bargain with God and devotes Toynton Grange and all his money to serving the disabled. The result is a small community of chronically disabled young men and women, ruled over by Wilfred Anstey, clad in his brown monk's habit. The inmates are taken on regular pilgrimages to Lourdes in the hope they might receive the same cure as Wilfred The three cottages on the grounds are called "hope," "faith" and "charity" Communal meals are conducted in silence, save for a scriptural reading, carefully chosen and intoned while the others swallow mouthfuls of wholly unappetizing food And, unhappiness is considered a "sin against the Holy Ghost, a sin against Wilfred" (41). That Toynton Grange is, in fact, a seething cauldron of hatred and evil, is hardly surprising considering that the entire set-up is a complete sham, founded not upon a real miracle, but a false diagnosis. Wilfred never had multiple sclerosis, all he had was hysterical paralysis.[13] Small wonder, then, that no was cured on the annual pilgrimage to Lourdes. Insead, it served as the perfect front for the ruthless Julius Court's heroin smuggling operation into France. And yet, all Wilfred was doing, was following in his grandfather's footsteps. It was his grandfather, who, according to Julius Court: "invented his own religion, based I understand on the book of Revelation. In the early autumn of 1887 he walled himself up inside the

tower and starved himself to death According to the somewhat confused testament he left, he was waiting for the second coming" (113)

James's is a world in which science has largely replaced religion, a world in which even the best of men, such as Adam Dalgliesh, turn to science and reason rather than religion to solve the riddles of mankind Adam's father, an Anglican minister, tried to fight death on a theological level, by denying its power Adam fights death on a secular level During moments of self-examination, it is not unusual for Adam to reflect: "Death One could ignore it, fear it, even welcome it, but never defeat it It remained as obtrusive but more durable than these commemorative stones. Death· the same yesterday, today and forever" (Black Tower 110). Constantly encountering death in the murder cases he investigates, Adam tries to bring order out of chaos, "if he cannot stop death he can at least catch and punish those who inflict it on others His, then, is an endeavour which offers reassurance, which seems to restore order to an otherwise disorderly world" (Hubly, "Adam Dalgliesh Byronic Hero" 91).

James has become more preoccupied with faith in her most recent novels, particularly A Taste for Death and Devices and Desires Indeed, a second or third perusal of these novels reads more like a series of discussions on religion and science, reason and faith, than a murder mystery. At times, the mystery seems not only to be a search for the hidden narrative, but also a quest for a sustaining faith Throughout Devices and Desires, characters discuss their religious beliefs. The tenor of these discussions ranges from Caroline Amphlett's impatience with Jonathan Reeves's faith, to Alex Mair's harsh response to the despairing Hilary Robarts: "If you want a religion, if you need a religion, then find one. There are plenty to choose from. All right

the abbey is in ruins and I doubt whether that impotent old priest up at the Old Rectory has much on offer . " (64) Sir Paul Berowne's mysterious spiritual conversion is central to A Taste for Death There is a double mystery at the core of this novel, for not only is the identity of Sir Paul's killer hidden, but so too is the nature of his religious experience As well, Sir Paul's social position as baronet and Member of Parliament makes it difficult for anyone connected with him to ignore his mystical experience He is not some crackpot mystic that people can easily dismiss That's why, when Father Barnes tells Adam that he saw stigmata on Sir Paul's wrists after communion, Adam is "shaken, almost physically, by an emotion far stronger than distaste. . . . What he was feeling was a revulsion amounting almost to outrage" (Taste 54) Indeed, neither the investigation, nor the people closest to Sir Paul nor the public at large can ignore the overtly religious implications of his conversion.

James is, I would argue, along with Erlene Hubly in "The Formula Challenged. The Novels of P. D. James," a religious writer--'religious' in the sense that she believes there is an order behind the universe, an order modern man has lost sight of. In The Black Tower there is an image that is central to her world a Pre-Raphaelite stained glass window portraying the expulsion of Adam and Eve from the Garden of Eden decorates the entrance hall at Toynton Grange It is an image that hovers over all of James's novels--man expelled from Paradise. Hers is a world peopled with invalids and cripples, the diseased and dying, where life itself, as one of her characters says is "a progressive incurable disease" (Hubly 519)

And yet, just as solving the mystery reaffirms one's faith that the world can in some small way be put to right, the ending of A Taste for Death seems

to point a way out of the woods for those who have lost sight of God When Miss Emily Wharton first discovers the mutilated bodies in the novel's opening pages, she is unable to pray, "strangely, the words seem to have got muddled up" (13), but on the novel's very last page

> she remembered what Father Collins had once said in a sermon when she first came to St Matthew's: 'If you find that you no longer believe, act as if you still do. If you feel that you can't pray, go on saying the words' She knelt down on the hard floor, supporting herself with her hands grasping the iron grille and said the words with which she always began her private prayers: 'Lord I am not worthy that thou shouldest come under my roof, but speak but the word and my soul shall be healed.' (512-13)

Small wonder that after reading P. D. James's novels, Dennis Porter claims in "Detection and Ethics" that· "a casual reader should be warned that to read one of her novels is to risk a kind of conversion" (17).

Conclusion: Where the world almost goes back to normal

What has continued to strike me about James's novels in the five or so years since I first discovered her, is the pessimism that pervades her writings. Of course, any text which takes murder as its subject isn't likely to be full of boundless cheer, but James's are far grimmer than most. Her resolutions instill a sense of unease rather than relief that the mystery is solved and the world can go back to normal. Certainly, James novels such as A Taste for Death and The Black Tower are a far cry from the insouciance of the Golden Age (1920s and 1930s) detective fiction writers. Her novels reflect her displeasure with a society where traditional mores are rapidly disappearing. Degraded characters and the settings of her novels reflect what she sees as the unhealthy state of the contemporary world. Thus, a Wren chapel turned into a lovers' den serves to reveal the decline both of religious faith and of morals. Also, the seventeenth-century family mansion turned into a forensic laboratory in Death of an Expert Witness illustrates, among other things, scientific pursuit taking precedence over family ties. It is a ruthless quest for scientific advancement that leads Sir Ronald Callendar, in An Unsuitable Job for a Woman, to kill his son Mark. Even when they don't murder, characters in James's novels are all-too-frequently self-serving, immoral, and petty. Character and setting conspire, then, to produce a brooding, grim atmosphere, only somewhat offset by a few decent characters. As discussed at length in chapter 4, this pessimism is largely a result of James's moralistic outlook. She uses her novels to teach her readers about the consequences of the breakdown of the family, and the decline of a humanizing faith.

The poor state of contemporary morals may be legitimate grounds for pessimism in James's view, but that's not all. Her novels also examine the police, and their methods in a murder investigation, under a fairly critical light The police are portrayed as invaders who poke and pry into every aspect of the lives of victim and suspect. Dalgliesh and certainly Massingham are portrayed as having ruthless streaks. When necessary, they do not hesitate to destroy an innocent person in order to prove another's guilt As a result, their investigations frequently leave behind irreparably shattered lives, casualties of a system which invests the police with authority to solve the crime The police, then, are also tarred by James's moralistic brush, although to a certain degree, a successful resolution absolves them. In the final analysis, the end justifies the means.

What is particularly striking about James's pessimism, though, is that it runs counter to the detective genre, which celebrates the ultimate triumph of good over evil Closure in detective novels means bringing order out of chaos, and, as demonstrated in chapter 2, stabilizing meaning. As James herself has said, detective novels "do affirm the intelligibility of the universe; the moral norm, the sanctity of life" (Stasio 196). However hard James may try to subvert the genre with her endings--some lives are irreparably destroyed, and the police don't always have the necessary proof to make an arrest--invariably, by the novel's close, the reader, police, and suspects all know who committed the murder. The result is, as Auden points out in "The Guilty Vicarage," that "a suspicion of being the guilty other has been expelled, a cure effected . . . by the miraculous intervention of a genius from outside who removes guilt by giving knowledge of guilt" (24).

But with James's detective novels, a simple restoration of order and harmony is easier said than done The police investigation reveals much more than the murderer What also emerges is an unflattering portrait of the community under investigation Almost invariably, strife, adultery, petty jealousies, and even blackmail, prevail In retrospect, it is hardly surprising that murders occur in these seething, brooding environments The police may function to restore order, but what the investigation reveals is that there was never more than a superficial order there in the first place There is a contradiction, then, between the closure the genre requires and the underlying conflicts exposed during the course of the novel. It takes a great leap of faith to imagine that such conflicts will really be resolved Resolution and textual coherence are thus to a large degree incompatible in James's novels Such a contradiction has more to do with the constraints of the genre than with any failings on her part. Indeed, the entire genre is founded upon a central paradox: that murder gives birth to its own investigation

Endnotes

[1] While some critics include crime stories in such texts as the Bible and Canterbury Tales in the genre's geneology, I do not. My aim in this discussion is to trace the beginnings of the detective story, which I argue requires the presence of a professional or amateur detective.

[2] An exception is Michelle Slung, a staunch Christie admirer who says that James doesn't deserve the crown: "Rendell and James and their ilk, don't mistake me, are certainly truly talented writers, but in the end, genius, like murder, will out" (67)

[3] Sandra Pla, Richard P. Gidez, and Norma Siebenheller, to name a few.

[4] This scene is echoed towards the end of P. D. James' A Taste for Death, where the murderer Dominic Swayne and Father Barnes meet in St. Matthews church. But in this novel, God's representative is at best a pathetic, lost man. He reveals himself to Swayne in the misguided belief that everything will be "taken care of," and is shot for his pains.

[5] There is also a general grab-bag of conclusions that defy categorization. An instance is David Lehman's assertion in The Perfect Murder: A Study of Detection, that the detective novel is the only really modern novel form, for "a narrative form that restricts itself to the aftermath of events presumed to have already taken place must indeed be considered peculiarly modern--if a condition of modernity is a feeling of belatedness, of having arrived on the

scene at the tail end of something that's over and done with " (Lehman 26)

6 With most of James's novels, it's more like 450 pages that separate crime from revelation This is a feature which distinguishes her from other detective novelists In part, it's as though James's complex characters and plots take on a life of their own, necessitating longer novels

7 Some mystery novelists, such as Ruth Rendell, have written novels where the murderer will proclaim their culpability from the outset This doesn't work particularly well, for if we know 'whodunit,' there's not much point in continuing to read the novel After the opening announcement "Eunice Parchman killed the Coverdale family because she could not read or write" (A Judgement in Stone 7), Rendell tries, without much success, to build and sustain suspense, even though the exact outcome is a foregone conclusion

8 In general, though, James relies less on objects as clues than her predecessors in the detective genre did. Instead, she lays her clues more in the complexity of human motivations, so that her detectives Adam Dalgliesh and Cordelia Gray must become adept at reading human nature

9 Readers aren't so fortunate, for the proceedings of many suspect interrogations are frequently recounted either through Adam's or a character's recollection of the event, if at all.

10 On rare occasions, James does bring up the idea of punishment in her novels. One instance is when Paul Middlemiss, the Document Examiner in Death of an Expert Witness, reflects that he "seldom thought of the half-

dozen men who had been hanged during the twenty years of his forensic experience, primarily because of his evidence, and when he did, it was not the strained but oddly anonymous faces in the dock which he remembered, or their names, but paper and ink, the thickened downward stroke, the peculiar formation of a letter" (61-62)

11 Because James would not make herself available to me for a personal interview in England, my attempts to answer the question must rely on published interviews she has granted during the past decade, and on textual evidence

12 While characters such as Meg Dennison and Grace Willison have a religious faith that goes well beyond Cordelia Gray's lapses into faith, it is a concern for others that all three share

13 Medical science is shown to be fallible. Wilfred Anstey's condition was misdiagnosed, and Adam Dalgliesh had been told he was suffering from leukemia, when it was only mononucleosis. Perhaps blind faith in science is also a delusion?

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